# Chapter Five

# Research Methodology

## Introduction.

Previous chapters have discussed the background to the three objectives that this study addresses. This chapter reviews traditional research methods used to study museum and heritage site visitors using attitude surveys. It then highlights other research that has taken a more ethnographic approach allowing more in-depth investigation of social phenomena. It then describes the specific research methodology used for this study.

*What do we want to know?*

The first objective for the study proposes an investigation of people's understanding of the standing 'heritage' buildings in the landscape around them. Chapter one has suggested that the visual medium is a powerful sense by which we perceive that world and that the way that we view landscapes around us is structured by the society in which we live. It is apparent that the features of the landscape can symbolise a multitude of social meanings.

The second objective of the study is to gain insight into the roles that the understanding of 'heritage' structures in the landscape play in the negotiation of identities. The literature discussed in the opening chapters highlighted senses of identity, on a national, European or local scale. The discussion of literature pertaining to symbols of identity within the landscape suggests a complex web of meanings and social constructions. Some of these threads of meaning are not constantly referred to in everyday living; they act as 'banal' referents that support particular social identities, for example 'banal nationalism' (Billig 1995). The idea of 'banal' referents appears static, unnoticed and unchangeable, but Billig suggests that when a particular identity is challenged it is difficult to dislodge because 'common-sense', forever bolstered by 'banal' symbolism, rejects the challenge.

The third objective is to address the 'value of heritage debate. To do this the methodology needed to address the first two objectives in such a way as to produce a thesis regarding people's understanding of the world around them, that allowed implications to be drawn regarding this debate.

*How can we get at it?*

It is clear from the literature that to investigate the visual interaction between people and features in the landscape around them, a particularly sensitive research method was required. This method had to allow me, as the researcher to disentangle some of the complex meanings articulated by people in their talk about landscape features, paying particular attention to senses of identity, 'heritage' and social value. It is the purpose of this chapter to describe the methods that were used.

The chapter is divided into six sections:

1. Traditional and Current Methodological Approaches in Museology and 'Heritage' Studies.
2. The Present Study: Choosing Qualitative Methods and Focus Groups.
3. The Present Study: Focus Group Research Design.
4. The Present Study: The Site and Recruitment.
5. The Present Study: The Analytic Procedure.
6. Conclusion: Reflecting on the experience.

## 1. Traditional and Current Methodological Approaches in Museology and 'Heritage' Studies.

The first task required in selecting a research method to address the particular objectives of this study was to consider the traditional research methods used in the past. This section discusses research methods (questionnaire surveys) employed to understand the 'public' relationship with 'heritage' and contrasts the traditional survey approach (Boulton 1818, Niehoff 1968, Cruickshank 1972, Mason 1974, McWilliams and Hopwood 1973, Stone 1984 and Merriman 1991) with qualitative interview methods (Bagnall 1996, Puccini 1999) ethnographic methods (Odermatt 1996, Shankland 1996) and the use of images in research that have recently been adopted by some researchers (Crawshaw and Urry 1997).

There has been a long tradition in museology of research approaches that surveyed visitor numbers and profiled visitors according to social status to make claims about the attitudes of their respondents; museum and heritage visitors and the public as a whole. Some surveys, Merriman (1991) in particular, found that open ended questions generated important data that stemmed from respondents 'speaking for themselves' about issues that they considered important rather than following the research agenda of the study. It was the opportunity that qualitative research methods bring to respondents to 'speak for themselves' that the present study used to consider views on the cultural significance of 'heritage' in European, national and local terms and how these views were formed or held.

**a) Researching 'Heritage': Attitude Surveys and Beyond.**

*Museum visitor numbers and attitude surveys.*

Since the 1980s a political drive to justify all activity in terms of 'value for money' has pushed professional groups including 'heritage managers' towards researching relations between their work and 'the public'.

In contrast museum curators had long been concerned to research public opinion. Researchers in the

field of museology began to look at people's interest in their collections as long ago as 1818 (Boulton) when the British Museum carried out a head count of visitor numbers. Museum curators restricted their investigations to censuses of visitor numbers until the 1950s when new questions were asked about museums in the USA. American researchers began to use questionnaire surveys to ascertain the 'marketing profile' (a basic cluster analysis arriving at segmented customer groups) of museum visitors (Merriman 1991). This approach predominates museum research today (Ambrose and Paine 1993).

Niehoff pioneered visitor surveys at the Milwaukee Public Museum (Niehoff 1968). He used questionnaires to collect data and followed principles developed in the expanding field of market research to analyse his data. The surveys included questions on visitors' age, sex, occupation and educational background allowing comparison with census statistics (Niehoff 1968). Similar work in Britain placed museum visitors in particular groups or clusters according to their economic status. Museum visitors were identified as predominantly students and economic groups A, B and C1. Groups C2, D and E were under-represented (Cruickshank 1972, Mason 1974, McWilliams and Hopwood 1973).

During the 1980s work began to concentrate on the community role of the museum and sought to suggest ways that would widen the appeal of museums. Vergo described this development in approach in 1989 as the 'New Museology'. These changes in museums sought to make them more accessible, more reflexive, and more visitor centred (Ross 1994). Archaeologists and historians who wanted to present 'heritage' outside the museum's 'partial' landscape turned to this tradition, of studying the public in marketing and attitude terms, when they began their studies.

During the 1980s, two research projects sought to survey general public opinion concerning not only museums but 'heritage' sites and monuments too. The first of these projects was carried out by a group of archaeologists; Ian Hodder and Mike Parker-Pearson from the archaeology department at Cambridge University and Peter Stone at Southampton University (Stone 1984). The second project of note was carried out as by Nick Merriman (1991) a museums archaeology curator and researcher.

The Hodder, Parker-Pearson and Stone study aimed to 'find out what the public thinks about the past' (Stone 1984, 14). The objective of the survey was to collect information on people's archaeological interests, attitudes and awareness, and on how people's concepts of the past are formed. The general aim of the study was to identify any deficiencies in the ways in which archaeologists present the past to the public.

Data collection was carried out using a door-to-door questionnaire survey in the towns of Cambridge, Southampton, York and Lancaster. Each centre was organised by representatives from the local university archaeology department. The project originally aimed to recruit more centres both urban and rural, all of which aimed to return 100 completed questionnaires. Unfortunately, it was not possible to recruit enough data collectors hence the restriction to the four towns. Stone commented that

although the survey omitted rural and inner city centres, it did cover a wide geographical area. He was also concerned to emphasise that whilst the study could not be considered representative, it did identify issues concerning public understanding of the past that had not previously been raised (Stone 1984). From approximately five hundred members of the public who were approached, three hundred and one interviews were obtained (a response rate of around 60%). Stone later reflected on the two hundred non respondents, noting that the main reason for declining to complete a form involved a claim to ignorance: 'a common reason for refusal was that the potential respondent claimed to have no knowledge of the past and thus felt that (s)he would be of no use' (Stone 1984, 16). The issue regarding a perceived right to talk about a particular topic ('category entitlement') and the role of knowledge in this dilemma is important to the analysis of data collected by the present study and is discussed in chapter six.

The questions asked by the questionnaire in the 'Stone' study covered two general topics. The first reflected issues surrounding 'values' of studying the past (discussed in chapter four of the present study) including questions about 'value for public money' issues, especially topical in the early 1980s. The second topic tested respondent's awareness of particular archaeological projects, especially the raising of the Mary Rose. It is worth noting that many of the questions reflected an underlying concern on the part of the researchers to be able to justify archaeology in terms of 'value for money'. For example question twenty-three asked: 'Do you think people need to know about their distant past?' Whilst question twenty-two asked: 'Do you think public money is well spent on archaeology?' As a consequence of the researchers' interests in value for money many questions did not reflect the sorts of issues that ordinary people might normally allude to in the course of discussing 'the past'. Indeed Stone noted this in his analysis of question twenty-two, where many respondents were surprised that public money was spent on archaeology at all (Stone 1984, 18).

The questions were deliberately kept open ended in order to 'elicit as full and detailed responses as possible. The idea was not to have a series of ticked YES/NO boxes but rather to actually find out what the respondents thought - or did not think - about the past.' (Stone 1984, 15).

Notwithstanding the apparent concern with gathering qualitative data, respondents were not really given the opportunity to present or to explain, their answers in any depth. The general set-up (in which people were interviewed on their doorsteps) was unlikely to encourage lengthy replies, the fact that the researcher would physically write down the response meant that the respondent would be liable to provide short answers (which may not, in fact, have been transcribed fully or accurately by the interviewer). It may have been more successful if the respondent was writing down his or her own thoughts. Moreover, many of the questions did not seem designed to invite a particularly discursive response. For example, questions such as, 'Do you think people need to know about their distant past?' or 'Do you think public money is well spent on archaeology?' allowed a yes or no answer.

