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PARISH COMMUNITY MAPS: THEIR POTENTIAL FOR THE ECOMUSEUM EXEMPLIFIED BY THE WEST SUSSEX PARISH MAPS PROJECT, ENGLAND

In my talk this afternoon I am going to talk about what we in England call parish maps - you call them community maps - and their connection with ecomuseums.

Now, may I say from the beginning that my background is not in museums, I work in archives, so I work in a different area to most of you, but what we have in common is our work to promote historical and heritage-based objectives.

Now, it is quite clear that parish maps can be used to support the work of the ecomuseum movement. Parish maps can be used as a tool for the ecomuseum. Parish maps have the potential to link together all aspects of a specific territory. A parish map includes information about the present and the past, people and wild life. So the map unites the past with the present and unites the work of man with the work of nature. So these are maps with very different, but inter-connected layers of information.

On the maps these elements interact, just as they do in real life and in the ecomuseum. They thus emphasise the unity, or the wholeness, of a place within a distinct geographical setting. Significantly they are made by the local people themselves according to *their* ideas, and I emphasise *their* ideas rather than from ideas imposed from outside the community.

This afternoon I would like to draw out one particular aspect of parish map making, and this is the importance put on the small, the ordinary, the everyday, the things we all take for granted in our local environment because they are always with us, as a constant backdrop to our lives. They are almost invisible. We only notice them when they have gone, when they have been destroyed.

Let me put this another way. When I go to a village to tell them all about the project and how to start a map, they inevitably ask questions, they make comments. Sometimes they say “Our place is so small, there’s not much to put on the map”, or “This village isn’t an important place, nothing ever happened here, there’s nothing here that would fill a map”. How many times have I heard this in England? And last year, I well remember one villager, in the Stura Valley, in Italy, commenting exactly about this: “Our village is full of mountains and sheep, there’s nothing here for a map”. And it was due to Stefano Martini, who is here this afternoon from the Stura valley with his map, who has proved that there is a lot in a space with *apparently* nothing in it. There is proof in this map as you will see after my talk.

Dig under the surface and great riches will be found. I always say it is what we see every day and we hardly notice that is what we need to put on the maps. We are not looking for the spectacular, for the sensational, but all those little ordinary elements that together make a place what it is. This gives a sense of place.

This is about a very special way of seeing. It is an educational process and the parish map will train the mind and the eye to look in new directions. The point is that we must not take for

granted all the common place, little things around us, because if we do, with the rapid changes of today, these key features to our local environment may be lost for ever.

This attitude towards little things drives the parish map project forward. It is clearly a major motive in the work of the ecomuseum movement with its emphasis, not on the spectacular and the sensational - with the high culture of the more traditional museums - but on the more ordinary and everyday lives of the community.

Let me just show you a few slides. They encapsulate some of the main concepts for you.

This parish map of Copthorne is based around an original idea. It is very inspired. The parish is shown in the shape of a tree, and the actual buildings and the roads are shown in the branches of the tree. Notice the roots at the bottom. Now, these roots at the bottom, the roots of the village, are the roots of the community. In those roots are all the names of the families in the community. They are the people that have made the community as we know it today. Now notice that from the tree comes the fruit. This is an oak tree, very widespread in my part of the country. The flower of the oak tree, the fruit, is the acorn. And in the acorns are shown the activities of the community. You can see the names of the organisations, the clubs and the societies, that have blossomed out of the community. This three-tiered concept - about roots, the tree and its fruit is a brilliant concept. I am not necessarily looking for brilliant artistic work, although I must say this is very good. What I want to see are new ideas and imagination as in this example. This parish map of Copthorne would win the prize for imagination, without a doubt.

Parish maps are about three elements: they are about the present and the way that the present mixes with the past, and they are also about nature, about animals and trees and the landscape. These are identical to ideas you are representing in your ecomuseums. And I come from a country where we have no ecomuseums at all in England, but we have some 4,000 parish maps. Isn't it interesting that we have developed our parish maps quite separately from your ecomuseums, and yet we are pursuing the same ends and the same objectives. Our parish maps and your ecomuseums have so much in common.

Here is the parish map for Henfield. There is a lot of information around this map. It is like an encyclopaedia of the village. Notice the shop signs: Scott's of Henfield, the Mimosa, the Shell garage shop. These are the shops in the High Street of the village. Nobody has made a record of these shop facias before. On one side of the map we go down one side of the street and then, on the other side, we go up the village street. How many villages have made record of the ordinary and everyday like this? Can I tell you that this was made in the year 2000 and this is already an historical record because one of those shops has closed down, it's gone. This is history in the making, if you like, about the ordinary and everyday.

On this map of Donnington are shown all the clubs and societies that meet in that village hall.

On this parish map of Burpham is a calendar for winter and for spring, of events that happened in this village when the map was being made, just ordinary occasions such as village meetings and weddings. They are important events for the village, not important for the world out there, but just the village. And this inset map shows all the names of the cottages. And can I tell you that there is no map, other than this one, that shows this type of detail for the parish. This is a brilliant summary of a place, on a single sheet of paper.

And on this map of Boxgrove are quite ordinary people. They aren't famous people at all, but aren't they so very important to the community? The postman, the policeman, they even have their names recorded. These are the people that are so generally missed in history, aren't they? They are underneath the surface, and they come and they go and they do their work and they disappear. It is great to record the ordinary and everyday, as I have said.

And here are three signs on this parish map of Lyminster. Do you see McDonalds, the Travel Inn, and a road sign at the bottom? These will no doubt have changed in fifty years: McDonalds might have been wiped off the face of this earth by then. Certainly the road sign will have changed. This is a wonderful record of what we see in our everyday lives. How many people take photographs of this type of thing such as an ordinary road sign? We take photographs of a church, of a lovely old building, but not of the ordinary, sometimes the ugly.

