The Turnover Club: locality and identity in the North Staffordshire practice of turning over ceramic ware.

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Abstract:

This paper explores a key practice adopted by those local to or from Stoke-on-Trent, and outlines its significance in the wider context of 'ordinary' consumption and material cultures, globalisation and local identity. Being a 'turnover-er' – someone who always turns over pottery to check whether it is Stoke-on-Trent ware - is an oft practised, but little examined part of the living heritage that connects those with affinity to 'the Potteries' (as the region is known) and its ceramic ware. The project set out to explore qualitative accounts of turning over and to gauge its salience and reach as a practice, linking this to broader accounts of material culture, consumption and heritage. We carried out 20 interviews with those who turn over or who have an interest in local ceramics, and an online survey (n=500) which explored the some of the reasons for turning over. Findings indicate the strong connections established by the practice of turning over to local identity, both inherited and adopted, and further indicates the social salience and emotional attachments to the meanings of local ware.

Keywords: ceramics; pottery; Stoke-on-Trent; intangible cultural heritage; material culture; working-class heritage

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Locals to Stoke-on-Trent – including, anecdotally, the renowned author Arnold Bennett, who is thought to have been mocked for his own flipping over of a dish (visitstoke.co.uk) – like to say that you can always tell someone from the Potteries[1], because they will turn over their cup to check where it was made. Generically, turning over of pottery is a practice carried out by many people interested in pottery, in the interests of value, collectability and provenance, to establish where and when a piece of ceramics comes from and what it might be worth. However, for those local to The Potteries region, it is tinged with broader cultural significance. This paper seeks to make the case that 'turning over' is a distinct part of local culture and is worth celebrating, documenting, protecting, and communicating more broadly. It is fair to say that currently, 'turning over' is a community of heritage practice that is mostly 'in itself' rather than 'for itself', since practitioners only really acknowledge it as a collective 'thing' when they spot another 'Stokie' turning over while on holiday. However, as I will show, it is widespread, compulsive and customary, as well as providing regular opportunity for reflection on local identity, skills, and knowledge. It may be part of cultural practice that is not recognised by others, that Stokies themselves laugh about, but its prevalence is prolific and worth further investigation. Moreover, because Stoke-on-Trent pottery has travelled the world as a global artistic and commercial product, yet its status as global heritage is often downplayed by locals themselves, there is still work to do in establishing its true value.

What is turning over?

Turning over of pots occupies a complicated position at the cross section of Stoke-on-Trent/North Staffordshire pride, and a kind of reluctant, resistant defensiveness of the historic local ceramic industry. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that this pride does not simply extend to the notion of industrial/local geographic heritage but also consuming/living heritage also: Stoke-on-Trent locals have a distinct sense of their material culture as regional and some notion – at least in part – of this being part of a wider global cultural/artistic legacy of which they are part. This paper further seeks to engage with the socio-cultural significance of 'turning over' as part of local living heritage and as part of everyday material cultures that play an important role in 'cueing' social action.

The practice of turning over is important because, as the pottery industry has significantly shifted its production and globalised processes and distribution, the region has de-industrialised (not only pottery but also mining and other significant industries have declined) while undergoing significant shifts in local populations. In this political and economic climate, local identity has high salience as a social issue. Moreover, the globalisation of the ceramics industry in both economic and cultural terms (with mixed consequences) is widely recognised, and the various impacts of expansion, contraction and relocation much discussed. The working class history of the region, its industrial processes, geography and working practices are much discussed, and – separately – Stoke-on-Trent's fine artistic products and global historic significance are well documented.

However, there is little to connect how those who worked *in* the potbanks feel about their ware, its artistic contribution and what role this might play in the *story of itself* that a

deindustrialised region might tell. In the search for regeneration, that self-authored story is very important and the stories of those locals who consume Stoke-on-Trent ware are virtually unheard. In one sense, this is not at all surprising: very many of the people who made Staffordshire ware, especially that which was at the high end or for commercial use, were not the intended customers. On the other hand, 'outsiders' might find it surprising that locals to Stoke-on-Trent turnover pots wherever they go, often every time they see or use one.

What meaning this untold story of Stoke has is at the core of this project: is the story of turning over pottery simply a question of blind pride in an excellent product? Or, is it overlain with other more intimate meanings – family narratives and uses? Or – more often – does it indicate immense pride, connection and unrecognised expertise that identifies 'locals', whether born here or not? Further analytical questions emerge from these: does the wide adoption of 'turning over' as an identifying practice constitute a part of living heritage for a dying industry: a marker of loss and transition that needs capturing before subsequent generations stop doing it? Alternatively, is it part of something more lasting and intergenerational?

The Backstamp and the Turnover Club?

