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Enterprise in Albion: Thatcherism, entrepreneurialism, historicity

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ABSTRACT

During the 1980s, Thatcherism sought to align British citizens with market rationalities, not least through discourse and policies of entrepreneurialism. During that decade, Pete, a wheelwright and the subject of this essay, began an entrepreneurial trajectory. His path to independent small business ownership was deeply informed by his own personal experiences and by a particular reading of history, one that apparently placed him at odds with Thatcherism. In revealing the historicization of Pete's entrepreneurialism we also confront how Margaret Thatcher's beliefs were no less anchored in history.

Preface

Pete is a wheelwright and carriage builder. He and his wife and partner Sarah, who is a signwriter and artist, live and work on the Marches, those borderlands between England and Wales.[1] Pete and I have been friends for more than forty years (I provide a comment on sources and methods at the end of the essay). One day, perhaps fifteen years ago, we were sat in the kitchen of Pete's rural home talking about his craft and his business. Quite suddenly, it came to me to ask him if he found enough work. I struggled to imagine sufficient demand for his seemingly archaic skills. 'Oh yes, plenty,' he readily replied, 'I could do loads more, but what's the point? I'd only put the money in the bank.' This response jolted me in a way that I can still recall today. I could not, in the moment, make sense of what he had just told me. Who was proffering these commissions that Pete chose to decline? And, most confusing, what is ever 'only' about money in the bank?

Introduction: being enterprising

Despite his urban upbringing, Pete has lived and worked with horses for many years. For a long time, horses provided his and Sarah's source of motive power, quietly doing the work expected of them, pulling behind them the family's home as they moved around the land. The first time I visited Pete and Sarah where they now live, we took time to admire the traditional bowtop caravan that stood outside the house, neat and sturdy,

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resplendent in a flamboyant cloak of traditional painted motifs. Pete built the caravan from the ground up and Sarah painted it. This is the work they do in the little workshop they rent a few miles away on the other side of the small town their house looks down on from its elevated position. Pete builds not only the bodies of these and other types of traditional horse-drawn vehicle but also the wheels, taking seasoned timber and with simple tools, his eye, and a long, largely self-conducted apprenticeship crafting a wheel, perfectly circular so that it rolls easily and smoothly but at the same time is detailed and shaped so that its form, when we take the time to look closely, pleases both the eye and the brain that tries to take in what has been done in the making.

The house where Pete and Sarah live perches on a high shoulder of hill. The first time I visit it is midwinter and the snow lies deep. The car bucks and slips its way up the steep slope. I have not seen Pete for fifteen years. At the last house, I get out. Pete is standing outside waiting and he and I hug. A mile or two a way through the crystalline air, Hergest Ridge seems to hang, huge and weightless. Later, in summer, I tramp the length of the Ridge, straddling the world, above even the rain at times. Pete meets me at the pub at the end for beers and a lift, and we talk of the past. Born and raised in an industrial city beset by seemingly inexorable decline, Pete came to an abiding love for and affinity with both his horses and this land.

Living in these deeply rooted places, Pete and Sarah practice crafts anchored not only in specific skills and materials but also, at least to some extent, in ways and patterns of living among communities with a particular relationship to the land and time. They are not, though, the ways, patterns, and communities into which they were born. Pete's craft was initially forged out of a third set of more recently created practices, patterns, and communities, distinct from both his urban, industrial origins and the rural place where he now lives. From that practice, though, he and Sarah have found a way to make a living that comes together as an enterprise: Queentown Carriages. They enjoy the work, and it gives them what they need. They are reinserting themselves and their practices back into much older traditions of which they were not a part by birth and inheritance: an interleaving of times and places and lives.

Becoming enterprising

Pete's first taste of being enterprising came sometime in the mid-1980s, when he joined a UK government program called the Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS). He had left school, aged sixteen and without qualifications, in the summer of 1982. At this time, Pete's story was a very ordinary one, experienced by many others like him. It was not a good time to be an unqualified sixteen-year-old school leaver. In the summer of 1982, the deep recession triggered by the monetarist policies launched in 1980 had barely begun to abate (Tomlinson 2017).

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had been elected in May 1979, following the so-called 'Winter of Discontent,' in which widespread industrial unrest had left homes unheated and unlit, refused uncollected, and the dead unburied. In this context, Thatcher was elected on a promise to confront crisis and malaise (Saunders 2012). The cure, to many, came to seem cruel indeed.

The profound economic recession that stretched between 1980 and 1983, characterized by spiraling inflation and interest rates, was accompanied by a traumatic

process of deindustrialization. From 1979 to 1981 the UK manufacturing sector shrank by one quarter (Jackson and Saunders 2012, 5). At the same time, unemployment soared from 1.3 million in 1979 to 3 million in 1983 (5–6). Deindustrialization was a reality for almost all mature industrialized economies during the 1980s but for Britain, with industrial structures and an economic geography inherited from the deep history of the first industrial revolution, its impact was particularly profound and unequally distributed, in both class and regional terms (Hudson 2013). Employment landscapes were transformed with astonishing rapidity; in 1980 alone youth unemployment grew more than it had in the whole of the preceding decade. High unemployment was accepted, by the government at least, as an integral, perhaps necessary, consequence of policy (Tomlinson 2017). The impact on both individuals and communities, however, was often experienced as a trauma (Perchard 2013). Pete had been born and raised in Stoke-on-Trent, in the English Midlands. 'The Potteries,' as the city is fondly known, was a classic product of the first industrial revolution, dedicated to coal, steel, and – above all – ceramics. It suffered badly in the early 1980s.

Pete cannot now remember what his first, putative business was, some kind of handicraft or other, but that hardly mattered. Being on the EAS meant a little more money and it kept the 'dole' office (unemployment bureau) off your back. The EAS was first trialed across five regions of high unemployment in 1981, before being rolled out nationally in 1983, having met with a favorable reception among potential enrollees. Qualifying criteria included age and employment status. Applicants also needed to be able to make an initial investment of £1,000 in the business. In return, for one-year, participants received a supplement of £40 to their unemployment benefit (Gray 1998, 71). They were relieved of the obligation to attend an unemployment office fortnightly to 'sign on' – that is to regularly prove their eligibility to receive benefits;—an attraction for many. Initially, participants received only a half-day induction session, but this was later expanded into more extensive training and mentoring, though provision was often patchy and many reported receiving little or no support. For many participants, such as Pete, it provided little more than twelve months relief from the prospect of the dole queue.

