Performing place: the spatial dynamics of intangible heritage and the Heptonstall Pace Egg ritual

Tom Black
United Kingdom

Johnathan Djabarouti
United Kingdom

Dragana Opacic Wilkinson
United Kingdom

Tom Black is a registered architect and associate lecturer at the Manchester School of Architecture in the United Kingdom. Alongside teaching architecture, he runs his own practice undertaking architectural commissions of varying scales across a range of sectors, from home extensions and adaptations to single-family houses, community use projects, and work in conservation areas and on listed buildings.

Johnathan Djabarouti is a registered architect and senior lecturer in architecture at the Manchester School of Architecture in the United Kingdom. His Arts and Humanities Research Council–funded research focuses primarily on the intersections between the conservation of built heritage and critical heritage theory. Since 2023, he has been a UK Research and Innovation research associate for Historic England, where he assists the organisation on the theme of intangible heritage and its relationship to place-shaping. He is the author of Critical Built Heritage Practice and Conservation: Evolving Perspectives (Routledge, 2024).

Dragana Opacic Wilkinson is a registered architect and lecturer at the Manchester School of Architecture in the United Kingdom. Her research focuses on fragmented urban fabric, infrastructure and heritage. She integrates these themes into design education, fostering critical engagement, cultural awareness and socially responsible practice among emerging designers shaping the built environment.

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Tom Black
Manchester School of Architecture, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

Johnathan Djabarouti
Manchester School of Architecture, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

Dragana Opacic Wilkinson
Manchester School of Architecture, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

ABSTRACT

The ratification by the United Kingdom (UK) UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2024 marked a significant moment for both built and intangible heritage studies, prompting renewed reflection on the relationship between them within the UK context. This article takes the little-known Heptonstall Pace Egg Play in the Upper Calder Valley of northern England – a seasonal folk performance revived in the mid-20th century – as a case study to explore this interplay. This research addresses a notable gap in heritage discourse concerning the symbiotic relationship between physical spaces and place-based cultural practices, specifically in England. Utilising non-representational theory and 'habit memory', the study investigates how the performance enlivens Weavers Square – a site shaped by urban clearance in the mid-20th century – and, in turn, how the locale influences the enactment of the play. Combining archival research and participant observation, the study reveals how the annual revival of the Pace Egg Play sustains cultural memory and reinforces local identity while also stimulating cultural and economic activity through small-scale tourism. This case highlights how local traditional performances can serve as vital mechanisms for the continual reinterpretation and reinforcement of cultural heritage within evolving English villages. Consequently, the Heptonstall Pace Egg Play offers valuable insights for the integration of intangible cultural heritage into broader heritage frameworks in the UK. The study advocates for a holistic approach that can harmonise material and spatial conservation with the safeguarding of constantly evolving living traditions by leveraging the interconnectedness of tangible and intangible manifestations of culture.

Keywords

Heptonstall, Pace Egg, Heptonstall Pace Egg, Pace Egging, Easter custom, Mummer's Play, medieval mystery play, spatial heritage, performance heritage, local heritage

Introduction: UK heritage in transition and the mummer's play

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (hereafter '2003 Convention') was officially ratified by the United Kingdom in March 2024, with the formal process completed in Paris on 11 April 2024. This ratification marks a significant shift in UK heritage practice, introducing for the first time formal government recognition of intangible cultural heritage (hereafter 'ICH'). Yet, while this development marks progress, it also brings with it a renewed focus on the complex relationship between tangible and intangible

heritage. Historically, the UK's heritage efforts have concentrated predominantly on preserving physical assets – particularly its built environment (Djabarouti 2021, 1103). With formal recognition of ICH in place, the need to reconsider how tangible and intangible heritage interrelate and influence one another is now urgent.