The 'Turnover Club' or simply 'turnover-ers' is an affectionate, colloquial name for those native to, or adopted by, the Potteries region who turnover their crockery wherever they go to check whether it was made in Stoke-on-Trent. Indeed, for those who have left the region, it is still an important part of their experience, connecting them to their own heritage and affording a regional identity independent of residence. It is also – we find, empirically – something that incomers adopt as part of a complex adaptation to belonging to their new-found locality. Not everyone recognises turnover-ing as any kind of 'official' name however, as the practice of turning over is – as I will show – both ubiquitous and part of everyday life. The consequence of this is that its significance as part of local heritage, identity and cultural practice is under-recognised, partly because it is seen as a mundane, everyday activity of little import by those who do it, and seen as quite odd or calculating by those who do not understand it. It is also partly because it reflects a *local* strategy of cultural defence against social, economic and generational change that is not recognised in the changes to production processes and wider marketing that have almost wholly moved to a globalised industrial model.

Crucial to the experience of turning over ceramics is the backstamp, a makers' mark in which the date/origins of a piece can be identified. Backstamps are central to the curatorial and collecting communities, as the detailed knowledge contained within provides important provenance to identify and value ceramic ware. However, the backstamp has a life beyond the formal collecting cultures. First, it is the source of commercial value in the ware itself to manufacturers. A stamp of quality and identification, backstamps have been used for centuries by potbanks to mark ware to signal its originality and line, often cited in Godden's (1991) guide for verification.

There have been attempts to capitalise directly on this habitual practice in order to market it in the interests of the ceramics industry and associated tourism. In this way, the practice further entered the public discourse and consciousness, but in ways tied to specific

instrumental marketing purposes for specific ware or in the interests of tourism-driven heritage. Steelite, for example, has its own Facebook page in which it invites members to log sightings of its ware in hotels and restaurants around the world. As part of a promotion, Wedgwood also once issued a 'Turnover Club' card giving permission to 'members' to turn over pots wherever they travelled. Further, Visit Stoke, the city council's tourism office, established a 'Backstamp Club' in which members could have a membership card as a turnover-er. These commercial initiatives attempted to capture and market the widespread practice of turning over, but they have not (yet) developed or explored the deeper social and cultural significance of the practice as an element of living heritage. Nor have they managed to map the incidence and spread of turning over as an extensive local (and Stoke-on-Global) phenomenon. These various endeavours have no doubt contributed to the sense of lay expertise, but none has quite managed to capture the full story of what turning over means to, and does for, local residents and ex-residents.

More nuanced acknowledgement of the significance of backstamps, as cultural icons and not just as brands, is found in work completed by the Potteries museum and various artists in its commission of the artwork by Emma Biggs (Biggs 2007) which graces its entrance hall. The backstamp becomes a thing of beauty and contemplation in its own right, and the associated writings and voices collected by the artist, provide some context for this understanding of people's own knowledge of local ware. However even this has neglected that simple reality that local people buy, own, collect and 'virtually collect' local ware and thus the backstamps have a further hidden story to be unearthed. Turning over is bigger than any single brand, artwork or collection, and it has gritty connections to real lives and local communities. The current project seeks to derive further data, mapping the extent and demography of turning over, and to explore it in relation to geographical and identity narratives, as well as broader patterns of material culture and generational consumer/collector identity.

However, the backstamp itself has become the source of considerable commercial and political interest in the context of globalisation in recent decades. As Ewins (2013a, 2013b) and others point out, the keen obsession with backstamps highlights a commercial battle over branding and global outsourcing, in which some producers hold on to the notion of regional brand/manufacturing value, while others reject this in favour of a fluid, global brand with more obscure origins. Numerous local MPs have addressed this – in the broader context of Stoke-on-Trent's place in 'countries of origin' debates – making the case that, as with many foodstuffs and luxury products, country/region of origin offers some value to producers and consumers. Some manufacturers and consumers call for a specific 'made in Stoke-on-Trent' restriction but many political and commercial interests continue to defend a global product arguing that 'the market' does not need more restriction and that regional labelling would be considered protectionism. In the most recent parliamentary intervention, Stoke Central MP Tristram Hunt linked the need to limit country of origin marking to local feeling and quality by making an emotive, scholarly - and unsuccessful - plea to the House of Commons to instate a Made in Staffordshire requirement:

> "It is a source of great pride to our constituents that pottery has been thrown in Stoke-on-Trent since the late-1500s. Out of the blue and yellow North Staffs clay

> came butter pots and flowerpots. In the sun kilns of Bagnall and Penkhull, local artisans started to glaze their earthenware and develop a reputation for craftsmanship [sic]. In their wake came the great houses of Wedgwood, Spode, Royal Doulton and Minton, names celebrated around the world for the excellence of their craftsmanship. Stoke-on-Trent gained the title "The Potteries" as "Made in Staffordshire" became a global hallmark of excellence". (Hansard 2013)

Ewins' work (2013a, 2013b) outlines the competing rationales by manufacturers for making use of the country of origin in backstamps – or not – in the context of global outsourcing of production. The introduction of the 'detachable' label noting country of origin or use of the phrase 'decorated in England' are just some of the multiple strategies used to either obscure or downplay the country of origin. It is perhaps not surprising that these practices are controversial to locals in North Staffordshire.