Historical judgment on the efficacy of the EAS has been mixed, but in the 1980s the scheme met with a 'positive echo among the unemployed, as well as the progressive and conservative press, [and] the Enterprise Allowance emerged as a highly popular neoliberal social policy of the Thatcher years' (Rieger 2021, 119). Enterprise, entrepreneurship, and self-employment were seen as a promising solution to chronic unemployment in areas blighted by the collapse of traditional manufacturing industries, leading to a blossoming of policy initiatives aimed at moving the unemployed from inactivity to work through self-employment and business formation.

Tehila Sasson notes that entrepreneurship 'was seen not as some abstract ethos or new subjectivity but rather as a concrete way to generate self-employment' (Sasson 2021, 345). But the EAS was not only a policy tool and unemployment not merely a social or policy challenge; together, they also provided an ideological opening. Thus, entrepreneurialism took its place in a much wider attempt to remake British society and British citizens. According to Bernhard Rieger, the EAS aimed to produce 'empowered … market participants.' As such, the EAS was one of the suite of unemployment policies that 'aimed to remove barriers between the individual and … market

rationalities' (Rieger 2021, 120). What kind of market rationality leads someone in business to decline commissions because they offer nothing more than money in the bank?

Thatcherism, individualism, entrepreneurialism

Histories of Thatcherism have often focused on disentangling its roots amidst a dense thicket of influences; from transnational intellectual and ideological antecedents, through explicating the relationship between Thatcherism and neoliberalism (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Davies, and Jackson 2021), to various precedents within Conservative thought, to Margaret Thatcher's own origin story, biography, and preferences (Davies, Freeman, and Pemberton 2018).

Similarly, business history, in so far as it has engaged with Thatcherism, has tended to focus on macro-level attempts to refashion the British economy, particularly through privatization (Billings and Wilson 2019; Millward 2010), industrial policy (Pardi 2017), industrial relations (Phillips 2009), and the deregulation of financial services and the City of London (Bellringer and Michie 2014). In comparison, more granular, micro-level analyses of the impact of Thatcherism on everyday business life in Britain have been scant in the business history literature (Popp 2020). This extends to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurialism as policy and discourse. However, if it is the case that the 'enterprising or entrepreneurial self is the mode by which neoliberalism becomes generalized within a society,' creating 'distinct subjectivities' (Mass 2021, 176–7), then it is curious that business historians have not done more to address the question of Thatcherism's attempt to use entrepreneurialism to refashion British citizens as 'empowered market participants' (Rieger 2021, 120).

More recently, political, social, and cultural historians have sought to trace Thatcherism's attempts to remake British citizens, whether as members of a property-owning democracy (Francis 2012), share-owning capitalists (Edwards 2016, 2022), patient-consumers (Mold 2011), savers (Davies, Freeman, and Pemberton 2018), volunteers in the battle against property crime (Moores 2017), or even as participants in rave culture (John 2015). A central motif of these studies is an emphasis on individuals, individualism, and their place within Thatcherism (Davies, Freeman, and Pemberton 2018). Individualism, some argue, was central to Thatcherism's attempt 'to reform the moral and behavioural norms of British society' (Davies, Freeman, and Pemberton 2018, 481). Individuals, Thatcherism believed, 'needed to be brought into a direct relationship with the capitalist system' (489).

Entrepreneurialism, entrepreneurship, and the figure of the entrepreneur were pivotal to this project:

> Entrepreneurialism was central to Thatcherism's development as a political and economic project. Thatcher herself valorized small business owners and the self-employed as 'wealth creators' whose decisions to 'leave the security of employment' created the profits and jobs vital to Britain's prosperity ... Thatcherites diagnosed Britain's 'sickness' as resulting from a deficiency of entrepreneurial risk and investment ... Thatcherism ... constructed both its political and economic narratives around the entrepreneur's values and economic utility. (Davies, Freeman, and Pemberton 2018, 494–95)

If the aim of Thatcherism was to 'expose millions of Britons to market rationales' in order that they are reconfigured 'as *homines oeconomici* . . . anchored in market relations,' then entrepreneurs were surely the shock troops of this programme (Rieger 2021, 130 & 114). Entrepreneurialism was to be the mechanism through which 'neoliberalism [became] generalised within a society' (Mass 2021, 176). Succinctly, 'individual subjectivity' was to be 'reformed according to the ideal of entrepreneurialism' (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Davies, and Jackson 2021, 5). Specifically, entrepreneurial selves were to be molded through their subjection to 'market rationalities.' 'Rationalities' carries much weight here, suggesting as it does a platonic ideal of what we might call market ordering. The entire project was 'shot through with assumptions about market mechanisms' (Rieger 2021, 113). But we should not take for granted the success of this project.

Despite the work cited above, it has been claimed that 'the position of "the individual" within Thatcherism remains under-analysed by historians' (Davies, Freeman, and Pemberton 2018, 482) and that historical 'studies of neoliberal cultures and subjectivities are not as far advanced . . . as historical studies of neoliberal ideas, political movements and economic structures' (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Davies, and Jackson 2021, 20). Certainly, there is little historical consensus on the success of the Thatcherite project to refashion the subjectivities of British citizens in alignment with 'market rationalities.' Historians have argued that the project contained ambiguities and contradictions from the outset, and that 'the conceptualization of the individual by the architects of change was characterized by fundamental tensions and inconsistencies.' Ultimately, there 'was no coherent, pre-formed "neoliberal individual" at the heart of the Thatcherism' (Davies, Freeman, and Pemberton 2018, 484 & 501). Similarly, there also remain important questions about how the Thatcherite project was received and acted upon by individuals and communities. Moores, for example, cautions that Neighbourhood Watch schemes offered 'by no means a straightforward process of conscription' into 'new forms of neoliberal governance' (2017, 232 & 231; Barton and Mees 2023). To what extent, then, and in what forms did individuals embrace the 'direct relationship with the capitalist system' that Thatcherism wished to inculcate (Davies, Freeman, and Pemberton 2018, 489)?