There were also problems with the analysis which was orientated to obtain a quantitative answer to a

single question, and did not seek to examine the range of understandings which may have existed between respondents, far less the potential that individual respondents might hold complex ideas about the past. It is also worth noting that whatever detail, or nuance, may have been apparent in the original responses, was neglected at the point of analysis. The analytical procedure relied on content-analytic techniques to classify each response simply in terms of whether or not it indicated an 'interest in the past'. Stone's analysis of the data proposed a hypothesis, 'namely that most people share a basic interest in the past' (Stone 1984, 17). The final results were presented in the form of aggregate data describing whether the respondents agreed with the basic tenant of the question. For example responses to the question 'do you think people need to know about their distant past?' were grouped as :

1. 'Need' no - but of great interest.
2. Yes - very much.
3. Yes.
4. No.

(Stone 1984, 17)

The conclusion that Stone reached was that there is a basic public interest in the past, indicated by the fact that the grouped answers to questions like that illustrated above gave a positive result. The question above gave rise to two hundred and thirteen responses in the 'yes' category from three hundred and one responses (Stone 1984).

It is clear that the potential of this study was limited by the techniques of data collection and analysis used. Stone recognised this in his analysis where he stressed that 'these figures probably mask a great deal of information that will be available after further, more detailed, analysis' (Stone 1984, 17). The use of structured surveys does not offer the respondent enough space to express their thoughts or feelings about a subject making it an unsuitable approach for this study. The investigation of understandings and glimpses of insight into identity require more depth.

In the late 1980s Nick Merriman embarked on research that sought to investigate 'public attitudes' to both museums and 'heritage' sites and monuments (Merriman 1988). The objectives behind Merriman's work reflected similar concerns to those evidenced in the contemporary museology literature: to prove 'value for money', to forestall the introduction of entrance fees and to improve access to museums for as broad a range of groups in society as possible. Merriman explicitly stated that he hoped his work into 'different ways in which people use the past' would help to 'open museums to a wider public' (Merriman 1991, 3).

The research at the core of Merriman's thesis was very much an attitude survey. He looked for ways that the past is consumed by the public (e.g. visiting a historic property as a leisure pursuit or undertaking family history) that do not simply reflect dominant ideologies vested in institutions like museums. Merriman's survey sought to provide this new dimension by surveying patterns of people's

‘heritage’ visiting, their attitudes to the places that they visited, their images of the past and for other, non-museum, ways of experiencing the past (Merriman 1991).

Merriman collected his data by means of a self-report questionnaire, distributed by post to one thousand five hundred names randomly selected from electoral registers. Merriman was concerned that the questionnaire should reflect issues of concern to the general population, and should not simply reflect the priori interests or assumptions of the researcher. In order to ensure that the eventual questions used did not reflect common-sense concerns, the first stage of the research involved open-ended interviews with ten individuals from Cambridge (selected at random from the electoral role and recruited through postal approaches). The interviews were carried out in three areas of the city, there was no formal sampling strategy but the three areas encompassed broadly working class, lower middle class and upper middle class people. The interviews lasted for thirty to sixty minutes and followed a thirty-four question schedule. Interviewees were asked about their visits to museums and ‘heritage’ presentations, their image of archaeologists, their feelings about ‘alternative’ approaches to the past and their own possession of old objects Comments made during the interviews were used to formulate ‘closed category questions’ which were based ‘as far as possible on the basis of actual comments made in the interviews’ (Merriman 1991).

The use of open-ended interviews must have generated a large amount of data. This was analysed to determine particular topic areas for a more structured questionnaire survey. Had the interviews been tape-recorded the analysis could have been much deeper, it is at this point that there seems potential for this study to unpick some of people’s understanding of ‘heritage’ and their landscape.

The eventual questionnaire comprised forty questions. Most of these had closed-ended response alternatives, for example the question; ‘Do you think it is worth knowing about the past?’ was answered by ticking Definitely, Probably, Perhaps or No (Merriman 1991, 22-23). In the case of five of the questions however, an open-ended response was elicited. These five open ended questions are set out below, in each case the open ended questions, or elements of questions gave two lines for the respondent to write on.

***Question 4)***

*What do you think is the main reason for studying the past?*

***Question 9)***

*a) Which Museum did you last visit? ……..*

*b) Who did you go with? ……*

*e) Why did you go to that particular place? ……..*

***Question 19)***

*Please describe what you think life in the past was like for the ordinary person.*

***Question 20)***

*What would you say were the single best and worst things about living in the past (any time before your grandparents)?*

*The best thing about life in the past was that…….*

*The worst thing about life in the past was that……*

***Question 30)***

*Please write down what the word 'Archaeology' means to you.*

Merriman's open-ended questions were aimed at his particular areas of interest in museums and 'heritage' presentation. Merriman sought to elicit information regarding the production of attitudes towards museums and 'heritage' presentations and the consumption of these representations of the past (Merriman 1991). His open ended questions addressed attitudes to the activity of studying the past (question 4), the more specific activity of archaeology (question 30) and the public activity of visiting museums (question 9). Two of the questions (19 and 20) also related to the ways that the past was understood by his respondents who were asked to engage in representing the past by trying to think about what life was like in the past.

The rationale for the use of these open-ended questions was to reduce the possible constraints on respondents and to allow them to expand on issues central to Merriman's interests. The result was a set of quotes or 'one-liners' which gave insight into questions that Merriman may not have set out to research directly. He used responses to questions 19 and 20 (by grouping them under a variety of topics suggested by the data) for example to suggest that 'the vast majority of attitudes to the past are not nostalgic or of a romantic nature' (Merriman 1991, 28).

At the outset Merriman was concerned that open-ended questions might make respondents cautious about 'self-presentation', Stone (1984) commented on a facet of this problem as a perceived lack of knowledge. In an attempt to avoid 'self-presentation' response bias, these questions were prefaced with the explicit statement that. 'I'm not interested whether you know the facts, but I'd like to know what you opinion is' (Merriman 1991, 168).

Merriman achieved a high rate of response to his questionnaire survey (66%). His quantifiable survey analysis agreed with earlier museums research by Cruickshank 1972, Mason, 1974, McWilliams and

Hopwood 1973 by concluding that social class is an important factor in predicting who will visit museums and 'heritage' sites. He also found that museums and 'heritage' sites were viewed as representative of the activity of particular social classes that disenfranchised certain groups in society. Prince (1983) has noted that museums appeal to a 'middle-class' sense of constructive leisure time in the same way that reading does. According to Prince there was a (supposed) tendency for 'working-class' individuals to use leisure time in a passive manner or in-group activity. Merriman concurred with Prince noting that social status and cultural influences were important factors in shaping attitudes to museums and 'heritage' presentations.

Despite the predominance of middle classes using museums and 'heritage' sites, Merriman concluded that 'the majority of the population attach some value to the past' (Merriman 1991, 22-23). He also found that images of the past are not generally nostalgic but emphasise the adverse conditions of life in the past. Despite a sense of loss about the past it also constituted a root source, in a present that could be disorientating due to technological advances such as the proliferation of computers. Merriman's respondents did not tend to regard the past as a retreat to a haven from today's problems but believed that they were better off in the present (Merriman 1991).

The images of the past that Merriman observed varied according to age and social status. (Social status was a variable derived from two socio-economic variables (housing tenure and access to a vehicle) and educational background.) Younger (below 35 years) and 'higher status' respondents (i.e. owner occupiers, above minimum education with access to vehicles) demonstrated concerns about the material world. They were more likely to mention the absence of amenities such as modern medical care, electricity, plumbing and transport. Older (above 60 years) and 'lower status' respondents (i.e. tenants who had left school early and had no access to a vehicle) were more concerned with personal issues such as general poverty or fewer educational opportunities.

Merriman concluded that the clear variation in attitudes to the past 'along lines of age and status showed that the past cannot simply be viewed as a commodity to be bought and sold. Instead, because images of the past were personal and could be controlled by each individual they could be used as a form of discourse about the present' (Merriman 1991, 41).

Merriman's conclusions about the 'image' of the past were derived from his open-ended questions. He analysed question four; 'What do you think is the main reason for studying the past?' by placing responses into groups suggested by their content. In this case Merriman had three clear groups:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| To understand the past and how we got here: | 49% | 382 responses |
| For curiosity, knowledge of 'life in the past': | 43% | 336 responses |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| To learn from our mistakes and predict the future: | 26% | 138 responses |
| Other reasons: | 4% | 38 responses |

The figures above add up to over 100% because many respondents gave more that one answer.