Ewins cites the major ceramic trade magazine, Tableware International, as reporting manufacturers being unconvinced that consumers really care much about country or place of origin. Ewins suggests that his empirical research provides some challenge to this notion: a number of consumers reported an association between British manufacture and perceived quality. Moreover, some makers (such as Emma Bridgewater), Ewins notes, have explicitly maintained their British and specifically Stoke-on-Trent manufacture as a key part of their marketing strategy, capitalising on Britishness as part of the brand value. Further, in beginning to address the consumption side of this story, Ewins also points out the link to notions of authenticity and value found in collectability and provenance of ceramic ware. In such global and postmodern times, the search for lineage and authenticity seems to demand a narrative of origin in the face of generic anonymous products.

My research is deeply concerned with value, but more with broader sociological and cultural theory approaches which explore the upswing of consumer and user 'agency' in constructing value, this paper addresses the theme raised by Ewins of the consumption arm of the debate: on the lived, experiential cultural practice of appreciating backstamps, and pottery more generally. In this specific case – of North Staffordshire people's own perceptions of local ware – it focuses on the way the backstamp and the ware more generally, contributes to a sense of locality and identity, as well as providing a frame for material and symbolic practices in the rich ceramic lives of locals to the area.

Pottery from 'The Potteries': narratives of deindustrialisation, everyday culture or unauthorised heritage?

On the whole, research that explores the local identity of the Potteries has focused on pottery (and mining) exploring the public realm of work (Hart 2005; Popp 2003; Sarsby 1988) and the 'official' museum culture which also primarily focuses on art history and production. However, the experiences of pottery workers, their communities built around the pot banks, the decline of mining and pottery production locally, the urban and heritage legacy (Jayne 2000a, 2000b) that developed alongside are all important parts of the local history and

provide much basis for local pride, as can be seen in many studies of local knowledge, leisure, and museum visiting (DeBres 1991; Waterton 2011; Williams 2006).

Often Stoke-on-Trent is considered in the shadow of the cultural and economic regenerations practiced more successfully (Jayne 2004) in Manchester and Birmingham:

> "…it has proved difficult for Stoke-on-Trent to reimagine itself and create a new place-image which is less reliant on the old stereotypes of pottery, dereliction and cultural lack. …[T]he Potteries have become a byword for obsolescence, an amusing reference to a space left behind in the image-economy…" (Edensor et al 2000, 10).

These comments in the introduction to Edensor et al's book about leisure spaces in Stoke-on-Trent highlights one predominant academic and regeneration policy concern that links identity to public spaces, buildings, and work within the ceramics industry. This important tradition in the literature, linking the decline afforded by deindustrialisation with cultural 'lack' focuses primarily on culture as spectacular, collective and public (Jayne 2000a, 2000b, 2004; Edensor 2000). Notions of ordinary 'everyday culture' outside the public spaces of work, leisure palaces and streets – the culture of materiality, consumption, micro-communities - as significant in local stories tends to be neglected, although the attachment to the local food hero – the Staffordshire oatcake – is indeed documented in Edensor's et al (2000) collection.

Yet – in much of the literature on culture, heritage and regeneration - the value and salience of ceramic ware itself is neglected. This may be for a number of reasons. First, the 'urban regeneration' focus of both academics and urban professionals seems to favour an urban architectural vision and a cultural vision which eschews the domestic and that which is seen as middle-aged, and pottery consumption perhaps is a little too old fashioned and bourgeois to be on the radar of academics or designers. Second, the local business community, as Edensor (2000) points out, has done its own work in attempting to 'move on' from pottery, constantly reminding the business community that locality is about much more than bottle ovens. Finally, consumption and collecting is not often seen as part of the construction of locality – a point that this project actively challenges, building as it does on the extensive literature on consumption and material culture in everyday life that demonstrates the salience of acquisitive objects for cultural construction.

The broad perspective that this research is located within is the material culture studies tradition on the boundary between sociology, anthropology, design history and museology (as well as other disciplines). A key principle of this approach – found most definitively, as discussed below, in the work of Miller (1987) - is the analysis of objects as communicative of social structure and cultural meaning, and as placeholders as social forms and structures persist over time. In other words, objects do social 'work' – such as signifying group identity, representing social norms and values and 'cuing' social behaviour (Attfield 2000; Dant 2004; Gregson and Crewe 2003; McCracken 1990; Pearce 1998; Pink 2004). They shape, and represent, the relations between individuals, social structures and wider

normative expectations, and they provide the symbolic 'pegs' for a series of micro-level narratives of personality and identity to be 'hung' on (Woodward 2007). This material culture approach deploys variations of what Miller (1987, 217) calls 'de-alienation': the restoration of meanings and values of objects by their use in circulation. The way this approach configures objects as an empirical resource is not simply to map and list them, but to place them in the context of wider systems of value and social structure which capture moments of 'singularisation' (Kopytoff 1986, 80-83) given by individual and group level meanings in narrative accounts. In these moments objects are changed in meaning by their uses and definitions within the broader social context, rather than defined at the point of production or commoditization.