Regarding pension provision reform in the 1980s, Davies et al. note that a fundamental but unresolved question concerned whether the 'the aim should be to make individuals into investor-capitalists, or to create a society of free consumers' (2018, 484). Concerning desires to create share-owning democracy, Edwards brings 'into focus the importance of individual share-ownership as a site of political, ideological and institutional contestation, the outcome of which was by no means inevitable.' People bought shares for a myriad of reasons, 'many of which had nothing to do with the desire to become 'good' capitalists"' (2016, 23). Similarly, voluntaristic Neighborhood Watch schemes stubbornly refused to 'conform to the aspirations of politicians, the police or even scheme members, [for their] embedded individualism could never quite escape a longing for community, however problematically defined' (Moores 2017, 246). As such, they represented an 'apparently "illogical" combination of acquisitive individualism and community spirit' (231). Similar tensions are uncovered in histories of attempts to center individual in the creation of a property-owning democracy (Francis 2012), patient-consumers (Mold 2011), and rave culture, which inexorably laid bare 'the ideological tension within Thatcherism's philosophy concerning the moral limits of economic individualism' (John 2015, 173). Sutcliffe-

Braithwaite et al. claim that Thatcherism's vision was 'destroyed' by a mass 'of tensions and inconsistencies' (2021, 501).

Until we better understand those subjectivities as they were shaped through everyday engagement with Thatcherism (as both policy and ideology) it is difficult to fully assess claims that late-twentieth century Britain witnessed a neoliberal age in which 'new individualistic forms of self-fashioning … came to dominate,' leaving '[w]ork, family and community … relentlessly colonised and distorted by the demands of neoliberal economies and ideologies' (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Davies, and Jackson 2021, 20). Thus, Vernon asks what 'would happen if we were to supplement these bird's eye views of neoliberalism as a transnational phenomenon imposed from above with a mole's eye view from below of how it operated in situ?' (214–15). If:

> Those responsible for implementing the practices that allowed actually existing neoliberalism to take shape were a humbler crowd, who imagined themselves as finding solutions to specific problems rather than implementing any grand ideological design. (Vernon 2021, 218)

then, methodologically, we need to engage in conversations with this humbler crowd.

This section has provided a reading of histories of Thatcherism as they relate to key themes: the individual, entrepreneurialism, market rationalities, and the connections and tensions between them. The individual was central to the Thatcherite programme. Society would be reconfigured through the alignment of individuals and individual subjectivities with market rationalities. Given this tight coupling between the individual and market rationalities, the figure of the individual entrepreneur stands as an exemplary embodiment of the Thatcherite individual. However, historical studies of 'actual existing Thatcherism' have revealed the project as riddled with complications, contradictions, tensions, and contestation. Individuals resisted their detachment from non-market structures, practices, and mechanisms, such as those provided by community and associated moral frameworks. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite et al. claim that historical studies increasingly 'challenge' arguments concerning neoliberal subjectivities and the 'development of entrepreneurial practices' (2021, 22). I contribute by asking about formative influences on and the lived experience of 'actual existing entrepreneurialism.' Today, Pete and Sarah run a modest but viable craft business. They are entrepreneurs by any reasonable definition, but their constitution as 'empowered market participants' is complex. Thatcherism has been described as an unfinished project: 'the crusade that failed' in the words of Ivor Crewe in 1989 (11). Pete and Sarah help us understand another dimension to how and why the project remains incomplete.

Leaving the city

Joining the EAS might be figured as one point of departure for Pete, but it was little more than a dead end. In time, a more sustained and meaningful trajectory emerged from a series of decisions taken in the mid-1980s. For Pete, these were decisions to reject both a schooling that seemed not to recognize his innate skills and the once-intensely skilled local industry that in previous generations might have offered him purpose and pride but that now, in the early 1980s, in its senescence and decline, promised only low wages and a faint simulacrum of prior glories. It was a decision not to have the futures that might have flowed

from choices not taken. He took to a nomadic life on England's roads (where he and Sarah subsequently met). As Pete says now, 'people have always traveled for economic reasons. I had to leave the city, there was nothing there.' There was no future to be fabulated from that place or from a past made up of stories that could no longer be believed.

On the road, he met others making similar choices. Some began to embroider a mythopoeic vision of an Edenic Albion, where, in William Blake's words, 'Albion rose from where he labourd at the Mill with Slaves/Giving himself for the Nations he danc'd the dance of Eternal Death' (Blake, 1794–1796).[2] This mythopoeia melded disparate elements, haunted by history, politics, and legend: pagan, Celtic, and Druidic pre-Christian Britain ('Albion' itself), the Levellers and Diggers, radical proto-socialist groups of the English civil war period, modern anarchism, urban born but close to the medievalist Utopianism of William Morris, the Stonehenge Free Festivals of the 1970s, squatting and peace movements, anarcho-punk and particularly the band Crass, who's key member Penny Rimbaud pointed back, via his name, to the French decadents and a certain poeticism and a visionary stream of thought that returns us, full circle, to William Blake (these mythic elements are not of concrete significance to Pete, who concludes, 'I just try and live my life.' 'You're very pragmatic,' Sarah adds. Nonetheless, his life is infused with implicit sociopolitical critiques).

There was little organization among the emergent traveler community. Groups were ever mutating, crossing paths, coalescing for celebrations and festivals, swapping stories and lore, meeting old friends, separating into new, never fully stabilized configurations that formed as individuals found new congenial traveling partners or drifted apart from others. This was a community based in orality, practice, custom, and place rather than codification and formalization. It was not without materiality, artifacts were made, but it privileged living over production. This lack of obvious productiveness was problematic for much of the general population. Despite their lack of organization, to the public, the press, and, critically, the government, the travelers formed a single and increasingly threatening entity: the Peace Convoy. One focal point guaranteed to bring a large proportion of this collective together was the Stonehenge Free Festival, held at the Neolithic standing stone circle in Wiltshire, England, every Summer Solstice since 1972. In 1985 a political decision to prevent the festival taking place led to a violent confrontation with and initiated by the police that became known as the Battle of the Beanfield. The community was shattered by this action and a raft of legislation that followed in its wake. Harassed and harried, unable to stop for long, prevented from establishing livelihoods, despair entered into many travelers' encampments. Any sense of building and dwelling, of living well, became almost impossible. Some gave up and left the road, others moved abroad, and yet others, Pete among them, tried to find new ways to live the same life. Assemblages became smaller, larger gatherings more exceptional. Some began to make the switch to horse-drawn over motor vehicles, the change enabling a retreat further back into the quiet of the deep greenwood, Shakespeare's Forest of Arden.

A serious application to learning new skills was needed as the quotidian cycle became attuned to the available hours of daylight. Older diurnal rhythms began to reassert themselves, time being governed more by 'task-orientation' than clock time (Thompson 1967, 95). Perhaps, in the process, they began to 're-learn some of the arts of living lost in the industrial revolution: how to fill the interstices of their days with enriched, more

leisurely, personal and social relations; how to break down once more the barriers between work and life' (95).