The 2003 Convention emerged in response to global heritage imbalances, particularly the dominance of material-based frameworks established by the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (hereafter 'World Heritage Convention') (UNESCO 1972), which tended to favour built and monumental heritage, especially in Europe. Unlike its predecessor, the 2003 Convention gave precedence to cultural expressions not necessarily tied to permanent structures or specific locations. This has specific relevance for regions where heritage is embedded in practices, performances and oral traditions. In contrast, heritage management in the UK has historically prioritised the conservation of the built environment, a legacy of its foundational role in shaping modern conservation theory and practice (Jokilehto 2018, 192). This legacy now sits uneasily alongside the increasing international emphasis on safeguarding ICH, prompting the need for a more inclusive and context-sensitive approach that accommodates non-physical forms of heritage within place-based considerations of heritage. In the spirit of the *Québec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place* (ICOMOS 2008), this paper seeks to contribute to the knowledge of the interface between physical and non-physical manifestations of culture, supporting the assertion that tangible and intangible heritage are mutually interdependent and can actively inform and influence one another (Djabarouti 2020, 172). With a focus on the English mummer's play – a traditional seasonal ritual performance of an historic British folk play – it proposes that this curious and under-researched form of English ICH serves as a compelling vehicle for exploring the tangible–intangible interface within an English context (Renwick 1981).

Originating in the British Isles in around the 18th century, the mummer's play is at its core a publicly performed folk drama of an historical event (often the legend of St. George). It is a performance that involves costume, comedy, conflict, death and resurrection (Potter 2023), as well as the representation of complex concepts such as the changing of seasons or fertility (Kirby 1971). What makes the mummer's play specifically of interest within the scope of this study is that, while there has long been the assertion that there existed an 'origin' or 'original' ritual from which all subsequent mummers' plays have ultimately emerged, its constant re-creation and proliferation across time has resulted in both local and seasonal variations of the ritual that are regionally distinct – reflecting placed-based qualities of the nature, culture and physical environment of the people and place that give rise to their performance. For example, despite there being some commonalities, the performances of the Weston Mummers of Southstoke are distinct from those of the Herga Mummers of Eastcote; and the Middleton Pace Egg Play is distinct from the Heptonstall Pace Egg Play. Part of these distinctions rests in the unique features of the built environment (the physical place) within which they are performed, and this is possibly no more apparent than in the case of the Heptonstall Pace Egg Play. It is the relationship between the Heptonstall play as an unofficial and unrecognised example of English ICH and its setting in Weavers Square that is the focus of this paper.

The theoretical framework employed to conceptualise and analyse the play leans primarily on the socio-material aspects of non-representational theory (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000; Thrift 2007) and on a form of social memory called 'habit memory' (Connerton 1989). Following the literature review, which offers a current overview of the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage, the authors provide their ethnographic insights and experiences of the 2024 Heptonstall Pace Egg Play, from the hour leading up to it, to its immediate aftermath. Considering the limited literature, documentation and archival work on mummers' plays, and more specifically the Heptonstall Pace Egg Play, a key part of this work's novel contribution lies in the formal documentation of the play itself, alongside the insights it offers concerning the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage. These insights include how physical settings can scaffold the continuity of living traditions, how performances can activate space in ways that reaffirm collective memory, and how the two domains are mutually sustained at a place-specific scale through processes of revival, adaptation and local agency.

Theoretical framework: memory, space and the performance of tradition

The theoretical framework for this study explores the relationship between history, performance and memory

through the combined lenses of non-representational theory (hereafter 'NRT') and Paul Connerton's (1989) seminal work on memory – specifically, 'habit memory'. NRT, as expressed in Thrift and Dewsbury (2000) and later in Thrift (2007), facilitates emphasising the importance of embodied actions and performances in shaping space, viewing performance as an ongoing act that 'makes space livelier' (Vannini 2015, 8; Thrift and Dewsbury 2000, 415). Yet ICH performances that activate spaces also simultaneously revive historical traditions through the embodiment of a living temporal practice. This revival aligns with Connerton's (1989, 23) notion of 'habit memory', which posits that memory is reproduced through repeated bodily practices, allowing the past to persist in the present. Habit memory reflects the past by continuing to perform it in the present. Hence, memory is not a static recall of history but an active, embodied process made present through social performance (Misztal 2003, 23). The authors thus conceptualise the Heptonstall Pace Egg Play as a performance through which cultural memory is enacted and revitalised in a specific spatial context. It is lived and re-enacted on an annual basis through place-specific bodily rituals that help to reveal and make sense of Heptonstall as a unique and distinct place with particular social rules/norms that come into force during its planning, performance and aftermath (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000, 145; Connerton 1989, 29).