The first group of responses Merriman called his 'present-oriented' group. This group Merriman concluded represented people for whom study of the past brought a sense of 'stability in their lives'. His second group were labelled a 'past oriented' group, who saw the main reason for studying the past as 'sheer curiosity about what life was like then' (Merriman 1991, 24). In the third grouping identified by Merriman respondents 'felt that studying the past has the definite pragmatic purpose of helping society to plan the future' (Merriman 1991, 25). He concluded that this attitude is contradictory to the views of the majority of historians who have abandoned the idea of a moral and instructive role for history. Merriman presented a selection of ten verbatim responses as an illustration of each of his conclusions. The categories that he used were not mutually exclusive with many respondents expressing attitudes that fell into more than one category. His conclusions drawn from question four were that 'the public exhibit an overwhelming agreement that the past is worth knowing about and put forward a variety of reasons for knowing about it, the majority of which suggest that history provides useful knowledge in showing people how we arrived at the present, and providing lessons for the future' (Merriman 1991, 25).

In questions nineteen and twenty Merriman encouraged respondents to comment on what life was like in the past. These questions, Merriman suggested, required people to describe 'images of life in the past'. Responses were analysed in the same way as question four. They were grouped under headings suggested by the data. In this case the results were more complex and as observed above allowed him to conclude that images of the past were not nostalgic in nature. The headings that Merriman used were:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Hardness of life in general. | | 82% |
| Lack of modern amenities. | 25% | |
| Poverty. | | 13% |
| Lack of personal achievement. | | 8% |
| Greater social divisions. | | 7% |
| Short life | | 5% |
| Poor education. | | 3% |
| Various positive aspects. | | 43% |

Again many respondents gave answers that fell into more than one category.

Merriman also observed that not only were images of the past generally not nostalgic, they were also 'couched in terms of the absence of certain things which are valued in the present, such as material

comforts' (1991, 28).

Most of the questions that Merriman used to study how often respondents visited museums were closed-ended but he did use one open-ended question to ask about reasons for visiting a museum. This question generated a very varied response that Merriman analysed using eleven basic categories. He was able to check these against the closed questions to analyse reasons for visiting against the frequency of visits. He found that most people visit museums for a specific reason and that this reason varies from person to person. As a result of this finding, he felt that individual visits cannot be ascribed to some ideological compulsion. Merriman considered the variability of reasons identified for visiting museums to be important in itself because it suggested that assumptions made about museums and social stratification may be more complex than noted elsewhere, both in his own study and in earlier work on museum visitor activity (Prince 1983). In particular Merriman concluded that because of the varied reasons for museum visiting 'museums should be available to all and not just restricted to sections of the population who currently use them' (Merriman 1991, 41).

In his fifth open-ended question Merriman showed his interest in archaeology by asking respondents to 'write down what the word 'Archaeology' means to you'. His analysis distinguished eight categories, showing that, although the image of archaeology as digging persisted, most people did not necessarily associate it with death and treasure, but did associate it with objects rather than understanding once living societies.

Merriman's research generated very useful data that was analysed to good effect, particularly with regard to sampling a broad section of the public rather than concentrating on museum or 'heritage' site visitors. Merriman was very aware of the limitations of postal attitude surveys. He was also aware of the problems with response rates (although his were very good), the absence of an interviewer and the complexity of the questionnaire. Merriman was also mindful of potential problems in using closed-ended questions, problems raised by Schumann and Presser (1981). Closed-ended questions may actually create attitudes, which are not held, until raised by the questionnaire, which then force respondents to answer using predetermined responses, which in turn limit the range of attitudes present in the data.

The use of closed-ended questions in Merriman's work also raised difficulties with the object about which questions were asked. For example he stated: 'Prehistoric people in Britain were basically the same as us'. To which respondents ticked a scale from strongly agree through agree, neither, disagree to strongly disagree (Merriman 1991, 102). One of the objects of this statement was 'prehistoric people', a description that may have been interpreted differently by different people. Indeed 'expert opinion' has changed over time from the Victorian image of the 'pagan savage' to modernist economic definitions like the 'hunter-gatherer' (A change raised by Zvelbil (1996) in relation to the construction of European 'origin myths' discussed in chapter two) and post-modern interpretations of ritual and astronomical associations or even in the case of Eric von Danekin's work first contact with extra-

terrestrials. Multiple meaning of the words ‘prehistoric people’ discussed above made problematic attempts to clarify the interpretation of the term when respondents used in making their replies.

Further problems with the analysis of closed-ended questions in attitude surveys can be identified in the use of scales that measure how closely the respondent agreed with a statement. The analyst translates agreement or disagreement without hearing the respondent’s stated reasons for making their choices. For example in Merriman’s survey he asked two questions aimed at measuring attitudes towards ‘mysterious forces’ in relation to Stonehenge and people’s belief in the Loch Ness monster. In both cases people were asked to express agreement or disagreement with a statement. People’s assertions that they strongly disagree with the statement; ‘there are mysterious forces connected with Stonehenge’ were treated by Merriman as a firm rejection of the paranormal (Merriman 1991). Without a more in depth discussion about Stonehenge, the paranormal and the context in which the terms were being used, it is problematic to relate rejection of the paranormal to an expression regarding the statement about Stonehenge.

Both of the research projects described above follow traditional opinion poll or attitude survey approaches:

The first project by Stone *et al* attempted to elicit spontaneous responses to open-ended questions. As we have noted, however, the actual spontaneity of responses may have been limited by the doorstep interview technique used. Moreover, the responses were likely to have been summarised and subtly represented by the interviewer who wrote them down in long hand. Finally, any nuances or contradictions in the accounts would have become lost in the process of content analysis.

In the second project, Merriman was concerned with making claims about a representative sample of the British population. The closed-ended attitude analysis produced results that were consistent with previous research, whilst the use of open-ended questions, discussed above, gave scope to draw more in depth conclusions. These were ultimately Merriman’s outstanding contributions, underpinning his assertion that museums should be open to all. Most interestingly for this project, Merriman’s work also suggested that people use visual terms to evoke the past in their responses. This has important implications for the present study of the role of ‘heritage’ sites and monuments in the landscape, confirming the ideas raised in chapter one of this study, that viewing the landscape is a visual activity influenced by cultural predisposition e.g. renaissance perspective (Cosgrove 1984). Merriman singled out the image of the past as a personal resource that can be ‘used as a form of discourse about the present’ (Merriman 1991, 41). He also highlighted the ‘vastness and malleability’ of the past which made it a convenient space in which individuals could negotiate senses of place-identity. Merriman summed-up this relationship between the past, the present and the visual thus:

> “Images of the past, because they are held in the head and may not even be articulated, cannot easily be controlled or challenged and they can thus be used by the individual

as a very personal way of coming to terms with his or her own situation."

(Merriman 1991, 41)

Merriman's use of the visual was perceptive but missed the influence that cultural constructions of images can have on the image 'held in the head' suggested by Cosgrove (1984) and Olwig (1993) and discussed in relation to this study in chapters one and seven.

Questionnaire survey methods have dominated the study of museum and 'heritage' presentation visitors but alternatives have been used. These include observational studies of the behaviour of people in museums or at 'heritage' sites (Bagnall 1996), in-depth interviews with 'heritage' visitors (Bagnall 1996, Piccini 1999) and longitudinal participant-observational studies of communities living near 'heritage' sites (Odermatt 1996, Shankland 1996).

*In-depth interviews.*

Bagnall (1996) carried out research at two 'heritage' / museum sites in the north west of England to study the ways in which people 'consume' such sites. Although Bagnall grounded her work by characterising museums and 'heritage' sites as experiences that were 'consumed' by the public as one might any commodity in the 'market place' she rejected Hewison (1987) and Wright's (1987) 'heritage baiting' argument because, she stated 'such definitions of 'heritage', take little account of the bedrock of popular support it receives' (Bagnall 1996, 229).

Bagnall's research methodology aimed to 'move away from "one-sidedly quantitative methods" (Fyfe and Ross 1996, 131), with their use of highly structured questionnaires, towards a more detailed and flexible approach' (Bagnall 1996, 118). To achieve this approach Bagnall utilised qualitative research methods in understanding two 'heritage' sites, the Wigan Pier museum and the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester. Her remit was to talk to people about how they made their way round the museum and how they responded to it. The interviews were taken on site, which kept the respondents 'in context', and were tape-recorded. The tape recording of interviews allowed Bagnall to transcribe the interviews later enabling detailed analysis. The interviews were carried out with groups, so taping also made the capture of individual contributions possible. Bagnall interviewed thirty-five groups in total at the two sites.

From her data Bagnall was able to identify a number of issues relating to the ways in which the respondents related to the 'heritage' or museum experience. By considering their activity as a form of consumer 'mapping' (Jameson 1991) she was able to identify a ways in which people experienced the two sites. Firstly the experience was a physical one, that extended beyond the visual because the exhibitions used other sensory stimuli like sound and smell. Secondly the sites were experienced and consumed as emotional or imaginary experiences, suggesting that the 'heritage' experience went beyond the physical to evoke cultural values. These experiences were not sufficient for Bagnall's respondents to enjoy their consumer experience however, the sites had to convince the visitor that the

experience was ‘authentic’ and based in fact (Bagnall 1996).