This should not be mistaken for an easy life. Weather had to be accepted as a constant, immediate presence. Without electricity wood had to be foraged for cooking and heat, culinary repertoires adapted to cooking on fires, building a good bender (a temporary shelter assembled from pliant branches and tarpaulins), warm and watertight, proved to be an art. A very practical coping was required. Horses had to be tended to properly and horse drawn vehicles maintained and repaired. At the same time, connections began to be forged to older traditions and communities; instead of Stonehenge, the seasonal calendar became marked by attendance at Appleby Horse Fair, which has been taking place annually since the eighteenth-century. Critically, changes to legislation made claiming welfare support almost impossible without a settled address. Work had to be attended to both more conscientiously and more creatively. So, it is a pleasure to sit now in Pete's kitchen, listening to him describe the demands, intricacies, and satisfactions involved in effecting a sound repair on an old and rotten wooden wheel. Amidst these reflections, he jumps up to fetch me a copy of George Sturt's *The Wheelwright's Shop* (1923/1963).[3] Through the coming about of his rough apprenticeship in wheelwrighting, and through his enthusiasm for Sturt (he gladly lends me one of the several copies of the book he owns), Pete has become connected to traditions of both craft and business that stretch back at least two centuries.

Pete first began to learn to wheelwright whilst living on the land of a farmer on the edge of the Staffordshire moorlands – an arrangement involving an informal exchange of occasional labor for space and peace in the corner of a field. He began to contemplate how he could teach himself this intricate craft. His first step was to methodically take apart an old wheel in need of repair, carefully laying out the pieces on the floor as he did so in the style of an exploded diagram, standing over it, trying to puzzle out how the pieces could be made and then reassembled. The method has a neat empirical simplicity to it, and Pete had taught himself many other complex practical skills in a similar way before, but this time, faced with such a difficult task, it led him into some basic errors.

Realizing the challenge he faced, Pete started again and found his way to Tom Clarke, a traditional wheelwright, then in his late sixties (Clarke was born in 1921, two years before Sturt published *The Wheelwright's Shop*). Pete consciously evokes as significant these overlaying spans of time that reach back from himself, via Clarke and Sturt, to the dawn of the eighteenth century. Despite the differences in age and backgrounds, Tom took to Pete (as Pete later related, 'we're both crusties;' that is very scruffy) and agreed to teach him – though the relatively formal agreement they entered into, including payment from Pete, soon broke down. The two men simply began to work side by side in the same space, Pete watching carefully all the time. This was still a very pragmatic and empirical approach to learning, echoing traditional informal methods of craft transmission based on orality rather than codification.

It is this tradition that Sturt records and celebrates in *The Wheelwright's Shop*, something approaching a bible to Pete. Sturt's book is part memoir, part business history, part natural history, and finally, and least of all, instruction manual. The Sturt family wheelwright's business, the history of which Sturt meticulously traces through leases, mortgages, and indentures, was located in the Surrey village of Farnham, in southern England, and came into the family in 1810 (through the acquisition of a wheelwright's business first

established in 1706, at which Sturt's grandfather had been the leading man for some time prior to his purchase of it). When, in 1884, his father's early death forced Sturt to assume his place at the head of the firm and the family, little if anything, whether in techniques, machinery, practices, and business principles, had changed over the preceding seventy-four years. This was a trade ruled by profound continuities. Indeed, real change only began, in Sturt's view, with World War One and the 'long impending change from horses to petrol . . . An entirely new era had begun in my ancient business' (1963, vi). This last turn of phrase is significant. Sturt may have been a self-admitted romantic, an autodidact schooled in Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera*, but for him the shop was always a business before it was a place of craft – in fact he calls it a '"folk" industry, carried on in a "folk" method' (1963, 17). For Sturt, the 'folk' nature of the industry comprised several interlocking dimensions: forms of skill and knowledge and their preservation and transmission; continuities of product and service rooted in local conditions, demands and materials:

> There was nothing for it but practice and experience of every difficulty. Reasoned science for us did not exist . . . What we had to do was to live up to the local wisdom or our kind; to follow the customs, and work to the measurements which had been tested and corrected long before our time in every village shop all across the country. A wheelwright's brain had to fit itself to this by dint of growing into it, just as his back had to fit itself into the suppleness needed in the saw pit, or his hands into the movements that would plane a felloe 'true out o'wind' . . . So the work was more of an art – a very fascinating art – than a science; and in that art . . . the brain had its share . . . He felt it in his bones. It was a perception to him. But there was no science in it, no reasoning. (19–20)

For Sturt, this work was inseparable from time and place. His extreme localism (down to the level of the precise copse from which to buy, or not buy, timber 'in the round' – that is as a still standing, growing tree) was impossible to divorce from a wider conception of 'England' that was both material – in its woodlands especially – and historical or mytho-historical. He lamented the loss of an 'earlier English understanding of timber, of local knowledge of it, the patriarchal traditions of handling it,' in terms that evoked a sense of stewardship (1963, 23). Thus, he noted how his 'father or grandfather would [not] have bought timber from that hollow . . . [they knew] "England" in a more intimate way' (26). Sturt's apostrophized 'England' is made both precisely concrete – that hollow where timber should not be cut – and etherealized, rendered into the mythic. These connections across time and place extended beyond natural landscapes and materials to the work done, of which Sturt asks 'Delightful? It was somehow better than that. It was England's very life one became a part of . . . Only now have I realized how I ought to have felt privileged to be taking part at all in the century-old colonization of England.'

He saw his trade as the 'answer' to local 'difficulties and dangers, the daily conditions' (1963, 31). He argued for his workers' 'lore' as 'not stupid any more than an animal's shape is stupid. It was an organic thing, very different from the organized effects of commerce' (33). Sturt frequently referred to his shop as a business and to the trade as an industry, making the choice of the words 'organised . . . commerce' seems deliberate, an anachronistic note of modernity designed to highlight by contrast the ways in which the organic skill of the wheelwrights were deployed. Business is one thing, and understandable, but commerce is quite another. By his own admission Sturt knew even less of business than he did of the craft when he first assumed headship of his father's shop, acknowledging that 'I should soon have been bankrupt in business in 1884 if the public temper had been like it

is now – grasping, hustling, competitive. But then no competitor . . . tried to hurt me' (54). The ways of business were as customary as the craft. Remarkable was Sturt's solution when, on assuming his father's position, he realized that he had no idea how much to charge customers and no system for finding out:

> An uncle, long since dead, advised me to 'charge enough and apologise;' but I have long since known I did not 'charge enough.' Hunting through the old ledger – my grandfather had started it – I was able to pick out and tabulate many customary prices . . . In the old days there was a recognized price for much of the work. I believe that the figures were already antiquated and should have been bigger even at that faraway time; yet on the whole they served to keep things together while I was finding my feet. (86)

In other words, he simply charged what his father and grandfather before him had charged, because it was the custom.[4]

When Pete describes his methods of calculating prices (and profits) 'charge enough' would be a fair description of his operating maxim. Pete is not trying to live again in Sturt's world; he knows that too much around him has changed. His business has an online presence for example (and Sturt welcomed machine power where it lessened brute physical labor). Yet, we are forcefully reminded of the way in which Pete's intrinsic motivations are at least partially divorced from monetary reward, his inability to see the point in simply earning more so that it may be salted away in the bank.