Through this theoretical synthesis, the play is examined as both a performative action that animates the tangible environment of Heptonstall's Weavers Square and a cultural ritual that reproduces cultural memory through embodied practice. This dual perspective allows for an exploration of how the play serves as an example of ICH in England that interacts with and is shaped by its socio-material conditions. As demonstrated in discussions on the relationship between performance and space, the socio-material context – including the built environment – actively influences the dynamics of performance, rather than merely providing a backdrop (as per Olsen 2018). In the case of the Heptonstall Pace Egg Play, the distinct topography and architectural features of the village – such as its narrow streets, steep landscape, strategically positioned square and ruined church – shape its ongoing re-enactment, influencing the performance's site, setting and experience, and its evolution across time. This influence highlights the importance of understanding how tangible elements inform and shape the revival of intangible cultural practices, illustrating the complex interplay between physical space and the continual re-creation of cultural memory.

Anchoring performance in place: tangible and intangible heritage

The relationship between tangible and intangible heritage is highly complex, yet its understanding within specific contexts often underpins successful conservation and safeguarding efforts (Robischon 2015, 20; Djabarouti 2024, 56). Both tangible and intangible heritage can be constantly re-created across time (a term derived from the 2003 Convention [UNESCO 2003, 2]). This understanding refers to both a chronological accumulation of changes as well as a continuity of changes that build upon a tradition and ensure its relevance for contemporary societies. In this context, the idea of 'tradition' is understood as a tool for creating something new in the present which is enhanced by a position within a rich continuity of historicity (Plevoets and Cleempoel 2019; Pallasmaa 2012). Tradition can therefore be understood as a temporal method of cultural transmission that enables the past to have a presence in the present while simultaneously encouraging a developmental approach towards the future of culture (Frost 2017, 263).

Transmission from generation to generation is part of the very definition of ICH (UNESCO 2003, 2), yet it is also one of the primary characteristics that makes ICH unstable – it becomes significantly more fragile across time owing to the inevitable transformations it undergoes (García-Esparza 2019, 128). Giving ICH rootedness in a distinct geographical 'place' is one way of attempting to counteract this, where urban places, towns, landscapes and villages can act as 'symbolic locations' of identity where very specific cultural practices are manifest (García-Esparza 2019, 130). This effect is highly beneficial when considering that consolidation of the tangible and intangible can help to reinforce a sense of identity for communities as well as supporting dialogue and inclusion (Golding 2006, 85, 92).

A key aspect of re-creating ICH is to facilitate the transmission of stories across generations, which encompasses the foregrounding of identity, memory and values (Partarakis et al. 2021, 130). Stories and storytelling are a form of cultural expression that benefits from the consolidation of tangible and intangible qualities of heritage, with artefacts and structures able to be utilised as 'carriers'

or 'vehicles' of narratives (Partarakis et al. 2021, 130; Robischon 2015, 20; van Eijnatten and de Nood 2018, 95). Equally, the enactment of stories and storytelling can add additional layers of meaning to the physical environment (Partarakis et al. 2021, 130). Storytelling has an economic utility by being able to help drive footfall to local areas and to satisfy the cultural desires of tourists (Howell and Chilcott 2013, 174; Timothy 2020, 5). 'Performing arts' as a distinct domain of ICH is particularly successful in attracting tourists (Timothy 2020, 62). It is often utilised as a storytelling medium, yet it also has the ability to ground interactions and intersubjective experiences in physical places, creating affectively charged heritage spaces (Fouseki 2022, 13). This effect can be clearly seen within the tradition of Pace Egg Plays, which are set within the wider context of mummers' plays. The case study within this paper focuses specifically on the Pace Egg Play of Heptonstall, in the Upper Calder Valley, as the stage for a revived play – one that has been constantly re-created across time in response to people and the environment, resulting in the distinctiveness that has been forged through its attachment to the very place where it has been revived.