Bagnall’s methods allowed her respondents to ‘talk’ for themselves in a very well defined context, that of the museum ‘partial’ landscape, formed by ‘heritage managers’ for them to experience. Piccini used the same technique (1999) at the open-air ‘heritage’ presentation at Castell Henllys in Pembrokeshire, South Wales. At Castell Henllys a ‘visitors walk’ has been created, taking people through an Iron Age or Celtic hill fort that has been reconstructed on the evidence of an archaeological excavation that continues to take place on the site. Piccini (1999) used the same interviewing technique as Bagnall, talking to visitor groups about their experience of the hill fort, allowing them to discuss their sense of national past represented by the Celtic emphasis of the site. Like Bagnall, Piccini also considered the physical experience that visitors had, how they were physically guided around the site and how the visitors returned from a nationalist encounter with the past to a consumer one in the present at the site shop (Piccini 1999).

The long tradition of survey research about museum visitors has been complemented by the work of Bagnall (1996) and Piccini (1999) who add substance to the questions of why and how people experience ‘heritage’ as sites, monuments or museums. They do not however, depart from the closely bounded space of the museum or ‘heritage’ presentation. They still view ‘heritage’ as a consumer activity and as such continue the tradition of researching the museum or ‘heritage’ market through surveys. Other researchers have extended their work to look at the role of ‘heritage’ in the ‘real’ landscape by using ethnographic methods to study communities living near particular sites or monuments.

**b) Ethnographic Studies of Communities Living with ‘Heritage’ Sites.**

Ethnographic research methods have rarely been used to study the relationship between people, their landscape and the ‘heritage’ sites that are found in those landscapes. Ethnography as a research method is derived from the work of anthropologists but has increasingly come into use in sociology and social psychology (Hammersley 1992). As a methodology, ethnographic approaches allow the researcher to ‘discover’ the social world through ‘first-hand observation and participation in “natural” settings. They are guided by exploratory orientation that capture the social processes observed and the social meanings that generate them’ (Hammersley 1992, 12).

The work of Peter Odermatt with the community of Abbasanta in Sardinia has been discussed in relation to national and local place-identity in chapters one and three of this study (Odermatt 1996). Odermatt published his work on Abbasanta as a paper in *Archaeological Dialogues* and did not make his methodology explicit, nevertheless it is possible to recognise the ways in which he collected his data from the text. He clearly collected the data for his study by combining traditional anthropological data collection, living with families in the village during local elections in 1990, and observing local social activity in relation to the ‘heritage’ sites and monuments in the landscape. Odermatt’s anthropological observation was clearly combined with in depth interviews with local people about

long running (since the 70s) controversy regarding the local 'heritage', the nuraghe (a prehistoric tower) in particular. This ethnographic data was supplemented by historical analysis of documentation regarding:

i. Visits to the nuraghe at Abbasanta by the King (Vittorio Emmanuelle III in 1926 and 1937) and Mussolini (in 1926 and 1939).
ii. The noting of the nuraghe at Abbasanta in the Guida Rosso, a national tourist guide.
iii. The formation of an indigenous 'heritage' industry and a regional archaeological service in the 1970s.
iv. Post cards and local publications that depict the nuraghe and Abbasanta.

These combinations of data collection methods add depth to Odermatt's detailed ethnographic work on the people of Abbasanta during the 1990 local elections. He showed that the local 'heritage' played a key role during this period as a representation of local place-identity replaced by regional and national evocations.

In 1993 an archaeological excavation began on a settlement site at Çatalhöyük in Turkey. The project director Ian Hodder collaborated with anthropologist David Shankland to carry out a study on the nearby village of Küçkköy to consider ways in which life in the village today might inform the interpretation of the archaeology and to consider the impact of the archaeological excavation on the villagers themselves. The site at Çatalhöyük stood out as a large 'tell' in the landscape and had with it a number of smaller mounds and field systems that were still visited by local villagers (Shankland 1996).

Shankland's anthropological approach involved living with the community, who provided him with a house; from this situation he was able to observe particular aspects of social life or institutions in the community. Shankland selected particular aspects of society to observe in detail, this selection he called a 'template'. In the case at Küçkköy Shankland looked at the care and upkeep of the village beasts because he perceived that this might throw light on the archaeological evidence at nearby Çatalhöyük (Shankland 1996). It was in the nature of ethnographic investigation however, that the data (because it gave voice to the people being researched) threw up unexpected results. Shankland was able to uncover a whole range of relationships between the people of Küçkköy and the tells, mounds and fields that surround the village. These did not bear any resemblance to the importance vested in the same remains by the archaeologists. Some of the indigenous interpretations of the landscape were traditional and related to the agricultural nature of the village, carried forward from before the excavations began. Others related to the finds that the excavators were making whilst more related to beliefs about the supernatural (Shankland 1996).

Both Shankland and Odermatt's work demonstrated the detail that can be achieved through ethnographic approaches and demonstrated the capacity that these methods have for generating unexpected findings, as hypothesis testing does not drive them. Such methods also emphasised the

social process that is at work, the 'what' things exist and 'how' they may work rather than the 'how many such things there are' (Walker 1985, 3).

**c) Using Images in Research.**

The present study sought to explore how people understood representations of the past in the landscape. In particular, these understandings were sought with regard to constructions of national, European and local place-identity. As is apparent from the literature discussed in previous chapters, the roles of visual representations of landscapes appear important in framing national or European constructions or local place identities. It was therefore key that in designing the research, a way was found to bring people participating in the research to interact visually with the landscape. This required either data collection outside in the 'real' landscape or the use of images showing views of a 'partial' landscape.

Wagner (1979) listed five distinct modes of research that used photography, first amongst these was as a stimulus to interviews. More recent writing on researching the visual (Emmison and Smith 2000) has highlighted analysis of the visual itself rather than the evocations that visual images introduce into people's narrative about the world about them. Urry and Crawshaw (1997) have continued the practice of using images to stimulate narrative.

Visual stimuli and visual concepts are central in the methodological approaches used in the tourism studies work of John Urry (1990 and 1997 with Crawshaw). Urry and Crawshaw's (1997) project was to investigate the specific role of photographic representation of landscape and tourist activity. Crawshaw carried out the research; her methods were simple but effective. First she interviewed ten photographers who lived and worked in the Lake District, secondly she included two questions in the Cumbria Tourist Board's 1993 annual holiday guide. The first question asked what the respondent's favourite image in the guide was the second gave them a short space to say why they chose this image.

The analysis of Crawshaw's data allowed very useful conclusions to be drawn about the relationship between photographic images and people's process of reminiscence. Crawshaw's work did not however, allow people to use the images as the basis for more complex discourse that might have allowed more 'in-depth' analysis.

The use of images in researching understandings of the landscape has a lot to recommend it to this study. The issue is discussed further later in this chapter.

*Conclusion: research traditions in 'heritage' and museum studies.*

The study of 'heritage' sites and museums and the ways in which the public relate to them remains firmly grounded in traditions of questionnaire survey and market research. A need to confront questions like 'how' and 'why' have led to more qualitative approaches in recent years including the use of open-ended questions, in-depth interviews and even anthropological studies. This shift towards the use of qualitative research methods as well as quantitative is important if 'heritage managers' are to gain a better understanding of how people value the historical environment. This was certainly the case for this study, which sought to understand some ways in which people understand of the landscape and its features. The focus on visual understanding has been underpinned from the start by the literature reviewed in chapter one. It was therefore important for the study to select a research methodology that allowed in depth investigation of people articulating themselves, representing their understanding of the world in their own words, not ticking a box. It was also important to design a methodology that would allow the use of images to provoke responses that reflected on visual experiences of the world.

The next part of this chapter looks at the use of a particular qualitative research method (family focus groups) and why this was an appropriate research method for this study.

## 2. The Present Study: Choosing Qualitative Methods and Focus Groups.

This section of the chapter discusses the use of qualitative research methods further and looks at the use of focus groups in particular. The discussion shows why focus group methodology was used to interview families for this study and demonstrates why photographs were used as stimuli for the focus groups. The section is divided into two parts:

a) Why use qualitative research methods in this study?
b) Choosing focus group interviews.

**a) Why use Qualitative Research Methods in this Study?**

The above discussion of research methods used in studying people and their attitudes towards 'heritage' or 'heritage' presentations, museums and the like suggests that qualitative approaches bring particular advantages to a study. They allow people to 'speak for themselves' and allow researchers to analyse more thoroughly questions about 'how' people understand the world around them.

Whilst considering the use of qualitative research methods it is worth referring back once more to the original objectives of the present study. The aim of the present study is to investigate some of the ways in which people understand 'heritage' sites and monuments in the landscape around them, paying particular attention to visual understandings. The second objective requires the study to gain insight into some of the roles that such 'heritage' might play in terms of European, national and local place-identity. To meet these objective the present study needs to concern itself with gaining an in-depth

picture of the ways in which people articulate their understandings of the landscape and how they use visual stimuli to help them form these views.