The key elements of the approach that are applied here are twofold. First, that the narratives of pottery use told in the accounts of turnover-ers shed light on their sense of local identity and on notions of local culture, as well as wider personal and social forms. Second, that the routine and ritual practices of engaging with pottery are themselves part of their 'marking' as significant: in the (anthropological) material culture tradition, the status and role given to symbolic objects is partly demonstrated by their place in hierarchies and systems: in this case, their 'special' status marked out in public eateries by the ritual turning over. The issue here is that ceramic ware is 'used' for more than simply holding food and drink. It is used for a wide variety of social purposes – not least social status and consumer taste, but also as a signal of group membership, a badge of local identity, and a repository of memories, dreams, hopes and emotions.

The current research draws much from Miller's (1987; 2008 and inter alia) anthropological assumptions: that the human/object relation – even in consumer cultures – is a moment of engagement and transformation in which new meanings can emerge and in which existing social forms are encountered. As such, this relation is a primary component of culture, and – in the case of pottery in/from North Staffs – this relation takes a specific form that maintains, supports and represents a living practical and ideational tradition.

One consequence of the focus on material culture has been the extending of the social boundaries of the object: studies of consumption now take for granted the notion that the object is not only consumed by purchase but by ideation, use, imagination, revalorisation and devalorisation – a range of routine and ritual processes of social engagement with objects (see also, on related ceramic or second-hand objects, Cheetham [2003, 2009], Parish [2007], Parsons [2006, 2008], and Gregson and Crewe [2003]). Indeed, the part of the engagement that is actually consumption or 'exchange' is a minor part of the significance. In the case of pottery appreciation or appropriation, in this study, it is precisely a kind of virtual appropriation that matters: in almost all the encounters people describe, they are specifically NOT buying the goods, but using them in public settings. Of course, people turn over in car-boot sales, junk fairs and antique shops, but they encounter ware far more than in specific opportunities to purchase. So, this is a form of purely virtual consumption, in which the appropriation is fleeting but highly valued.

It is not only the questions of regional identity through material/virtual 'appropriations' that this project sheds light on. A second key focus is the broader cultural questions of the ownership and nature of 'heritage' raised here, since this is a clear example

of cultural identity forged outside of the formal authority of the museum. As such, this project speaks to work on collecting and object relations that seek to establish the new dynamics of heritage in which the ordinary material practices and accounts of people have as much to say about locality as 'official' versions. This tradition is found within the 'new museology' in which museum cultures reflexively recognise their authorial and political power in 'speaking' community – often in the context of nationalism, but also, as in this case, in identifying a regional sense of belonging. Further, the debate emerges particularly in studies of working class culture and the critique of heritage found in Smith (2006) and others discussed below. The contested stories of locality are increasingly reflected in regional arts practice and museum cultures but this project asks how much this translates in and out of such public and communal realms, and stretches into a private, intimate world of the home, familial and friendship connections.

Waterton (2011) – who has explored the material and heritage culture of Stoke-on-Trent - presents an argument that working class heritage is evident in the intangible but real memory work of locals, who use their identifications with the past to recreate belonging to the Potteries. Her counter to the 'authorised heritage discourse' of grand, historic country houses. identified by Smith (2006), is that local belonging is already evident in the rather more visceral memory of hard work embedded in the potbanks and collective memory is invoked in the 'immaterial' processes of museum visiting. She also identifies – but does not dwell on - 'turning over' as a jokey way in which 'Stokies' can be identified.

One reason for the absence of turning over as 'culture' is the 'everyday' nature of the practice: operating at the level of domestic life and everyday 'eating out', turning over – on the one hand – seems entirely mundane and humorous. However, on the other hand, it is so very embedded in the practice and ritual of locals that while they self-identify extensively (see below) as turnover-ers, the notion that this might be significant in any sense bypasses the Stokies' self-deprecating self-image: as Waterton points out, self-mockery is a dominant feature of this. The practice is further 'buried' in the public consciousness because of its status as 'unauthorised' heritage. Part of a local working class tradition of pride in regional ware, turning over is (mostly) done without the expert authority of the valuer or the curator. It is done by those with lay knowledge passed down to them by parents or grandparents, or picked up by local knowledge of techniques and shapes which often comes from the direct experience of working in the potbanks. As in discussions of broader working class heritage, we can see in pottery practices exercised by locals that there has been a similar tendency of the 'authorised heritage discourse' to:

> "tend to ignore dissonant and subaltern heritage, or to relegate it to a 'special' category – something separate from 'normal' heritage – but it also works to deny the cultural and historical legitimacy and agency of those groups, including working class people, whose cultural, social and historical experiences fall outside the conceptual frameworks validated by the AHD" (Shackel et al 2011, 291)

Turning over can be seen as a 'subaltern', working-class custom, but perhaps one that needs more foregrounding in public consciousness, since it has been unrecognised as part of the ceramic legacy of the region. As Lenzerini (2011, 108) identifies, self-recognition of value is crucial in the identification of valuable intangible heritage:

> "the presence of self-identification among its constitutive elements makes ICH valuable in light of the subjective perspective of its creators and bearers, who recognize the heritage concerned as an essential part of their idiosyncratic cultural inheritance, even though it may appear absolutely worthless to external observers".