Drawing on an intimate relationship with Clarke and Sturt, his relationship to market ordering is highly historicized, is encoded in his practices, and is expressed most power-fully through his recognition of the continuities between those practices and Sturt's, not simply in terms of the craft of making but also in the purposes of such making and how it should be conducted as an enterprise. Perhaps most striking is his attitude toward profits and money – encapsulated in his disinterest in accumulation for its own sake – an attitude that appears to defy the profit maximizing precepts of market rationalities as commonly conceived.

In a complex relationship with the 'rationality' of accumulation (because, of course, he certainly needs to earn *enough*, however measured) Pete claims cousinship with Sturt, who discovered that customary pricing could prevail in wheelwrighting business even in the later nineteenth-century. Critically, Sturt was able to follow the customary as a member of a community, comprising his customers, competitors, and neighbors, that was prepared to forswear 'grasping,' the opportunity for profit-taking, in favor of social cohesion. Pete learnt similar values among the close-knit, self-policing community of travelers, lessons supplemented by experience of the trust-based marketplace exchanges customary at events such as Appleby Horse Fair.[5] These are values he now takes into his day-to-day jobbing work as a wheelwright. For example, Pete frequently makes bartered non-monetary exchanges, trading labor and materials back and forth with customers. These forms of exchange, based in mutually agreed use value rather than monetary value, are something, Pete says, that 'hippies and non-conformists have [always] championed.' Likewise, he does not use contracts and relies on trust in striking a deal.

Pete's views on, for example, accumulation are probably best thought of not as an act of rejection but as the expression of a preference. What utility does he seek? What if working more and earning more imposes opportunity costs? He finds greater utility in free

time. In this he also displays affinities with pre-industrial attitudes to time and time's relationship to work and production. His relative lack of interest in conventionally 'productive' use of time (and thus also in rationalities of profit and accumulation) is best thought of as an interest in allotting his time according to subjective use value rather than nominally objective monetary value. This is a mode of being – a rationality if we want – again learnt while living on the road, in which life unfolded according to not only strong diurnal cycles but also seasonal and annual ones organized around agricultural jobs or festivals and fairs. And at the level of singular days, his work is timed not according to the clock but rather to the work that is to be accomplished, a form of task-orientation that takes the 'independent peasant or craftsman' as its historical referent (Thompson 1967, 61). He does not view time as 'currency . . . [to be] not passed but spent' (69). His labor undivided and entirely under his own control, Pete is free, within certain limits imposed by the need to secure a livelihood, to spend his time as he chooses.

Of course, this is also practical. A cart or caravan, whether a new build or a restoration, is the epitome of a project. Each is a complex and unique custom-built unit. Such a project is comprised of a multitude of sub-tasks, for few of which is even batch production possible for the lone craftsperson. Mass production, and with it its emphasis on speed of throughput and tight temporal discipline, is an impossibility. Tasks and projects are finite, reaching completion, allowing pause and rest. The production line aims to never stop. Certain tasks present intense time pressures, such as the 'shrinking on' of an iron hoop to the rim of a wooden wheel, but those pressures are inherent to the concrete task and not caused by the stipulations of efficiencies. So, the new day presents a new task, each task builds toward the completion of the project, itself set within a certain degree of seasonality. Work is rhythmic and punctuated, at scales from the diurnal to the annual, in ways that allow for temporal space – downtime.

Today, Pete and Sarah have their enterprise. On its own terms it is thriving. They make a pattern of living that they find valuable and rewarding. The value and the reward lie not in monetary returns, but in the quality of the things they make and in how the way in which they do business allows attachment to a landscape, immediate *and* imagined. On one visit, wind-scoured and rain-sluiced, Pete drove me down a lane that released a flood of memories from him. Nearly twenty years earlier they had driven their caravan down this small, secluded byway, hoping to find place to stop for the night, never thinking they would make this locality home. Drawing them that day was Laddie. Laddie was still with them at the house just two or three miles away.[6] As Pete notes simply of the old horse, 'He came here on his feet.'

Historicizing enterprise

Pete's understanding and practice of entrepreneurship had emerged from the interactions between a myriad of elements: craft, place, past, imaginings of the future, the politics and economics of Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. From Thatcherism too. The process was complex, not simple. The Thatcherite project too was riddled with tensions that made its realization fraught. Margaret Thatcher wanted people to stand on their own two feet, or – in the words of Norman Tebbit – to get on their bikes. Citizens, those who were unemployed especially, were exhorted to move on and get on, leaving their pasts behind them. The country was to be catapulted forward through a propulsive 'Big Bang.'

And yet these exhortations to Britons to build and participate in a new entrepreneurial culture were, in fact, rooted in a particular reading of British history, in which entrepreneurialism flowered as an expression not of some coming zeitgeist but of an historically anchored native genius. Thus, in a speech given in October 1974, Keith Joseph, a key intellectual influence on Thatcher, especially in relation to economic ideology and policy, made the claim that 'Our [Conservative] party is older than capitalism' (https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/101830). Keith went on to develop this claim into the argument that economics were not the essence of politics: 'we have to get economics back into proportion, as one aspect of politics, important but never really the main thing.' Indeed:

> Over the years, this auction has raised expectations which cannot be satisfied, generated grievances and discontents. Far from bringing well being, this economics-first approach has aggravated unhappiness and social conflict, as wall as over-straining the whole economic system to a point where it is beginning to seize up.

'Would it not now be better,' he continued, 'to approach the public, who know that economics is not everything, as whole men rather than economic men?'
Instead of electoral reliance on mere economics, Keith preached a gospel of history-making moral purpose, arguing that:

> It is up to us. History is not made by abstract forces, or classes. It is made by people. If we have the moral courage to say what we believe to be true, right and good, the people will be with us.