Walker (1985) described qualitative research methods as a set of techniques designed 'more to determine what things exist than to determine how many such things there are' (Walker 1985, 3). When considering people's articulation of their understandings of 'heritage' sites and how they may form these views, the present study also seeks to address a third objective. This is contributing to the 'value of heritage' debate, in particular by adding to knowledge concerning social value. Qualitative research offers the social 'value of heritage' debate a theory of 'social action grounded on the experiences of those likely to be affected by a policy decision' (Walker 1985, 19). The idea that observations, drawn from the experiences of the people taking part in the research and expressed in their own words, can lead to the formulation of social theory during the actual data collection and analysis process has been termed grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

*Researcher Bias*

In qualitative interviews a social process takes place, which cannot be exactly replicated. This is often a source of criticism, based upon positivist approaches, which emphasis a need for replication, reliability and researcher neutrality, and seeks to hypothesis test rather than theory generate. The social process involved in qualitative methodology can, in itself, become the subject of criticism because of the potential bias that can be introduced by the researcher. Jones (1985) described bias as something to be used 'creatively, continently and self-consciously' developing an empathetic relationship with the interviewee. By this process Jones said we (the researcher) become a 'research instrument'. Methodological criticism at this point can be traced to a positivist / relativist divide, which is unfortunate as each approach is appropriate in different contexts. To meet the objectives of this study depth is required to generate theory from the data and a qualitative approach is appropriate. As set out below however, this does not mean that the researcher cannot bias the sessions towards the particular areas of research interest. After all it might take many days of listening to a person's talk before (in the case of this study) they talk about the role that sites and monuments play in their perceptions of local, national or European identity.

The nature of the objectives underpinning this study makes qualitative data collection and analysis the key to its success. Group interviews or *focus groups* are used to collect the data for the study; the reasons for using this method are discussed in the next part of this chapter.

**b) Choosing Focus Groups.**

The research objectives of this study and the topic that it set out to explore are quite wide ranging and complex. Walker (1985) identified four approaches to qualitative research; a) depth interviews, b) group interviews, c) participant observation and d) projective techniques. Either depth interviews or focus groups present the best data collection methods for the present study, as they are most amenable to researching a specific topic ('heritage') in a broad area (the landscape). No matter which approach is

taken the study needs to take into account the issue of the role of the interviewer or moderator in the research process.

*Focus groups or in-depth interviews?*

The broad and complex nature of the research objective is an important factor in deciding whether to use in-depth interviews or focus groups. Both use open-ended interview guides which could have a varying degree of structure ranging from pre-set, or semi-structured, questions to a simple set of issues that start the interview or focus group before it then takes its own course. Both approaches allow respondents to address issues on their own terms, it is the skill of the interviewer to allow this to happen.

The type of data collected by each method is quite different however. A highly structured in-depth interview may begin with a fairly lengthy bibliographic introduction and continue with multiple, often fairly specific, probes and prompts for each question (Crabtree et al 1993, 142). The data collected during in-depth interviews generally consists of long statements by the respondent, which is quite different from the data collected during focus groups.

The focus group consists of a number of people discussing a topic, in this case there are shorter elements of individuals talk, but there is also be a group dynamic involved and a broader range of ideas expressed (Crabtree et al 1993, 142). Morgan (1997) clearly set out the strengths of using focus groups under two broad headings: concentrated data and data generated by group interaction. Studies made about the relative merits of focus groups compared with depth interviews (Fern 1982) highlight the concentrated nature of focus group data. One study carried out by Fern (1982) concluded that, although focus groups do not necessarily produce better ideas from their participants, two focus groups produce the same number of ideas as ten individual interviews.

It is this capacity for focus groups to generate ideas and to concentrate the data in a particular topic area that led to the use of this research method in the present study. Focus groups are likely to allow respondents to consider the landscape in general whilst allowing the focus of the group to include 'heritage' features in that landscape.

*Focus group interactions.*

The interaction between participants is a particular strength of focus groups, 'the comparisons that participants make among each others experiences and options are a valuable source of insights into complex behaviours and motivations' (Morgan and Krueger 1993). It can of course be argued that interaction is a source of bias and hence a problematic area, e.g. stronger members of the group can dominate other members. It is part of the skill of the researcher/moderator to enable quieter members of the groups to have their say by stressing that they want to hear as many different ideas and experiences as possible (Morgan 1997).

Focus groups display issues of consensus and diversity that allow the researcher to look at areas where groups can agree and others where divergence is possible. Through highlighting convergence in focus groups Crabtree et al (1993) state that shared cultural understandings of a group of people can be examined.

*Choosing focus groups.*

I chose to use focus group studies for this study because they offer a number of advantages. Predominant of these is interaction; this is particularly helpful in generating data concerning complex issues. It allows a person to interact in conversation (rather than interview) allowing them to articulate themselves without the constraints of a one-to-one interview. The use of focus groups also presents a group dynamic that can be particularly revealing when consensus is achieved or diversity holds sway. Given the complex nature of the research objectives these advantages suggest that this approach can generate large amounts of good quality data in the subject areas of interest.

Because this study has a wide remit, the role that focus groups play in investigating complex behaviour is also key to selecting this research method. Focus groups clearly help to define important issues for understanding the social value of 'heritage' amongst a wide spectrum of seemingly important issues. This attribute is particularly important when people do not set out with particular attitudes to the fore, attitudes towards 'heritage' in the landscape for example. The group dynamic of forming an opinion to participate in discussion and using experience to back up that opinion, allows focus groups to gather data from which to derive insight that individual interviews do not so readily offer.

## 3. The Present Study: Focus Group Research Design.

The choice to use of focus groups led me to further decisions about the research design. The design of the groups themselves shaped the entire study. This section describes the design of the focus groups under the following headings:

a) Focus group research design.
b) Choosing family focus groups.
c) Using photographs as stimuli in the family focus groups.
d) The images used.
e) Conducting the focus groups.

**a) Focus Group Research Design.**

Morgan (1997) aided me in the focus group research design process; he highlighted four areas of particular importance and applied four 'rules of thumb' (Morgan 1992) to guide decisions in each field:

i. Who will participate in the groups? Morgan (1992) suggested groups of homogeneous strangers.

ii. How structured will the focus groups be? Morgan's (1992) 'rule of thumb' was that the researcher should rely on a highly structured interview with high interviewer involvement.
iii. How large should the groups be? Morgan (1992) suggested there should be six to ten participants in each group.
iv. Finally. How many groups should there be? The 'rule of thumb' suggested three to five per project.

Morgan (1997) reviewed his 'rules of thumb' in his later work and stressed that researchers should be 'self-questioning' when making these decisions instead of following his recommendations as a fixed standard of how to design a focus group. Morgan also questioned whether mixed groups might produce better results in some projects. I used mixed groups for very particular reasons that are set out below.

**b) Choosing Family Focus Groups.**

For the present study the very broad area of interest suggests that homogeneous groups can create an unacceptable degree of bias towards a particular social group. The use of families as mixed groups allowed for better coverage of gender and age whilst social class was confronted at the recruitment stage.

My concerns over the issue of bias at this point reflected an interest in minimising sample bias. As Morgan (1997) put it 'if a particular recruitment source does limit the nature of the data that are available, then this forces the choice between living with those limitations or finding other sources of participants that will reduce these biases' (Morgan 1997, 35).

I drew the idea of using families as ready-made focus groups from the work of Billig (1992). There were several advantages to using families rather than artificial groups specifically for the purposes of the present study. In the first place, there was an obvious pragmatic utility in arranging to meet members of a family in their own home, rather than attempting to gather individuals together at a particular time in a particular place. Moreover, given the research was based on a single session with each group, there were advantages to using groups who are already comfortable with each other, in familiar surroundings.

Despite Morgan's (1992, 1997) 'rule of thumb' that strangers be used for focus groups the family dynamic brought its own advantages. Billig suggested, in particular, that family groups were particularly useful if the research was interested in studying the argumentative structure of the accounts. Families may have been concerned to present a united front to the researcher, but they were unlikely to evidence the kinds of force or polite agreement often problematic in groups of strangers. The major disadvantage of using family groups is their familiarity with one another are able to take things for granted, or to allude obliquely to particular shared experiences, in a way which is not possible amongst groups of strangers. This disadvantage is offset however, by the 'natural' nature of family discussion, which is less likely to cause group members to orient themselves towards the

researcher.