This approach also raises an important question of how knowledge and customs held by people in The Potteries and the connection to pottery itself are configured – cultural heritage is, of course, a matter of the politics of the powerful, still "biased towards the elite, the monumental, the literate and the ceremonial" (Lenzerini 2011, 105). The main story of pottery's provenance and meaning is told in two key 'official' sources: its marketing/production narrative, and the museological/art history narrative, both of which formalise the value and provenance of particular pieces, apparently settling the question of their meaning. However, we know – from extensive work on culture and consumption in recent decades as discussed briefly above – that this production focused meaning is not 'fixed' in any sense, and that the value imbued by and in the consumption process challenges the authority of formal groups, in order to hear the authorial voices of user groups. In the light of this shift in perspective to consumption and everyday life, the meaning, use and value invested in pottery by those who recognise, use and turn it over is just as important a part of the story.

In many respects, as it relates to the story of place and identity for those who not only 'occupy' that place/identity but whose own labour built it in the first place, this part of the story is arguably more important than 'official' versions which have mostly stripped out working class voices from the 'valuing' of ceramics themselves. As Smith & Campbell (2011, 101) point out, this process of redefining history is part of living heritage – a profoundly important act:

> "Heritage… is not so much about conserving 'things' or 'intangible traditions' from the past, but rather it is an active process of making, negotiating and transmitting memories and social values for and in terms of present needs and aspirations. It is about generating pride and self-respect in the face of historical trauma and economic and political change. Ultimately, it is about self-recognition".

Why do people turn over? Methods and findings

The initial stages of the research for this project set out to explore the reach and significance of turning over – whether it had any social significance beyond the anecdotal. The approach

was a combination of desk research, interviews with key local figures and an empirical research design that built on the material culture and consumption literature. Taking as a first principle the notion that knowledges and cultures are the co-constructions of community members, the design sought to observe and examine first-hand accounts of the cultural significance of turning over, and to provide a descriptive overview of its scale and demography. The research conducted for this stage of the project comprises ongoing ethnographic engagement and observation of local pottery cultures and cultural practices. This includes conversations with stakeholders, heritage activists, curators, artists, and – primarily – those who consider themselves 'locals' to North Staffordshire who take part in turning over. This ethnographic engagement began in 2014, and is ongoing alongside more formal research tools. The latter includes qualitative interviews (with 20 participants in 2015) and an online survey of self-selecting turnover-ers (n=500) involving demographic, geographic and qualitative information, along with opt-in 'diary' email questions for survey respondents. I ran sessions at a Heritage Open Day at the Minton Library in partnership with Ceramic City Stories, a local community interest company focusing on heritage activism and volunteering. Fourteen qualitative interviews with 'ordinary' respondents were carried out, and a further six background interviews were carried out with local stakeholders – three local heritage 'activists', two council officers, one pottery industry leader. An online questionnaire was administered, designed to give a broad overview of reasons for turning over along with open qualitative responses. Thematic analysis (Dey 1993; Miles & Huberman 2014) using NVIVO was carried out using themes emergent during the pilot process, supplemented by descriptive statistics and basic cross tabulations from the survey.

How and why do people from Stoke turnover?

In the survey, over 50% of turnover-ers turn over pots every time they find them, and a further 34% do so most of the time. This means that the vast majority of turnover-ers are not casually doing it when they remember but they make a point of ensuring that it happens almost every time they encounter ceramic ware. The self-selecting online survey was not able to ascertain the true rate or prevalence of turning over amongst Stokies, but the sheer volume of public interest the survey elicited and the rapid hit-rate (reaching 500 responses in three weeks) confirm that this captures a thing of some salience in the local imagination. Gemma [F2S30[2]] was one participant of many who confirmed the status of turning over as a key local tradition acknowledged as such: "Turning pots over is a force of habit, almost a local custom".

Not only is turning over frequent and compulsive amongst those who do it, it has entered the public consciousness, at least as something to laugh about, if not yet to celebrate. Non-Stokies tease the plate turners, sometimes assuming mistakenly that the concern is some venal concern for value. If this is what is driving the practice, local participants have not mentioned it at all. This is highly plausible (that they think it but do not mention it) and it will take the next stage of research to further unpack more complex concerns over value. On the contrary, the 'face value' of a turned pot is the story it reveals of a shared history, often a very personal one as turnover-ers seek to link the pot to their relatives, their work experiences, their local potbank.