That a bright economic future would be reached only through the strait gate of a vibrant 'enterprise culture' has been positioned as a key tenet of Thatcherism. However, as Joseph's words suggest, in its simplest form, this reading does not fully reckon with the role of history in Thatcher's thought. Renewal and return were dominant motifs. The future was imagined from the past. Thus, both Margaret Thatcher and Pete drew on history and place to reimagine 'England' and its future(s) in alignment with their visions of proper market ordering.

The concept of creating an 'enterprise culture' has become indelibly associated with the 1980s, during which decade it seemed to emerge, fully formed, with great rapidity. In fact, the conjoined themes of enterprise, individual freedom, and British identity and history had been core to Thatcher's political philosophy from the immediate postwar years. In a newspaper article entitled 'YOU will decide,' published in the *Gravesend and Dartford Reporter* on the 28 January 1950, Thatcher declared that:

> It was not a Government that built up the skill and craft of this country—the woollen goods, the beautiful china, and the precision engineering, which have made their way into the markets of the world. It was private individuals who patiently persevered, building up their businesses bit by bit. They were not held up at every stage by having to apply to four or five different Ministries in triplicate. They and their families just went ahead with the job, living their own lives without interference. Their success provided employment for others and greatly benefited the community as a whole. This was the spirit that made England great and can restore her once again. Do you want it to perish for a soul-less Socialist system, or to live to recreate a glorious Britain? (http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/100856)

The references to the achievements of the entrepreneurs – noticeably characterized as 'individuals' – of the First Industrial Revolution are obvious. Equally striking is the exhortation to 'recreate' a glorious Britain that is clearly of the past.

Following accession to leadership of the Conservative party in 1975, those themes already present in 1950 became clearer and more assertive, the historicism more pronounced. On 25 August 1977, in an interview given to Tyne Tees Television (a regional commercial broadcaster based in North-east England) Thatcher argued that the British economy would remain stagnant until we become once again an enterprise economy, with people having some incentives . . . A return to an enterprise economy, a return to incentives, a return to all of those people who are either willing to take risks with their own money or who are willing to work jolly hard (http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103431).

Thatcher elaborated on these themes in a speech she gave in July 1979 to the Conservative Political Center Summer School, following electoral victory in May of that year. She began by advancing the proposition that 'The Conservative Party is proud of our national past. We still acclaim the scientific and technological innovations to which Britain gave birth and which ushered in the industrial and scientific age,' establishing the foundation for a deeply rhetorical claim of national character rooted in history, values, and institutions:

> Unlike the Socialists, our policies have never been merely a local version of an international creed; they have always been and remain British policies, for application within the framework of British institutions, which have evolved slowly since Saxon days. That slow organic growth has endowed our political life with a special virtue, offering a moral as well as a political example to mankind. We in our Party are certain that we belong to a 'happy breed,' as Shakespeare put it in the mouth of John of Gaunt . . . In the last few years, British patriots have, once again, had cause, as John of Gaunt did, to feel ashamed of the way that the nation was being directed. We know that Britain has been in dire straits before, and that she has recovered. She will recover again. (Speech to the Conservative Political Centre Summer School, 6 July 1979. http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104107)

Having recited this pageant of figures and moments from British history, Thatcher turned to the central theme (and title) of her speech, 'The Renewal of Britain.' For Thatcher, the Conservative party had won the 1979 election because 'We believed that we could inspire the renewal of our past faculties and ingenuity . . . We talked of the need for renewal of our traditional craftsmanship and civic spirit; renewal at every level, and in every profession, of our old vigor and vitality.' Fulfilling that promise meant:

> We need . . . to create a mood where it is everywhere thought morally right for as many people as possible to acquire capital; not only because of the beneficial economic consequences, but because the possession of even a little capital encourages the virtues of self-reliance and responsibility, as well as assisting a spirit of freedom and independence. (Speech to the Conservative Political Centre Summer School, 6 July 1979. http://www.margaret thatcher.org/document/104107.)

As is often the case with political rhetoric, there is a sleight of hand at work here: for example, in the way in which Thatcher elides between the 'industrial and scientific age' and 'our traditional craftmanship,' or, earlier, between Britain and England. At the same time, there is remarkable consistency to the ideological arc

traversed by Thatcher across the decades prior to her first General Election victory in 1979. Undoubtedly, her thinking had been deeply influenced by others. Nonetheless, the vision of a Britain 'renewed' or 'recovered' by a return to the best of its history (and presiding national character) was her own. Contained with that vision were many of the emphases subsequently explored by historians, especially the moral dimension of individual independence of means and actions founded on the private ownership of property and capital. It was from this constellation of beliefs that the attempt to recreate an enterprise culture emerged in the 1980s. Welding disparate, scattered fragments – artisanship and industry, tradition and innovation, craft and science, Saxons, Elizabethans and Victorians – Thatcher's vision of a past Britain of enterprise, awaiting an awakening, rings with mythic promise. But from it came practical moves that were meant to enact the rhetoric, such as the EAS.

Place is barely less significant than time to Pete's historicization of his enterprise practices, as was true of Margaret Thatcher, who sought consistently to place a virtue such as enterprise into an intimate dialogue with a notion of native English genius. For Pete, one source of this sense of the importance of place is to be found in the hyper-localism of Sturt, for whom work, craft, trade, and industry were inseparable from an England that was simultaneously indelibly concrete and profoundly mythologized.

This sense of time-haunted place was, however, nested within a wider set of related configurations. Place was important to the traveler communities, both practically and symbolically. Practically, they were always in need of a place in which to park their vehicles, whether for one night or many. In a country with extremely concentrated land ownership, this was rarely easy (and only made harder by anti-traveler legislation in the 1980s). Symbolically, space and place drew on appeals to a shared commonweal.

Geographer Kevin Hetherington and historian Alun Howkins have explored how travelers' senses of place melded history, memory, and myth (Hetherington 2000; Howkins 2002). These relationships to place and the land hinged on a sense of loss, just as Margaret Thatcher's calls for a renewal of English energies also acknowledged an implicit loss. Both were, in a sense, prelapsarian and thus unavoidably historicized. It was in their interpretations of how and why this mattered that they differed. Where Thatcherism emphasized the importance of individual ownership of private property, travelers expressed a sense of dispossession, specifically from the commons. For Howkins, the travelers were the latest link in a chain of English rural radicalism stretching across centuries. Land, and access to it, were central to a tradition rooted in both material conditions and imagined places, motivated by a 'clear and material account of how the land had been "stolen" . . . combined . . . with a mystical or mythical sense of the loss' (Howkins 2002, 3). Hetherington also emphasizes the centrality of the experience of loss as temporal and spatial. Traveler identity, he argues, is built on an 'imaginary or symbolic construction of the countryside . . . an imaginary but lost English way of rural and spiritual life' (2000, 16–7). As part of this process, sites that 'might be said to reveal glimpses of this imaginary past are particularly important,' valued for the way in which they relate to a 'lost or mythical past.' Ultimately, the travelers 'live in a country that they identify with *in absentia*' (Hetherington 2000, 17).