The advantage of mixed groups is important however, when considering a broad topic as the present study does. Using family groups reduces bias by automatically including both males and females, and people of various ages. With regard to the number of groups required Morgan (1997) gave a 'rule of thumb' that projects should consist of three to five groups. This claim was derived from a contention that more groups seldom provide meaningful new insights. Morgan (1997) cited examples from both the social sciences (Zeller 1993) and marketing (Calder 1977) demonstrating that the researcher/moderator generally recognises the point at which they can anticipate what will be said next in a group meeting. Morgan (1997) termed this point 'saturation'. Because contemporary families were generally smaller that the six to ten people suggested by Morgan's (1992, 1997) 'rule of thumb' for focus groups the number of people taking part in the research as a whole needed to increase to keep up the high frequency of ideas noted by Fern (1982).

Another of Morgan's (1992, 1997) 'rule of thumb' concerned a relatively structured interview with high moderator involvement. In setting a task and using props to act as stimuli, families were encouraged to question views that they took for granted as a group in order to complete the task. The activity of struggling with things that have previously been taken for granted was all part of the argumentative nature of family discussion that Billig (1992) looked for in his work. The use of props as stimuli in focus groups had been done before using photographs (Wagner 1979). The use of images of the landscape, in this case represented by a townscape, had a particular resonance for a topic area where the visual sense was so important.

**c) Using Photographs as Stimuli in Focus Groups.**

Harrison (1996) suggested the use of visual imagery as an elicitation technique. She noted two different approaches to the use of images as a stimulus in qualitative interviews, both of which basically 'enable an exploration of subjectively constructed social life, and tap cultural and personal meaning' (Harrison 1996, 80). In her first approach to the use of visual material Harrison suggested that the subjects produce their own images as part of a study. This produced a personally structured interview around the images.

Musello (1979) and Spence and Holland (1990) have used this technique, using domestic images as stimuli to investigate meanings in context. Their approach involved provision of images by the interviewer. This approach gained insight into subjective meanings in particular areas brought into focus by the images. Bendelow (1993) has also used images, paintings, etchings, drawings and photographs in exploring gendered notions of pain. Harrison noted that pain was a difficult concept theoretically and experientially for people to talk about and that the use of stimuli gave the interview focus which was sustained by a variety of images. Harper (1986) used snapshots taken as part of his fieldwork as a focus for his interviews on the meaning of work. He suggested that the subject took on the role of a teacher explaining the images to the researcher and thus their opinions and experiences.

Emmison and Smith (2000) were critical of the use of images as stimuli in interviews suggesting that the practice reflected market research that encouraged people to match 'types of holiday setting with democratic categories on the basis of idealised representations of settings and people' (Emmison and Smith 2000, 27). This sweeping dismissal suggests that the method of using visual stimuli was not visual research as such. This may have been so but Emmison and Smith (2000) completely underplayed the wealth of information to be gleaned by studying the discourse of respondents as they used images to evoke opinions and experiences. This research, using images as stimuli, did not study the image it self but it explored the meanings of the images and the ways in which the respondents understood them as idealised visual representations.

Harrison (1996) added to her comments on the use of images as stimuli by relating her own experiences using images (holiday snaps) in a teaching workshop environment in discussion about meanings of holidays. These experiences led her to comment on the possibilities that this technique holds for focus groups.:

> " The exercise suggested that visual stimuli may also operate very effectively in the context of focused group interviews".
>
> (Harrison 1996, 82)

The nebulous term 'heritage' (see chapter four) is difficult to work with theoretically and I felt that the use of images would give the present study the same focus as Bendelow and Harper achieved in their works. Despite the concerns aired by Emmison and Smith (2000), I decided to use images as props to focus the groups encouraging discussion and stimulating the group dynamic. Once the use of images had been built into the focus group research design a set of images was required.

**d) The Images Used.**

I used a total of thirty pictures. The images were not selected because they actually made a link between 'heritage' and identity. It was left up to the family group members to make associations and articulate them in their talk.

Some of the pictures used were commercial post cards, and others were photographs taken especially for the study. The images included a variety of types, both standard tourist views and others of more 'everyday' aspects of the town (Worcester). The images were selected to represent a contemporary range of activity and buildings, the river and older buildings including some industrial architecture. Some pictures contained buildings as the central object of the composition; some of these were older structures that might be seen as aspects of the 'heritage' of the City of Worcester whilst others contained more modern buildings, not traditionally labelled as 'heritage'. In many of the images social activity was taking place in the foreground whilst buildings formed the backdrop. Many images contained the same building, e.g. the cathedral taken from different angles, although in slightly

different contexts. This allowed groups to place the same building in more than one category if they wished.

The images I used can be seen in Appendix 5. The images can be grouped according to their general content and style (See Fig 5.1). Because the pictures contain a number of elements the figures in the table add up to more than thirty.

| Fig 5.1: Summary of The Images Used. | |
|---|---|
| Older Architecture, e.g. the cathedral or timber framed houses. | 19 |
| Everyday things and activity. | 11 |
| Tourist oriented heritage sites (the Commandery) | 2 |
| Industrial architecture and canals. | 4 |
| Formal Gardens. | 1 |
| Christmas Fair. | 1 |
| Race Course. | 1 |
| Modern Architecture. | 7 |
| Houses in residential streets. | 2 |
| School. | 1 |
| The Elgar Statue. | 1 |

**e) Conducting the focus groups.**

In order to encourage the family groups to talk about issues pertaining to the study I set up a task to create a focus to the proceedings and to encourage debate. The following procedure was used which was both constraining in the form of the task and images, and open-ended in that it lacked any structured questioning from the researcher (myself).

I set a task for the families with the aim of focusing the group's discussion on issues pertaining to the study: Interpretation of the built landscape and, in particular, the ways in which aspects of that landscape might be variously understood to symbolise the local area, the nation and Europe. This task involved presenting each group with a set of pictorial images, and asking them to select those pictures that seemed to them, to represent 'their home town (Worcester)', 'their state (Britain)' and 'Europe'.

I began each session by introducing myself and finding out a little about each participant. The purpose of the research, particularly the interest in 'heritage' and particular buildings was not explained at this point. The task was explained to people as an exercise in 'seeing how people thought about their home

town'. I asked the groups to look at thirty photographs and post cards of Worcester (see Appendix 5). They were then asked to select three sets of three images. These images had to be used to 'represent to an outsider' their 'home town of Worcester', Britain and Europe. Each set of three images was placed by an envelope that had written boldly across it 'This is Worcester', 'This is Britain' and 'This is Europe'. When the task was complete I asked each group 'what else should I have included in my pictures for each envelope?' To conclude the task I explained that I was particularly interested in the old buildings in my role as an archaeologist, I then produced an image of Stonehenge (at sunset) and asked which envelope it should go into.

I was present throughout the procedure, and took part in the discussion by asking participants to justify their selection of certain images. The entire group discussion was tape-recorded.

## 4. The Site and Recruitment.

This section sets out the arguments for a single site study and for Worcester as that site using the following headings:

a) Why select a single research site.
b) Why Worcester was chosen: an average British town.
c) A description of Worcester.
d) The focus group recruitment process.
e) Profile of the families who participated.

**a) Why Select a Single Research Site?**

As the present study was focused on the landscape and identity I felt that it was important to use a single landscape rather than deal with a variety of landscapes. By locating each focus group in a different region, the images would not have reflected the local environment, unless a separate set of images had be supplied for each group. Either focus groups would have had to work with images that were unfamiliar to them and were not local, or alternatively, separate sets of images would have had to be introduced and hence changed contexts between each group, making comparisons across groups impossible.

It might have been possible to conduct a two or three site study but this would still have no hope of covering the whole nation. An unnecessary objective, as I did not aim to make statistically generalisable statements about how often a person responded in a particular way, or that everyone in society would respond in a particular way, but that a response took place at all. I also felt that to allow the use of the same photographic stimuli in each site, images of the landscape in each area would have had to be introduced, eliciting comparisons between regions and reducing the focus on national and European identity.

Focus group methodology generates a lot of data (Morgan 1997) and a multi-site study would have swamped my resources, in terms of transcribing and especially analysis. This kind of multiple site work is frequently carried out by a research team or by using a survey methodology as Merriman (1991) did. The data collection resources for the 'Stone' research project (1984 see above) far outweighed those assigned to the analysis. Thus the mass of data resulted in a rather superficial rather than in depth analysis (Stone 1984).

**b) Why Worcester was Chosen: an average British town.**

Without claiming statistical generalisability for the present study, the research considered a very broad topic that could easily be biased by overly specific local issues. As a result the study was best carried out in an 'average' British / English town. The study required a town that did not have a particular feature or set of features that made it specifically different to a theoretic 'average town'. These particular features (a national museum for example) might have skewed the focus of the study away from the issues that it set out to address and might have focused upon issues that were peculiar to the location or specific groups of people. From a national demographic point of view, Worcester was a good location to recruit focus groups. Within its population of around 100,000 the social class of households profile (census 1991) matched the national profile (See Fig 5.2). Again this was not a matter of statistical generalisability but one of being 'average'. Indeed Worcester was so representative of average England that William Hague identified 'Worcester woman' as one of the Tory target voters in the 1997 general election.