Here at Felpham we have waste disposal, the receptacles into which to put the rubbish for recycling. The map also shows the bus service and the bus sign, and the bus shelter with its seats. And can I tell you that since this was made only three years ago, some of these sights have already disappeared from this village. One of the Felpham milk-floats is shown here. In England the village milkman is a very important institution, but gradually he's disappearing because people are using the supermarket. In a few years time, maybe within ten or twenty

years, there will be no more milkman coming round like this in England.

Here, at West Hoathly, we have a beautiful picture of a very historic village, but, look carefully. By the old timber-framed cottage and the church we have a huge communications mast. We do not like the way that these are ruining our landscapes and bringing the possibility of radiation from their microwaves. They look very ugly, but I say to the parish map makers "Don't just put down what we like to show on a picture postcard, or on a greetings card! Put down what you *don't* like to see!" This is reality. And we are being truthful if we show reality.

Let me show you this map of Crawley Down. In the corner of this map is a small inset map of the whole of the United Kingdom to show exactly where this parish is located in the country. This is an important addition to a parish map as it gives it context, its geographical setting. And on this map the buildings have all been dated by colour coding. Do you see the chart giving the dates of the buildings? Every building in this parish has been colour-coded, making it possible to date, by period, the building development of the parish. This I believe has never been done before on a parish map. It is an original idea and took four years of survey work to do. Four years, you do not need to be in a hurry to produce one of these maps! The important point is the *process*, the working with the data, very carefully and slowly. This is a wonderful dated record of the development of this village.

On this map of Lyminster a legend is recorded. Wherever we live we all have our legends. This area of Italy must be steeped in legends. So is my area of West Sussex. This is the legend of the Knucker monster who lived in a great bottomless pool, or lake. It lends itself very much to the pictorial, doesn't it? So we can collect the folk tales and legends from the local people to put on these maps.

At South Stoke the parish map makers revived a ceremony called beating the bounds. Every parish has a boundary. Many people do not know their parish boundary, they do not know how one place is demarcated from another. These parish maps emphasise the boundaries. We have an ancient ceremony going back to the medieval period of beating the bounds whereby the villagers walk around their boundaries. This ceremony was revived in this village, as shown in this newspaper article. The bounds go partly along a river and so for part of the ceremony a boat followed the boundary, and then it goes across the countryside where people walked along the boundary. We were all given a certificate to show we had walked the bounds. Making a parish map can give many opportunities for reviving ancient traditions and bringing together local people. Thus the process of making the parish map is quite as important as the end product, the map itself.

On the Petworth parish map we have plenty of wild life. In this panel we have a list of the local trees. There is one tree missing in this list. It is the elm tree, because most in England were wiped out by Dutch elm disease. Most have now gone. And I wonder if some of these trees listed here, in fifty years time, will have gone, because of disease, because of problems brought about by contamination of the environment. This is a record of the trees in this parish today.

This map of Chidham is not on paper, it is a fabric map. In fact maps can be made in many different ways. They can be on ceramic tiles, made from needlework, or a photographic collage. The ways in which they can be made is endless. This slide shows the chestnut in the corner of this map. And might I say how lovely it is to see the chestnuts here in Italy at this time of the year and how they are used so beautifully to decorate shop windows. You seem to have more chestnuts than we have. Where I come from our prolific tree is the oak. But here in this West Sussex map is shown the chestnut. It is three-dimensional and quite beautifully made. Also shown here is what was once an old English pub. The pub is one of our great traditional institutions. But this is now a Chinese restaurant, the Palace of Beijing. So this shows transition and change, the old and the new, as the present does not stand still. Change is in the nature of life and of communities.

These butterflies on this parish map of Warningcamp are not taken straight from a book, they are from an original survey done by the village people. They took a year to do a bio-diversity study and they put down their original work in this map. The blue one is called a Chalk Hill Blue, a rare butterfly. They have produced original work, it is not copied, or imitative in any way.

The stag beetle on this Henfield map is an endangered species, and so has been highlighted here to make this point. Parish maps can be very useful means of propaganda to illustrate how our environment is under threat.

On this map of Bury rabbits are painted all around the edges. There are more rabbits in this

part of the world than people, maybe in the same way that you have more sheep than people in the mountains. The population of this village is 690, the population of rabbits is 690,000! Every rabbit shown – and there are more than two hundred on the map - is in a different posture. It is a brilliant piece of art. What this highlights is a major problem for the farmers in our area on what we called the South Downs, because the rabbits are eating the farmers' crops.

Let me finish with just a few more pictures to show how parish maps can be used in a variety of ways to produce other types of product. Nearly all parishes produce their maps as paper copies so that everyone can have a copy. But some parishes go a stage further. Lindfield has produced its parish map as a jigsaw puzzle. This makes a wonderful present for anyone who lives in this village. And then this is the same map of Lindfield made into the top of a coffee table.

Eastergate and Easebourne have produced CD-roms so that you do not have to have a paper copy, you can have one for use on the computer. Poling has produced some lovely greetings cards, these are what in England we call notelets to write a quick note. This uses part of the design work used around the map, not reproducing the whole map, just small portions of it. And finally, my last picture shows the parish map of Walberton made into a calendar.

There are some useful by-products that can be made from parish maps. It means that the parish maps in many forms get sold and sent all over the world to friends and relations. The map, in whatever form it is produced, could be the most wonderful advertisement for your ecomuseums. Thank you.

MORE PARISH MAPS

See Common Grounds website: www.England-in-particular.info

E-mail: kim.leslie@westsussex.gov.uk for a free booklet on parish maps