The key difference between the local turnover-ers and a generic turner is the wealth of local expertise that is captured in ordinary people's memories and imaginations. What is remarkable is quite how extensive this is, yet how very hidden. The huge number of (now long dead) potbanks is reeled off as second nature, the specific designs and patterns memorised and backstamps often easily identified. Many, many Stokies have expert knowledge that rivals museum curators and specialist societies, yet they often demur and say 'Well obviously I'm NOT a collector…' The same person usually then lists the long catalogue of ware they have packed away in the attic, or mentions 'That ugly old thing!' on the mantelpiece or that some of it is quite valuable but they only keep it because they inherited it and their mum painted it. The point here is that there is a deliberately engaged 'ordinary' culture of pottery that does not depend on expert and museological knowledge: it comes from the source. That expert knowledge that is modestly demurring runs alongside a rich collecting culture that is not thought of as 'real' collecting as 'everyone' just has ceramics. As I show below, the expert knowledge is demurring but highly sophisticated in the local population.

The primary reason for turning over given by survey respondents and interviewees alike is unequivocal: it is about Stoke-on-Trent, and only Stoke-on-Trent – not about financial value. 78% of survey respondents make checking a piece is from Stoke-on-Trent as very or fairly important in their reasoning, and confirming the (local) maker/shape/design a close second for 77% of respondents. Checking if it was made in Britain was noted by fewer respondents as very or fairly important at 65%. This is confirmed strongly by qualitative responses that overwhelmingly use the word 'pride' in accounts of why people do it, for example Mary [F2S40], a woman from a neighbouring county but with links to the area says:

> "I used to think 'turning over' was a snobby thing i.e. linked to cost and therefore class/income however I later came to realise that Stokies turn over in pride not to establish class".

Further, qualitative comments identify direct personal and local connections as important in that pride, and not just abstract expert notions of provenance or value: people want to know if they painted it, if it was from their local potbank. In very many cases, this is a literal connection: 'I check to see if it is one I painted', or 'from the factory I worked in': as Dan [ME] says:

> "Pottery folk have an intense pride in what they do/did in manufacturing pottery. It gives them incredible self-esteem and value to say I made that plate/pattern/design!".

It is also a wider family connection, such as knowing about certain potbanks or shapes because an aunt worked on them.

It is clear though that even though this is an individual practice, the shared consciousness of it has some identity- and community-generating characteristics. As Bob [M2S50] said:

> "It makes me feel part of a different community with our own identity - I know that very few people outside the Potteries "turn over" and so I feel special - I have a "secret". I am proud of our craftsmanship and heritage and like to discover it when I travel. I especially like it when people ask why I am doing it so I can talk about our heritage".

Turning over pots clearly and frequently reaffirms the identity of those who do it. It has a slightly 'hidden' status in some ways, in that those who do it get asked question or even teased by others, especially non-Stokies, who may not grasp the significance of the action. However, its significance is immediately obvious to those 'in the know' who spot fellow turnover-ers and label them as locals. For example, Sandra [FE] is typical in highlighting the oddness of the practice outside of North Staffs:

> "When I am somewhere local people don't bat an eyelid. When I am further afield I have been questioned. Especially in fancy restaurants when I have been asked what I'm looking for!".

Anna [FE] was also typical in highlighting the amusing or teasing tone taken by others: "They laugh. They look as if to say: 'beware: your food will fall off!'". Anna shows how others are also implicated in the process, taking the role of explainer to outsiders: "My husband says: 'she always does that; it's a Stoke-thing!'". Angela [FE] points out how much it engages others in conversation, and like many Stokies, she relishes the opportunity to explain the importance of the ware:

> "Love to see people's reactions when I do it...always starts off a lovely conversation! When I'm away on holiday particular people are interested why I do it...again I spread the pottery industry story".

Likewise, the practice serves as an affirmatory identity practice for those who travel away, on holiday or more significantly, as migrants. Ex-patriate Stokies maintain the practice globally to give themselves a visceral reminder of 'home', history and ancestors. As Lorraine [FE] describes, the practice immediately identifies locals' away from home:

> "I have often been approached by others who noticed me turning pottery. Several have immediately spotted a fellow potter just by this action. Usually it's a "eh up duck" type of introduction, followed by asking which town"[3].

This identity practice is also rooted in pride in not only the ware, but also locals' expertise about the ware, as Marie [F2S20/FE] points out:

> "It feels kind of like an in-joke or a secret code - people who don't know as much about the process would appreciate the main side of the pieces, the design and shape (and rightly so!) but checking the backstamp makes me feel like I'm in the know!".

Further, the practice provides an outlet for tensions and frustrations over long-term change in enabling a 'policing' effect over local catering/retail establishments, who are perceived to have seriously let down the locality if a non-local pot is turned over. Sandra [FE] confirms this:

> "If the pottery is made in England I'm ok and if it's made in the potteries I'm ecstatic! I told the staff in a Hilton Hotel that they should be supporting the British pottery industry rather than using imported crockery!"

Or, from Barbara F2S40]:

> "How do I feel when I turn the pot over and it is NOT from Stoke-on-Trent? Disappointed if I am away from Stoke-on-Trent. Think the business has missed out on quality ware! But when I am in Stoke-on-Trent and see no SOT back stamp I am infuriated...especially when it is tourist hotspot e.g. it upsets me a lot that the eateries within Trentham Gardens and the Garden Centre itself do not use pottery from Stoke-on-Trent".