The 'mummer's play'

The etymology of 'mummer's play' (or 'mumming') hints at the spirit of both the mummer's play and the Pace Egg Play. 'Mummer' is believed by some to have originated from the Middle English word 'mum', meaning 'silent', though it is more likely to have originated from the early new High German noun '*mummer*' (a disguised person) and the verb '*vermummen*' (meaning 'to mask up', or 'to disguise oneself'). The spirit of this word seems pertinent in the context of Upper Calder Valley Pace Egg Plays, and while mummers' plays are prevalent in the north of England, they are also practised across the country, with notable exceptions being Norfolk and Suffolk (Cass 2004). The origins of mumming plays are obscure, and there have been many widely different beliefs held over the years in relation to their origins, meaning and purpose. Until the latter half of the 20th century, many believed the plays to have originated in pre-Christian fertility rituals. Academics now believe that these plays originated in the early 18th century. As Cass (2004) explains, the ideas of the pre-Christian origins of the play have been largely attributed to the work of ritualists such as Sir James Frazer in publications such as *The Golden Bough* (1890) and subsequently through the writings of J. Harrison, F. M. Cornforth, E. K. Chambers and others.

Upper Calder Valley Pace Egging

More contemporary research finds a connection between mummers' plays and the tradition of 'seasonal house visiting' during which groups of people in disguise (mummers) would visit and provide some form of dramatic entertainment in exchange for food or drink or a small gift. In this way, comparisons could be drawn with other traditions such as first footing (the custom of visiting neighbours on Hogmanay) or even the more popular trick-or-treating. Typically, mummers' plays and Pace Egg Plays are folk plays performed at a specific time of year by troupes of amateur actors in costume. In the case of the Heptonstall and Midgley Pace Egg Plays, they are performed on Good Friday. The Pace Egg Plays of the Upper Calder Valley fall into the category of 'hero-combat play', where numerous combatants enter a sword fight and one of them is injured or killed. This incident is followed by a 'death and resurrection scene' in which a doctor is called upon to heal the wounded (Cass 2004). The Pace Egg Plays of Heptonstall and Midgley are two examples from the Upper Calder Valley that are popular and performed in close proximity, yet only a handful of Pace Egg Plays persist in West Yorkshire and Lancashire – such as in Middleton (now in Greater Manchester) and Burscough in West Lancashire.

The Pace Egg Plays that endure today have many features in common but also possess characteristics that distinguish them from one another. In the Calder Valley, the Heptonstall and Midgley plays endure to this day and have become well-attended events in the local calendar. The plays typically centre around a mock sword fight in which the hero, 'St. George', is slain by a rival combatant, 'Bold Slasher', before being resurrected by 'The Doctor'. Plays are performed to a script and are centred around a fixed cast of characters: 'The Ringer In', 'The Doctor', 'Tosspot', 'Master of Ceremonies', 'King of Egypt', 'St. George', 'Bold Slasher', 'The Black Prince of Paradine' and 'Hector'. To emphasise the place-specific nature of the play's development across time, despite their geographic closeness, the Midgley and Heptonstall plays differ subtly in respect of their cast and script. Another key distinguishing characteristic is the fact that the Midgley Pace Egg Play tours several locations, culminating in a final performance in Heptonstall; whereas Heptonstall's Pace Egg Play is acted several times during Good Friday exclusively in Weavers Square at the centre of Heptonstall village.

As it is the relationship between the Heptonstall play as an example of ICH and its setting in Weavers Square that is the focus of this paper, it is of interest to note that while Weavers Square, largely on account of its name, is sometimes falsely believed to be a historical component of Heptonstall's urban fabric, it is in fact a relatively modern creation, having been established in 1967 following the demolition of older weavers' cottages and a band room (Horton 2014). Interestingly, the revival of the play occurred barely a decade later, in 1979, and Weavers Square was selected as its location for purely practical reasons. The square is a flat area off the main road through the village, with the churchyard providing an attractive backdrop.

The historical era of the origins of the Pace Egg Plays in the Upper Calder Valley seems uncertain. However, the plays were widely performed in the extreme West Riding of Yorkshire until around 1880, with evidence of their presence in Midgley as early as the 1780s (Cass 2004, 6).



Figure 1
Top: Location of Weavers Square pre-construction, to the left of the image where the row of terraced houses is located (circa early 20th century).
Bottom: Historical photograph of a former Heptonstall Pace Egg troupe (circa early 20th century).
Photos: The Alice Longstaff Collection of Pennine Heritage. Photos originally collected by Alice Longstaff.
Sources: Image reference ALC08244 (top), ALC00148 (bottom).

The custom of folk plays was declining by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the revival of the Midgley Pace Egg Play is attributed to Henry Harwood, who published numerous articles on the play in the local *Halifax Courier* newspaper.