The present study also required a landscape / townscape that had a good range of 'heritage' sites but was not so consumed by tourism issues that the images became completely dominated by clichés. The influence of tourism on local populations has been well covered (Urry 1990, Lanfant, Allcock and Bruner 1995, Rojek and Urry 1997) and was taken into account as a particular influence on the context in which the focus groups viewed their landscape. Warwick was considered as the research site but was rejected because a single 'heritage' site, the castle, dominated the landscape which was a tourist attraction (managed by Madame Tussaud's) of national importance

Fig 5.2: Social class of households in Worcester and England & Wales ( based on 1991 census).

| | | Worcs. % | England & Wales % |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | Professional | 7.00 | 6.67 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| II | Managerial & Technical | 34.3 | 30.8 |
| III(n) | Skilled (non-manual) | 11.8 | 13.6 |
| III(m) | Skilled (Manual) | 26.7 | 26.5 |
| IV | Semiskilled | 13.9 | 13.6 |
| V | Unskilled | 3.7 | 4.6 |

***c) A Description of Worcester.***

My choice of research site was informed by a number of considerations. The research site needed to have a landscape that contained at least some older buildings and structures. These might be described as sites and monuments as the present study was specifically interested in elements in the landscape that represent the past ('heritage') in the present. A town or small city was considered because it would provide a good collection of such structures rather than a rural site that might concentrate on only one site or monument. This decision meant that the study was considering a townscape, this however, can still be considered a landscape. The same activities of artistic representation and structuring are at play in a townscape as are located in a rural image. Visions of towns are structured and composed in an accepted set of rules just as a landscape. In fact the architecture of the townscape is probably more moulded by society than the rural, cluttered with architectural norms, planning constraints, ideas of taste, and the gaze of the local and visitor alike. It is this sense of landscape that Ashworth (1998) refers to in his construction of a non-divisive Europe of cities (see chapter two).

Worcester City Council emphasised particular features of the built environment and historical aspects of the city when they addressed potential visitors in their publication *The Worcester Visitor*.

> 'The City has a wide variety of attractions. In addition to the magnificent cathedral you will discover the splendid Guildhall, Royal Worcester Porcelain with factory tours to fascinate and inform you, the Commandery Civil War Centre, and Museums, or the landscaped parks and riverside walks. If you enjoy a sporting day out, Worcester Racecourse with its exciting National Hunt programme or the County Cricket team and its international celebrities may be your pleasure. Birthplace of Sir Edward Elgar, Worcester has an impressive history of musical and cultural events. Worcester's shopping scene combines individual specialist shops in period passageways and malls with major retail names and the impressive Crown Gate Centre, sympathetically constructed in the heart of the City. The pedestrianised High Street allows you to shop or browse at your leisure amidst colourful floral displays and a variety of street

entertainers. Worcester is a city with a wide range of quality Hotels, Guest Houses and Inns offering accommodation to suit all tastes, and the opportunity to combine a relaxing break with visits to new and interesting places. Whether you choose to visit Worcester in Spring, Summer, Autumn or Winter you can be assured of a warm welcome."

(Worcester City Council 1997)

The local newspaper the *Worcester Evening News* profiled the city on its Internet pages; the 'Key facts' page profiled the city in terms that the newspaper considered most important. The first statement that the 'Key facts' page made was set in bold type:

"The historic City of Worcester situated on the banks of the River Severn has been an important centre for trade and industry since well before Roman times."

(Worcester Evening News 1999)

The 'Key facts' page introduced Worcester as a city that 'has history', a distinctive geographical location and a 'heritage' of trade and industry. *The Worcester Evening News* went on to summarise the main demographic features of the city:

"Together with an ideal location and first class communication links, Worcester has a diverse and growing economy supported by a skilled workforce. Industry in Worcester has seen major changes over the last 40 years in both size and structure. Some of the engineering and manufacturing industries that Worcester was built on still remain, but the city's economic base is now characterised by a large number of small to medium-sized companies supplying a whole range of products and services, alongside many well-known international organisations. The various service sectors now account for 81 per cent of the city's employment, reflecting its position as the county town and important commercial centre, as well as a popular tourist destination.

Retail is another growth sector. The development of the Crown Gate scheme in the city centre has boosted Worcester's position in the hierarchy of West Midland shopping centres. A study in 1996 by Hillier Parker May and Rowdes based on the number of multiple stores in city centres, ranked Worcester fourth in the West Midlands and in the top 50 shopping centres nationally. An estimated 350,000 people live within 30 minutes drive time of Worcester City Centre.

The city's riverside location and history has made it an important tourist centre and employer. In 1995, Worcester attracted 1.4 million visitors who spend

> £26.7m.Worcester is also the fastest growing district in the county — projections for the year 2001 anticipate a population figure of 102,000 which would represent an increase of 34 per cent since 1981."
>
> (Worcester Evening News 1999)

The two profiles of Worcester highlighted features that arose continually in the analysis (see chapter six). Worcester's documented history spans a number of periods. The Roman features of the city are entirely buried and are not readily available to the gaze of local people. Despite the remote and intangible nature of the Roman remains, the *Worcester Evening News* profile of the city drew on Roman 'heritage'. This reflected a continuation of renaissance thinking that looked to the civilising influence of the Roman Empire to legitimise contemporary society. In the Early Medieval period Worcester was influential because it was a major ecclesiastical centre. This period was not recognised in the above profiles because it was not manifest in the tangible built environment. The cathedral represented the mid and later medieval periods, although earlier structures have been identified below the building that we see today. Other later medieval buildings were described in the city, churches, the remains of the castle and city walls and timber framed houses and shops. Much of the cityscape is Georgian or Victorian in origin, shops, offices and much of the housing nearer the core of the city. There was also a good deal of industrial 'heritage' that has its roots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the porcelain industry, the Worcestershire Sauce factory and the canals that transported goods to and from the city. Lastly there was more recent development, the modern buildings of the post war years through to the recently finished 'Crown Gate' shopping centre. Other more recent development has renovated the old in a more post-modern manner.

Lastly Worcester as a research site did not detract from European issues. There was a possibility that going to sites outside England would mask or change European issues because of their relationship to senses of Scots, Welsh or English nationalism.

**d) The Focus Group Recruitment Process.**

The research was not concerned to document class or age differences in accounts, nevertheless I made an attempt to recruit families from a range of backgrounds in order to obtain a general picture of the variety of types of accounts which might be available from the population at large. In particular, I took care to ensure that, amongst the families used, there were representatives of both those who might have a pre-existing professional or 'academic' (e.g. leisure) interest in 'heritage' issues, and those who had no particular experience with or knowledge about, such issues.

In the event it proved surprisingly difficult to recruit families to participate in the present study. The first strategy used was to establish contacts with employees at Worcester City Council, which then allowed snowballing onto contact with other families. Contacts made through the planning department

at the City Council led me to recruit three generally middle-class families. The snowball had also however, gone beyond the City Council, via school contacts to a further family that had no professional interest in 'heritage' issues.

I established a second snowball through contacts within Lancaster University. A fellow research student had previously worked with conservation volunteers in Worcester and she was able to introduce me to one family who she had formerly worked with. This original family was from a working class back ground and although they had professional interests in environmental issues they were able to generate a generally working class snowball through their parents to three families who did not have any professional interest in 'heritage' issues.

After the first and second stage families had participated in the family focus groups the snowballs began to melt. It seems that the task set for the focus groups was proving quite taxing and time consuming. This had an advantage in that it generated large amounts of very detailed and rich data. Although people seemed to enjoy participating in the family focus groups they found it rather difficult to persuade friends that it was worth giving up an hour and a half of their time.

From the two starts made at the City Council and Conservation Volunteers seven focus groups were completed before the snowballs melted. Of these seven, two groups (one middle class and one working class) had a prior interest in 'heritage' issues. Of the seven, three were generally middle class and four were working class.

An appeal was placed in the *Worcester Evening News* and the Local College of Further Education was leafleted in the hope of generating more family participant groups. In the case of the newspaper appeal one working-class retired couple was recruited, in the second appeal a middle-class couple was recruited who had a strong amateur interest in 'heritage' issues.

The recruitment process ultimately resulted in nine focus groups. This was more than Morgan's (1992, 1997) 'rule of thumb' had suggested, but contained fewer participants because of the size of the families, some were older couples without children. The study originally intended to carry out sixteen focus groups, to compensate for the lack of numbers in each group. As time went on however, it became apparent that similar material was emerging from successive groups and 'saturation' (Morgan 1997) was being achieved. This repetition suggested that according to Morgan (1997) it was time to stop collecting data and get on with the detailed process of analysing it.

**e) Profile of the Families who Participated.**

The table below (Fig 5.3) summarises the families who took part in the family focus groups. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities of the families.