This let-down is made much worse in local establishments if a piece turns out to be one of the 'decorated/designed locally' but manufactured overseas type that marks the shift to global outsourcing, as Frank [ME] points out:

> "Last week I went into the Portmeirion shop in Stoke and bought a butter dish. For once I didn't turn it over. I assumed it had been made in the factory there. When I got it home, I found that it had been made in China. How disgusting! I shall give it to a charity shop..."

A marginally lesser crime is to put out chipped, cracked or otherwise substandard ware for public use – Lorraine [FE] highlights the link to ubiquity and skill in setting the standard for locals:

> "I will not use chipped or broken tableware. Being a potter born & bred I suppose it has always been easy to replace & we are aware of the importance of glaze etc.. It also offends to see establishments thinking chipped crockery is acceptable. Part of the charm of pottery is its fragility. That's what makes old pieces so cherished".

Even at home, standards are high for Sandra [FE]: "Nothing except perfection at home - once there is a crack, a stain, it becomes 'crazy' or chipped I throw it away and replace".

Being spotted, spotting others and being asked by 'outsiders' is part of the process for a number of participants – reinforcing the secret expertise and giving an opportunity to show public pride is part of the communal practice. Further, turning over is used as a kind of ritual test for whether the expertise is still there: Marcia [F5S50] "Often I turn it over to confirm I was correct about the make. I can spot lots of makes without turning over the pot". Pauline [FE] says: "I try to guess if it was made in Staffordshire and then with some anticipation I turn it over to look". This is a typical response from long-standing turnover-ers especially those who have moved away, who test themselves or family members to keep the knowledge alive: Alison [F2S50], from Stoke-on-Trent now living overseas says: "I play a game of guess the manufacturer/pattern before I turnover to see if I am right".

That this knowledge and practice are at risk is also evident in a generational shift in lay expertise: many older participants who had worked in potbanks themselves, or people reporting on their older relatives, claimed that they didn't turn over because they usually didn't need to, knowing full well which potbank made it, who designed it and sometimes even exactly who painted it. Sandra [FE] highlights the shifting generational legacy of local knowledge, perhaps under threat:

> "I think it's something I was raised with which is why I do it and I would imagine it's similar in many families. I remember my nan doing it back in the seventies and eighties when I was a child and my mum too. This is despite the fact that [we were all] born and raised in Staffs Moorlands (not even true Stoke-on-Trent) and don't have any relatives with any connection to the pottery industry. I think this is dying out now. I was discussing this with my twenty year old daughter and although she's seen me do this it's not something she'd ever do and she doesn't really fully understand it".

We are beginning to see some evidence in early work at our Turnover events, that younger generations (early 20s and below) do it much less, as you might expect (although this is an artefact of the current stage and methods as our online survey has not specifically targeted younger groups). This is further confirmed by the survey findings that, although self-selecting, give a good indication of the age and generational profile: over 75% of respondents

were over 40[4]. Older respondents bemoan the lack of turning over, and the general lack of knowledge or interest, amongst younger generations. This raises interesting observations in relation to de-industrialisation and generation/cohort cultures: it is clear that, beyond the collecting societies, it is the older generations, who often worked in the potbanks themselves or knew many others who did, who can instantly spot a shape (more often, though sometimes it is a pattern) and identify which company made it – and often much more information.

Turning over pots is linked – in a broad sense - to a ritual passing, in that the practice is evidence of the mass loss of pottery making in the region – both in the retention of expert knowledge, interest and affection, but also in that there is a generational element to the practice: older generations either did it and passed it on, because so many of them worked in the potbanks and taught their children to do it. Or they actively did not do it – because they were so expert they did not need to. Even those who did not need to turn over, however, taught their children to look, and to evaluate ware. So the passing of this generation and the craftspeople before them is captured in the legacy of turning over: participants fondly remember their relatives as they turn over, feel loss and connection in the physical ritual. They are actively saddened when they realise younger people know little of the range and historical importance of ceramic ware.

However, for the intervening generational cohorts of adult and middle aged population, we are formulating some exploration around the transitional significance of keeping the living tradition alive, in the context of declining local knowledges. An inevitable consequence of deindustrialisation, local expertise is in decline, yet the practice of turning over still travels far and wide, so it is plausible – given the longevity of pottery as a cultural artefact – that the practice will continue to be part of local narratives and rituals. A key question to explore in further research will be whether turning over itself is a transitional response to, or expression of this decline in expertise – at least one commentator observed that the practice was an indication that people who turnover know *less* about local ceramics than they 'should' and are unable to list more than a few well-known producers – turning over as a kind of 'badge' of populism that belied the 'authentic' knowledge of longer standing locals.