The Heptonstall Pace Egg Play (the subject of this paper) was revived in 1979 by local resident and performer David Burnop, who plays the part of The Doctor in the play to this day. The play has been performed on Good Friday every year since 1979. However, prior to its revival, its origins are obscure, with no known record of its start, and it is likely to have been revived several times. It seems that performances of the play ended at some point prior to World War II (Cass 2004). The play was revived during the 1950s and performed by children attending Heptonstall Primary School before subsequently dying out again in 1967 with the departure from the school of a Mr Dobson, the member of staff responsible for organising the play. It was subsequently revived in 1979 as part of celebrations of the school's centenary.

The Heptonstall Pace Egg Play

A brief history of Heptonstall

The village of Heptonstall in the Upper Calder Valley in northern England provides the physical context for this paper. It is much older than nearby valley-bottom settlements, which largely date from the 19th century when textile mills were built along the fast-flowing streams and rivers for power.



Figure 2
Map of Heptonstall
Photo: No copyright
Source: Google Maps

The etymology of Heptonstall's name offers insight into its origins. The suffix '-stall' suggests it was one of several 'Tonstalls' – cattle-rearing farms or 'vaccaries' – established between AD 1100 and 1200, similar to Rawtenstall and Saltonstall. The first part of the name, 'Heope', comes from Old English, meaning 'rose hip'. The settlement was well established by the mid-13th century, as evidenced by St. Thomas à Becket Church, the older of the two churches in Heptonstall's present-day churchyard, which dates to between 1256 and 1260 (Historic England n.d.).

Heptonstall's historical renown came from its early association with the wool trade. Its cloth hall, built in 1545, was the first in the Pennines and played a key role in the local economy. The present-day building, located at 43–45 Towngate, is not the original but stands on the same site, just downhill from Weavers Square, where the modern Pace Egg Play is performed. The original cloth hall was a single-storey timber-framed structure, later expanded to two storeys in the mid-18th century (Historic England 2019). At the time of its construction, Heptonstall's population was largely engaged in producing cloth in their homes (Horton 2014). These cloth pieces were then sold in the hall to merchants from Halifax, Colne and beyond.

The 1500s was a period in its history when Heptonstall had relative regional significance and played an important role in the early development of the textile industry in the Pennines region. From the 1670s until the 1770s, cloth produced here was in great demand and utilised for clothing by a populace who could not afford clothing made further afield. This demand continued until the early 19th century, when the textile trade became more mechanised and settlements in the valley bottom, such as Hebden Bridge and Sowerby Bridge, established textile mills with easy access to flowing water.

Combined with shifting methods of textile production and changes in the patterns of human habitation in the Calder Valley, Heptonstall's significance declined within the valley as the production of textiles transitioned from a cottage industry to large-scale industrial activity. Today, Heptonstall is a picturesque hilltop village comprised of narrow cobbled streets and dominated by the churchyard, which is unusual in being one of only several in the UK to accommodate two Anglican churches. Following its decline in status, it could be argued that the village has transitioned completely from a place of industry to a tourist destination, on account of its rich history when compared to other nearby settlements and its inherently attractive physical setting. Interest in the church yard as a destination has been increased owing to the fact that it is the location of Sylvia Plath's grave. This has led to fans of her literature to view the church yard and the wider context of the village as a destination, perhaps adding to the prominence of Heptonstall's Pace Egg Play.

Heptonstall Pace Egg Play

The Pace Egg Play in Heptonstall is performed several times during Good Friday in Weavers Square. The square



Figure 3
Heptonstall village circa early 20th century. The building to the right is where Weavers Square is now located.
Photo: The Alice Longstaff Collection of Pennine Heritage. Photos originally collected by Alice Longstaff.
Source: Image reference ALC06327.



Figure 4
Plan of Heptonstall indicating the route of the Heptonstall Pace Egg Play, from the bottom of Towngate up to Weavers Square.
Source: Author's original image.