Markets, rationalities, and subjectivities

Is it right to think that British economic life was 'relentlessly colonised and distorted by the demands of neoliberal economies and ideologies' during the 1980s (Moores 2017, 247; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Davies, and Jackson 2021, 20)?

The irruption of the traveler movement in the 1980s might seem best understood through the lens of what E.P. Thompson called the 'spasmodic school' of social history, which would paint it as little more than an unthinking reaction to distress, bereft of an economic philosophy, an economic critique, or economic practices of its own, cut free from the moorings of community, culture, and history (Thompson 1971, 77). From such a framing we would probably conclude that their acts of resistance were futile. Instead, as Thompson argued in writing about participants in historical food riots, it might be better to see their actions and practices as 'self-conscious [and] self-activating,' their 'behaviour modified by custom, culture, and reason' through which were established the boundaries between 'what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices' within a market (76, 76–7, & 79).

Eschewing accumulation, Pete is no capitalist, but he is an enterprising, entrepreneurial market participant. He sells into a market and undoubtedly numbers the wealthy – who are capitalists – among his clients.[7] Even his decision to pursue a range of activities, economic and non-economic, at the cost of profit maximization might be rationalized as the expression of a preference shaped by opportunity costs. More broadly, Pete and Sarah have left the road and settled in a fixed abode. In quite important senses he can be said, in the end, to have conformed to significant elements of the Thatcherite project. If we were to read his choices as an attempt to resist or find freedom from that project, then he cannot be said to have succeeded.

But nor is it possible to argue that Pete's experience fully embodies the intent of Thatcherism and its project, which 'aimed to remove barriers between the individual and ... market rationalities' in order to shape British citizens as 'empowered market participants' (Rieger 2021, 120). It has been argued that Thatcherism remained an unfinished revolution because there 'was no coherent, pre-formed "neoliberal individual" at the heart of the Thatcherism' (Davies, Freeman, and Pemberton 2018, 484 & 501). Scholarship has laid considerable stress not only on the notion of a 'neoliberal individual,' but also – and in particular – on that individual's relationship to the market. Individuals 'needed to be brought into a direct relationship with the capitalist system' (489) to be remade as 'empowered market participants' (Rieger 2021, 120). Britons were to be exposed to 'market rationales' and become '*homines oeconomici* ... anchored in market relations' (130 & 114). The whole project was 'shot through with assumptions about market mechanisms' (113). At the same time, it has also been claimed that '"the individual" within Thatcherism remains under-analysed by historians' (Davies, Freeman, and Pemberton 2018, 482).

In this essay, I have focused on an individual to try and understand his subjectivities, his rationalities, and his relationship to the market. Doing so has exposed the extent to which his relationship with the market is rooted in deeply historicized notions of craft, community, and place that shape his idea of what a market is and how to act within it, his 'behaviour modified by custom, culture, and reason.' For Pete, markets and market relations interpenetrate with other social structures and relations in ways that are best

understood through an emphasis on their historicization. If, as has been claimed, the 'neoliberal individual' at the heart of the Thatcherism' was inchoate then was that true also for conceptions of the market? If the whole project was 'shot through with assumptions about market mechanisms' (Rieger 2021, 113) then has scholarships reproduced some of those assumptions? Margaret Thatcher may or may not have believed in the existence of society, but she did believe in a national community rooted in and formed through historical processes that provided the proper setting for and expression of economic activities. In that sense, her historicized understanding of market relationships was no more deracinated than was Pete's. Because they were not abstract but, rather, ambiguously historically embedded, Thatcherite understandings of the market and market relationships did not close off the possibility of alternative, differently historically embedded understandings, such as that proposed and lived by Pete.

Conclusion

Pete, Sturt, and Thatcher, considered together, their histories interleaved, throw each other into strange relief. There is a surprising amount that binds them. The contrast Sturt drew between his 'folk industry' and the 'organized effects of commerce' shares a certain amount of cultural DNA with Keith Joseph's claim that the Conservative Party was 'older than capitalism.' Both, in turn, help situate Pete's apparent lack of interest in the accumulation of money in the bank as not merely idiosyncratic but part of a wider, continuing, formative pattern of valuations, attachments, satisfactions, skepticisms, losses, and longings.

Sturt, Pete, and Thatcher each presented imaginaries of an England saturated with history and place. The specific geometries of those twin coordinates of time and place – Farnham, Grantham, Stoke-on-Trent; the eighteenth-century, the nineteenth-century, the 1950s, the 1970s and the 1980s; centuries, decades, generations, lifetimes; encampment, workshop, conference hall, and parliament – ensured they each projected visions of the proper ordering of market relations that were rooted in particular, not universal, rationalities.

Certainly, Pete should be considered an empowered market participant: empowered to decide what work to take and what not to; to decide the prices he might charge and the materials with which he would work; to decide when to work and when to find other uses for his time; to decide how much money to make, when to save it and when to spend it. But this is not to say that he also represented a 'new individualistic form[s] of self-fashioning … relentlessly colonised and distorted by the demands of neoliberal economies and ideologies.' His 'individual subjectivity' cannot be reduced to one 'reformed according to the ideal of entrepreneurialism' (Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Davies, and Jackson 2021, 5).

The histories reviewed in this article demonstrate that the Thatcherite project remained incomplete across several facets of British life, social and economic – from pension provision to rave culture. Pete was not the only person whose conscription into neoliberal modes of governance remained ambiguous. This article extends that claim to efforts to germinate a new entrepreneurialism, even as entrepreneurialism was 'central to Thatcherism's development as a political and economic project … constructed … around the entrepreneur's values and economic utility' (Davies, Freeman, and Pemberton 2018,

494–95). If Thatcherism was and is an uncompleted project then it might be easy to conclude that it was so because there 'was no coherent, pre-formed "neoliberal individual" at the heart of the Thatcherism' (484 & 501). It was always hunting after chimera. But this is an incomplete answer. In Pete's case, it was also because Sturt gave him the resources with which to build his own rationalities, the weight with which to buttress his own beliefs. But, further, it was perhaps because Thatcherism also carried its own weight of the past. Noticing how Pete is anchored in the past via Sturt, alerted by his refusal to seeing the point of putting money in the bank, we notice how Thatcher and Thatcherism also attempted to claim themselves as part of traditions far older than capitalism. In turn, Pete insisted that he be treated as a whole man rather than as an economic man. And so, he found his way to Sturt and to a way to practice his craft and his business. History, just as it did for Margaret Thatcher, provided the stuff from which a vision of enterprise in Albion could be fashioned.