A further key group who turnover are 'migrants', either tourists who use travelling abroad as a key moment to test the global reach of pottery, or as expatriates keeping alive their connection to the hometown. Turnover-ers take great pride and delight in noticing and logging the great distances travelled by Staffordshire ware and the survey noted sightings from the Arctic to Madagascar and the Galapagos Islands, as well as the usual European holiday destinations. For a population that is typically not very mobile this material global reach lends an exotic excitement to the experience of ceramic ware. The mapping of this important artistic reach is part of the agenda of local heritage activist Danny Callaghan (2015) of www.ceramiccitystories.postach.io, whose Potteries Tile Trail project sought to curate and map Staffordshire ceramic tiles and their stories, and continues in partnership with this project, demonstrating as much to locals as to the museum and art community, the ongoing ubiquity and significance of the ware.

'Incomers' – like myself - are also turning over pottery. They move to North Staffordshire and, often, they do not really 'see' ceramics, although they know something in

general about 'The Potteries' history. There is often a transition, in which they notice others turning over, then they start doing it themselves, and sometimes, they become avid aficionados themselves, feeling part of the local culture and belonging to the region. In my own story, I have become more knowledgable and interested in the region through the process of turning over - actively secretive, ashamed of and trying to replace my own (mostly non-local) tableware - and monitoring the local establishments for deviants. In my case, and at least one other in the qualitative interviews thus far, it is part of the process of 'settling in' to the locality: as a deprived area, Stoke is hard to belong to. In this way, one can pay homage to its past, support its future, commit to develop local business and sustainability. This adopted belonging is enabled by the accessible social ritual of turning over pots.

Conclusions

The central question of this project is to what extent being a 'turnover-er' provides a lasting and socially significant part of the local/regional identity. The early outcomes demonstrate that the practice does reflect a sense of community belonging, reinforcing local expertise and identity, expressing local and familial connections, and providing a ritual social practice that has considerable collective significance. The wider implications are two-fold: first, the policy implication around the role of the intangible cultural heritage of turning over as a living tradition and the ways this might feed into a more positive future via recognition of the global role of the arts of Stoke-on-Trent. It is significant that the story of turning over is a grassroots narrative, generated from the legacy of working class experiences, although the full account has not yet (in the study so far) been witnessed – more analysis is needed to pull out the nuances. Further work will explicitly address class, gender, ethnic and generational differences, which will contribute to the further legitimation of 'subaltern' class cultural value discussed above. Second, the broader academic question of what role consumer identity, in the broadest sense of the term consumer here (as a conduit for social order and meaning), has in creating a virtual community of practice. I use the term virtual here because although turnover-ers know of each other, practice alongside each other, and sometimes use this to build connections turning over is a privatised but communal activity. Everyone does it, but it only means something 'in itself'. If it can somehow be understood and made use of 'for itself', it might be that this notion of community of practice can help to broaden our understanding of lay audiences and practitioners of 'things' in contributing to local pride, community cohesion and perhaps even economic regeneration

There are further questions to be asked – in the context of the de-industrialisation of the UK ceramics industry – around the globalisation of this local identity in two directions. On the one hand, the Stoke turnover club travels itself, in that those who leave Stoke, often to live very far afield, continue to turnover; moreover, the global travel/holiday turnover is a source of considerable pride. Also in the context of the outsourcing of much British pottery manufacture to the global workforce, made in Stoke-on-Trent as opposed to made by an outsourced Potteries company is still a question of some controversy. Equally, further change is occurring as the local population gradually shifts to itself become more global. The additional value of local identity (in the context of rapid change and global mobilities) provided by the pottery industry and the objects themselves will be worth exploring further. There are remaining questions to be asked about who amongst locals actually collects pottery,

why they collect – not least because early research has turned up very many 'accidental' and 'under the counter' collectors (inherited, factory day purchases and ill-gotten pots are common acquisitions). What stories of material culture emerge, how this links into family histories of work in the potteries, what is 'done' with the objects, their status and value and any translation/movement of this value remains to be uncovered. The job in uncovering it will be to explore real stories of present and past ownership and acquisition, on the stories and significances both of the objects themselves and their acquisition, and then beyond this, the wider social significance and solidification of these processes as a rich seam of local culture.

Endnotes:

1. 'The Potteries' is the name used to describe Stoke-on-Trent and the wider area of North Staffordshire in the north Midlands of the UK, famous for the production of ceramics from the medieval period through to its heyday in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries when it was one of, if not the, global centre for both high end and everyday tableware, decorative items, tiles, sanitary ware and other ceramics. Once home to over 1000 potbanks, deindustrialisation and outsourcing have left a handful in local operation.
2. Respondents are given a pseudonym and labelled (in the survey data only), according to sex, social class measured using UK NSSEC categories and phase of data collection (S for survey, I for interview and E for email diary) and age band. So F2S30 means: female, NSSEC 2 – professional, survey phase, age 30-39); ME means male, anonymised email. I have not listed ethnicity here as the proportion of respondents from non-white backgrounds was tiny, something to pursue in future research.
3. This local talk also serves to solidify regional identity: "eh up duck" perhaps the most common Potteries' greeting, and 'which town' referring to the famous six towns that make up the federated city of Stoke-on-Trent.
4. It is also the case that around 75% of respondents were female: more research is needed with a more comprehensive and representative sampling process in order to assess the full incidence and importance of turning over.

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