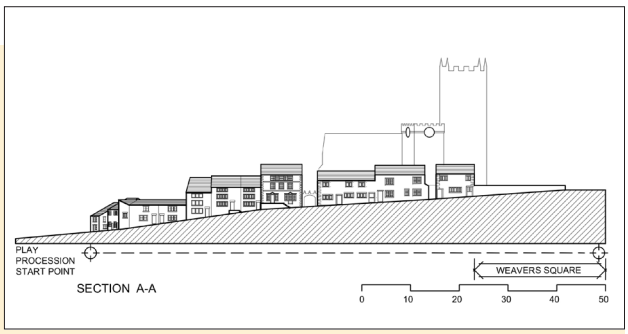


Figure 5
Section of the main street through Heptonstall village (Towngate) where the Pace Egg Play procession occurs.
Source: Author's original image.

is the 'stage' for the play, as it has been since its revival in 1979. Today the square forms a natural area and is raised above the gradient of the adjacent street. In contrast to the topography of the village, it is level, a key aspect of the decision to revive the performance of the play there. In a village comprised largely of very steep narrow streets, the open flat square makes an obvious choice of location for staging performances.

Although the play itself is performed in the square, the first performance of the day is preceded by the performers meeting in St. George's house for 'breakfast and toasts'. They then assemble at the junction of Towngate and Heptonstall Drive and make a short procession up Towngate, entering the square from the street to greet the waiting spectators.

The performers march loosely in single file, headed by the 'Ringer In' (or 'Master of Ceremonies'). The Ringer In marches ahead, ringing a school bell. The other performers march behind, shouting and hitting their shields with their swords before entering Weavers Square to join the waiting crowds. The play is performed four times during Good Friday. The first performance takes place at 11:15am, with subsequent performances taking place at 12:30pm, 2pm and 4pm. The Midgley Pace Egg Play is then performed in Weavers Square at 3pm as well.

The cast (*dramatis personae*) of the play is as follows:

- **Ringer In, or Master of Ceremonies:** The Ringer In leads the procession up Towngate towards Weavers Square, loudly ringing a school bell. The Ringer In also has the opening lines of the play, introducing the act to the audience before welcoming St. George to the stage.

- **St. George:** St. George is the hero of the play. After his very brief appearance in the opening scene, there follows a brief introductory line from Bold Slasher before the mock fight ensues.

- **Bold Slasher:** St. George's rival, Bold Slasher is the subject of the 'death and resurrection' element of the play. After being 'killed' in the mock sword fight, he is



Figure 6
Left: Pace Egg Play characters walk up Towngate towards Weavers Square. Right: Ringer In introduces the play.
Source: Author's original image.



Figure 7
Left: St. George's opening address to the audience. Right: Bold Slasher lies dead on the ground, with The Doctor standing beside him.
Source: Author's original image.

subsequently resurrected by The Doctor.

- **The Doctor:** After a lengthier introduction, The Doctor cures Bold Slasher by feeding him some 'Nip Nap', a life-restoring elixir from a bottle produced from The Doctor's right-hand pocket.

- **Black Prince of Paradise:** Introduces himself as the 'Prince o' Paradise, the black Morocco king'. The Black Prince of Paradise is the second challenger to fight St. George. After a brief sword fight with St. George, the Black Prince is also slain.

- **The King of Egypt:** The King of Egypt enters the play about two-thirds of the way through the performance to enquire about the whereabouts of his son, the Black Prince of Paradise, before introducing Hector and asking that he 'fight at my command'.

- **Hector:** A valiant soldier who enters the fray, challenging St. George to a sword fight at the command of the King of Egypt.



Figure 8
Left: The Doctor pours his 'Nip Nap' elixir into Bold Slasher's mouth to resurrect him. Right: The Black Prince of Paradise approaches St. George for battle.
Source: Author's original image.



Figure 9
Left: The King of Egypt approaches St. George for battle. Right: Hector races in to challenge St. George.
Source: Author's original image.

- **Tosspot:** The 'old organ grinder' enters the play towards the end in search of his wife. In many ways, Tosspot is the comic relief of the play and akin to a 'jester'. Tosspot mingles with the crowd, requesting 'kisses from the ladies' and handing out Easter eggs to the children from a basket. Following Tosspot's part, all the cast members join in a song, marching around Weavers Square with St. George in the centre before breaking into a dance. The final lines of the play are as follows:

> *We're walking, we're talking, we're not so very high. We hope you ladies will ne'er deny, ne'er deny sweet eggs and some beer. And come no more here until the next year.*



Figure 10
Tosspot with his basket of Easter eggs for the crowd.
Source: Author's original image.

The play ends with the performers leaving the square and heading back down the steep cobbled street from whence they came.