Earlier, we saw how James Vernon has suggested that we might 'supplement . . . bird's eye views of neoliberalism as a transnational phenomenon imposed from above with a mole's eye view from below of how it operated in situ' (2021, 214–15). But the bird and the mole also eye one another and find that they inhabit the same sphere. Each casting shadows and light on the other, Pete and Thatcher more fully reveal themselves in dialogue about the histories they share (which are greater in extent than we or they might ever have imagined), those they do not share, and what they thought it possible to do with them.

Sources and methods

Michael Heller has declared history to be 'by nature a discipline of suspicion.' (988). Historians treat the sources they use critically and quizzically. Our instinct is to not trust. But others often also view historians with suspicion. Are we to be trusted? I can blame no-one if they do not quite trust me having read this essay. I have declined to show my hand. Wadhwani and Sørensen (2023) make engaging argument for methods of play. I might be said to have used methods of mischief. Perhaps I should explain. Pete and I are friends, as I said. However full of life the center of this essay is (that is, with the fullness of Pete's life), there is also a void: no documents, no field notes, no traces. Do you trust me?

Microhistory is in some ways a method of trust. At one point in his essay 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things I Know about it,' Carlo Ginzburg says that 'the attitude that the historian must assume in regard to the anomalies that crop up in the documentation' (Ginzburg, Tedeschi, and Tedeschi 1993, 21) is unobvious. But then, only pages later, he argues that the 'obstacles interfering with the research were constituent elements of the documentation and thus had to become part of the account,' continuing:

> the same for the hesitations and silences of the protagonist in the face of his persecutors' questions—or mine. Thus, the hypotheses, the doubts, the uncertainties became part of the narration; the search for truth became part of the exposition of the (necessarily incomplete) truth attained". (23-4)

This special issue is particularly rich empirically, with several papers prising open a range of confounding or perplexing sources, revealing the pearls within (Dawson Scott 2024; Decker, Giovannoni, and Plakoyiannaki 2024; Tennent and Gillett 2024). So, trust the grist

and grit of the anomalous. Here, it was Pete's comment about money in the bank. I decided to take that statement (which I am sure he did not think exceptional or anomalous at all. Why would he?) at face value, for all Pete's reticence and silences (here, as a subject, as a source of documentation), treating it as the exceptional-normal, the central point from which to begin the double-movement. From there the connections reveal themselves.

If I want to claim any kind of genealogy for the approach I have taken here, I will call it, following Jessica Hammett and her coauthors, 'participatory micro-history' (2020, 249). As they note, there is 'a growing interest in co-production and collaborative public histories – researching with not on people,' drawing on a long tradition that was 'recognized by Raphael Samuel when he wrote that history is a 'social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands'' (2020, 251). Here, we hear acute echoes of Carolyn Steedman's claim that the 'past is re-used through the agency of social information, and that interpretation of it can only be made through what people know of a social world and their place within it' (Steedman 1986, 5). Writing in her intensely autobiographical study of her mother, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Steedman continues it 'is a proposition of this book that that specificity of place and politics has to be reckoned with in making an account of anybody's life, and their use of their own past' (6).

Still, though Pete is very much alive, I will finish with Katie Barclay's advice from her essay on 'Falling in Love with the Dead:' we should always remember that 'our affective connections to the past are not just worthy of critical reflection … but form part of our critical analysis of our subjects and the histories we produce' (Barclay 2018, 468). I hope it is there on the page.

But as Hammett et al. note, there can be 'tensions within these relationships,' centered around the 'power dynamics present in collaborative work' (Hammett, Harrison, and King 2020, 25). Power differentials are not the only issue. Intimacy and empathy become entwined. One historian speaking to Sarah Fox on empathy and historical practices listed 'the dangers of the empathetic approach as "the retreat of truth, the rise of identity politics and the mistaken sense that a single case or experience … can tell us something either systematic or systemic"' (2023, 14). The last point sounds a note of caution for anyone attempting to work in a microhistorical register, and even more so when we consider that, in some views, 'shared experience can actively obstruct empathetic approaches to history by blurring the separation between the researcher's feelings and those of their historical subject' (2023, 17). Pete and I have many shared experiences, extending back in time over more than four decades, experiences that have sometimes induced intense states of joy, excitement, conflict, sadness, and even danger. But to return to Steedman, I contend that these experiences help me in accessing that 'specificity of place and politics [that] has to be reckoned with in making an account of anybody's life' (Steedman 1986, 6). Thus, as another historian told Fox, '"empathy is a technology that makes historical writing more powerful and effective"' (2023, 19). The balance is never perfect though. For all Ginzburg emphasizes the activating silence of the protagonist, I regret the relative silence here of Pete and Sarah's own voices, directly speaking their version. It is too easy to dismiss this as merely a consequence (e.g. no field notes) of a research process that only became a research process in retrospect.

Notes

1. Pete and Sarah are pseudonyms.
2. These words form the inscription on a print, variously known as 'Glad Day' or 'The Dance of Albion,' made by poet William Blake in the mid-1790s. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1856-0209-417.
3. *The Wheelwright's Shop* was well received on publication in 1923. Though perhaps not well known to the general reading public, the book remains in print and is recognized as a classic of the social history of the English countryside.
4. An alternative interpretation is that Sturt relied on antiquated methods of calculation rather than actual past prices. Either way, this was a solution rooted more in custom than in cost accounting.
5. Appleby Horse Fair, also known as Appleby New Fair, dates to at least 1775, though there are likely earlier antecedents.
6. Sadly, Laddie has died since I began working on this article.
7. Unsurprisingly, there is no meaningful market for working farm vehicles. Much of Pete's work is restoration for people who, for a wide range of reasons, own and use horse drawn vehicles. He has also received commissions from companies, such as haulers, who want a horse drawn vehicle for commemorative or heritage purposes. A proportion of commissions – wheels and complete vehicles – are effectively decorative additions for wealthy clients.

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