Fig 5.3: Summary of the Families who took part in the Focus Groups.

| **Names** | **Family** | **Middle / Working Class** | **Employment** |
|---|---|---|---|
| John, Karen and Sarah Smith | Father (43), Mother (44) and teenage daughter | Middle | John: Local Authority. Karen: Teacher |
| Stuart, Wendy, Paul and Jo Moston. | Father (47), Mother (42) and teenage son and daughter. | Middle | Stuart: Computers. Wendy: Local Authority. |
| David, Carol, Mark, Julie, Carl, Naomi Westwood. and Debbie Clarke. | Father (38), Mother (37), Teenage son (17) twin son & daughter (14), and daughter (6). Sister in law (34) | Middle | David: Sales. Carol: Part Time. Debbie: Part Time. |
| Phil, Jane and Luke Taylor. | Father (26), Mother (25) and toddler. | Working | Phil: Conservation Volunteers. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mary and William Daish. | Mary (70), William (76) | Working | Retired |
| George and Maud Stevens. | George (78) Maud (75) | Working | Retired |
| Bill and Doreen Williams. | Bill (56) Doreen (54) | Working | Bill: Engineering. Doreen: at Home. |
| James, Helen, Paula and Richard Cooke. | James (35), Helen (33) and two teenagers. | Working | James: Retail Helen: Retail |
| Brian and Rose Stewart. | Brian (60), Rose (56) | Middle | Brian: Banking Rose: Admin |

## 5. The Present Study: The Analytic Procedure.

The tape-recording of each interview was transcribed for basic content. The tape recorder failed to operate for group eight, the Cooke family, and so could not be used in the study. For the purposes of analysis, the transcripts were segmented in various ways. The segmentation was carried out first on grounds of senses of identity required by objective two set out in the introduction. Within this basic segmentation further passages of conversation were analysed according to the subject matter or according to the ways in which people dealt with particular issues.

The first stage involved simply selecting out all the references (whether direct or oblique) to Worcester, Britain and Europe. Each of these broad categories was then analysed in turn. The next stage of the analysis involved the identification of shared features of the accounts: that is, themes or issues that arose regularly in the discussions and were evidenced in more than half of the family groups. Conversely, any particularly idiosyncratic accounts were identified, on the grounds that these might illuminate. The particular features of these shared (or idiosyncratic) references included: the specific pictures identified as representing each category; the general types of image identified as representative (e.g. Victorian or medieval architecture); general issues raised in discussion by the participants (e.g. the specific countries evoked when attempting to define ‘Europe’, what is meant by ‘Britain’ etc.).

A third stage of the analysis focused in a little more detail on the form (rather than the content) of the representations and the arguments about them. This involved consideration of the extent to which particular statements were accepted uncritically, or were treated as potentially contestable; the apparent ease or difficulty that respondents encountered in interpreting particular images or in representing particular locations (indicated by paralinguistic features like pauses, in addition to overt admissions of difficulty on the part of respondents); the particular ways in which speakers attempted to warrant (or, conversely, to question) a claim that any particular picture was representative of Worcester, Britain or Europe.

Much of the description of the present study in this section of chapter five concentrates on the technicality of the study. The analysis in chapter six features a number of topics about which the family groups talked whilst completing their task and considering the images in front of them. Morgan (1997) comments that a topic is worth emphasising if it combines three factors:

i. How many groups mentioned the topic.
ii. How much energy and enthusiasm the topic raised.
iii. How many people within the groups raised the topic.

He states that; if a combination of all three of these factors characterises a particular topic, it can be said to have 'group to group' validation or be 'normative'. It is therefore these topics in particular that are carried forward to the discussion chapters seven and eight, but not entirely. Sometimes an 'idiosyncratic' response from a single person or group suggested an important idea that further research might examine.

Lastly it is important that the researcher reflects on their own role in the activity of the groups. As Morgan (1992, 1997) suggested in his 'rules of thumb' the research design for the family focus groups was quite structured, based around a task, and the researcher played an active role. This primarily consisted of keeping the group focused, by asking what was missing from the set of images. Important for practical purposes of analysis though, were comments telling the tape recorder what image was under discussion at any one time. It will be noted in the analysis chapters that this last activity sometimes led to the researcher's own interests in an image being given some status by the groups. For example referring to the two up two down houses as Victorian housing, a category that the families never used themselves.

## 6. Conclusion: Reflecting on the experience.

A number of issues should be reflected upon with regard to the experience of using qualitative research methods and family focus groups in particular. These reflections have a bearing on my analysis contained in chapter six and on the nature of the research methods in general.

Firstly the general context of the times when the groups took place should be noted. This gives context to the study and would be of particular interest if a significantly nationalist, European or local event took place during the study. A war such as the Gulf war for example would certainly been significant for nationalist sentiment, after all that was what 'banal nationalist flagging' (Billig 1995) was all about. The family focus groups were conducted either side of Christmas 1998. The weather was wintery without being particularly cold. It was out of out of season for tourists. The Clinton and Lewinski Affair and the first meeting of Trimble and Adams in Northern Ireland dominated national news.

Pinochet's arrest was also in the news. In nationalist terms the Kosovo crisis was building up but bombing had not actually begun. Local news was dominated by a crisis in transport.

My role as the researcher in this qualitative study could be described using Jones' words a 'research instrument' (Jones 1985). This meant that as a researcher I had to use all my skills of creativity and self-awareness to develop an empathetic relationship with the families, this empathy had to extend to the analysis. I entered the family groups in trepidation that they would not talk about 'heritage' or identity. How often do we actually articulate these parts of our lives? I was surprised then by the amount of data that was generated, despite the warnings in the literature (Fern 1982, Crabtree et al 1993, Morgan 1997). If the recruitment process had worked better I would never have been able to cope with the amounts of data.

My use of family groups had its problems; the families had a good deal of knowledge that they referred to with out having to articulate what experience they were drawing on. A holiday for example was a joint experience that I was not party to. This necessarily led me to some problems with interpretation of discussions, as it was not always clear to me what, exactly the participants were referring to. However, even this potential problem may be seen to reflect a positive aspect of the research setting, in so far as it demonstrated that the conversations were relatively 'natural' and that the participants were not particularly inclined to orient their accounts to me (or the tape recorder).

It could be argued that using props allowed a good deal of researcher bias into the activity, I chose the images. But this only served to direct the focus groups into the general 'Ball Park' of visual reorientations of the townscape around them The task focused them more to address what evokes particular concepts like the local, national or European, all of which generated discussion relating to a sense of identity.

When analysing the data it was important that I noted the dominance of particular group members, this could usually be dealt with through my own interaction with the group itself. I found that the group dynamic however, could be a potentially helpful feature of using focus groups, so I allowed groups to develop their own dynamics rather than intervening too quickly to discourage dominance. This broadened the scope of the data further by 'placing the control over this interaction in the hands of the participants rather than the researcher' as Morgan suggests (1988, 18). It was rarely the case that a particularly dominant group member would hold stage for an hour or so without being challenged by other group members.

I found issues of convergence and divergence raised by Crabtree et al (1993) particularly interesting when considering concepts of national identity. As the next chapter demonstrates there was considerable convergence on issues of national identity that had particularly important consequences for the development of the central thesis developed by this study. It was fortunate then that the family

atmosphere generated plenty of disagreement and yet also saw families working hard to present a united front. These factors generated a good deal of the most useful passages of talk.

Focus groups certainly generated interesting dynamics that required reflection. I found I had a lead role to play in initiating the activity, but also needed to take a back seat when discussion was flowing. It was my role to keep the group on the general topic without leading them. In the present study this was aided by the use of a task and 'props', (sets of photographs) as stimuli. The setting of a task for respondents meant that their attention was heavily concentrated upon the exercise in hand (producing rich and detailed data). On the other hand, respondents could have perceived the concept of the exercise as a form of 'test' in which there were 'correct' answers. I needed to temper any such desire on the part of the respondents to 'say the right thing'.

I also found the use of focus groups particularly appropriate when considering the social value of 'heritage' debate. In situations where there is a gap between professionals (in this case 'heritage' managers) and the public at large the open approach of the focus group seemed particularly appropriate. The idea that there might be a gap between professional groups and the public that they serve tapped directly into the heart of the 'value of heritage' debate. As Morgan and Krueger put it, professionals 'all develop ways of thinking about reality that may be substantially different from the people they are trying to reach' (Morgan and Krueger 1993, 16). The interactions of focus groups gave an opportunity to consider how others think and talk, and had the potential to reveal to the professionals the reality of their customers' perceptions.

I had certainly entered the research process with my own expectations, based on the literature that I had studied. I held the belief that 'heritage' is not just important for an elite group (i.e. upper and middle class museum visitors) but that it is also simply understood and appreciated by the majority in ways not easily recognised by that elite. Some of my expectations were bourn out, but as the next chapters will show I was also able to construct a thesis regarding the ways that people use visual stereotypes that I never dreamt of before the analysis began.