Discussion: spatial heritage and the revitalisation of tradition

The Heptonstall Pace Egg Play provides a valuable case study for examining the interplay between tangible and intangible heritage in the UK. As discussed, the play is an example of English ICH that has persisted despite periods of decline and revival. It remains deeply connected to the material setting of Heptonstall, a village that has itself experienced significant transformations over time. The endurance of this tradition in a changing landscape highlights the adaptive nature of ICH and its ability to negotiate meaning within evolving physical and social environments.

One of the key themes emerging from this study is the significance of spatial heritage in maintaining ICH. The play's contemporary performance in Weavers Square – a space created following 20th-century urban clearance – demonstrates how material transformations do not necessarily remove heritage connections. Instead, the repurposing of this space as a performance site reflects a continuity between the village's historical fabric and its living traditions. This continuity supports arguments within the literature that tangible and intangible heritage are interdependent, with physical settings shaping the way

traditions evolve, while performances in turn imbue places with meaning (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000; Connerton 1989; Djabarouti 2024). Despite the square being a 20th-century creation resulting from the clearance of modest dwellings, the selection of the resulting space as a performance venue for the play demonstrates how the play reinforces the prominence of the square as a component of the village's urban fabric. The status of the square as the venue for the play ultimately can be utilised to promote it as a venue for other events or cultural practices held throughout the year.

The study also highlights the performative nature of place-making. Through the annual staging of the Pace Egg Play, Weavers Square is temporarily transformed into a charged site of cultural expression. The embodied and repetitive enactment of the play reaffirms Heptonstall's identity as a space of historical continuity, reinforcing the idea that performance is not merely an act occurring in space but one that actively constructs it (Misztal 2003; Vannini 2015). This notion is especially evident in the play's procession through the village streets before entering the square, and again upon finishing, further anchoring the performance within Heptonstall's topographical and architectural character.

Another crucial aspect of this study is the role of revival in sustaining ICH. The Heptonstall Pace Egg Play has undergone multiple revivals, each responding to broader socio-cultural contexts. While the historical origins of the play remain unclear, its continuity through revival efforts in the 20th century indicates the role of local agency in safeguarding tradition. In particular, the 1979 revival aligns with wider movements of cultural heritage resurgence, demonstrating how ICH can be strategically reintroduced to reinforce local identity and collective memory (García-Esparza 2019).

Ultimately, the Heptonstall Pace Egg Play serves as an example of how performance fosters community engagement and economic activity. The event draws spectators from beyond the village, contributing to the local economy through tourism while also reinforcing Heptonstall's distinctiveness within the wider Calder Valley region. Certainly, the economic utility of storytelling and performance arts as mechanisms for cultural transmission and place-based engagement cannot be overstated within the context of a tiny village such as Heptonstall (Timothy 2020; Fouseki 2022).

Conclusion: integrating performance and place in heritage conservation

This study has documented the unique and enduring Heptonstall Pace Egg Play in the Upper Calder Valley of northern England as an evolving example of ICH in the UK that remains deeply entwined with its spatial context. Our findings reinforce the idea that tangible and intangible heritage should not be considered as separate entities, but rather as dynamic and interdependent processes. In the case of Heptonstall, the play's relationship with Weavers Square illustrates how performance can serve as a means of place-making, ensuring the continued relevance of historical traditions in contemporary settings. Additionally, the research highlights the resilience of ICH in England through cycles of decline and revival. The play's continued enactment, despite shifts in the built environment and societal change, demonstrates the agency of local communities in safeguarding their heritage. This suggests that, rather than being viewed locally as outdated performances, traditions like the Pace Egg Play can be – and should be – constantly reinterpreted and adapted to suit contemporary contexts while maintaining an historical lineage.

In the UK, as in any other UNESCO European member state, ICH can be utilised as a key social tool for strengthening cultural identity and fostering economic sustainability within smaller regional contexts. The Heptonstall Pace Egg Play functions as a form of cultural memory, as well as a driver of local engagement and tourism. As the UK begins to navigate the implications of the 2003 Convention, the little-known case of Heptonstall provides an example of how ICH can be embedded within broader UK heritage discourse, bridging the tangible and the intangible to create a more holistic approach to heritage conservation and interpretation within a typically material-focused context.

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