

Festive Landscapes: The Contemporary Practice of Well-Dressing in Tissington

Well-dressing is a festive practice that takes place in many Derbyshire villages each year from May until late summer. A well-dressing is a wooden board, coated in clay, with flower petals and other natural materials pressed into it to make pictures, words and patterns; the boards are generally placed next to wells and water sources (Figure 1). In 2016, 102 communities dressed wells, primarily these were villages situated in Derbyshire, many of which fall within the area of the Peak District National Park (Williams, 2016).ⁱ

This practice has not been subject to academic analysis for over thirty years, in which time rural communities have transformed, the decrease in agricultural labour, increase in tourism and rise in property prices have led to significant population changes in terms of age and class. In addition, theoretical renderings of place have also developed significantly, particularly in terms of the growth of critical landscape studies and the influence of non-representational theory (Berberich & Campbell, 2015; Scott & Swenson, 2015; Thrift, 2008).

This article examines well-dressing in relation to different aspects of landscape in the Peak District. Its central arguments are that: the practice is a product of the geological particularities of the North Derbyshire landscape and that the practice produces new geographies or experiences of landscape, particularly in those involved in designing and making the well-dressings. This investigation focuses on well-dressing in one village, through interviews and participant observation it builds a detailed account of the practice in this community. It centres on local specificity, however, throughout the account it is possible to map the connections between this localised practice and the wider, sometimes global forces, which are shaping contemporary rural experience. Importantly, this article asserts that attending to the present-day manifestations of well-dressing is productive in articulating a set of diverse forms of landscape, which texture contemporary rural everyday life.

Well-dressing in Tissington

Well-dressing has local variations and histories in each village, for example: differently shaped boards, different methods of applying the clay, different rules about the types of materials that can be used to make the pictures, some villages have competitions between the wells, some villages only portray Christian themes, while others relate their well-dressings to current events. These distinctions can make it unproductive to write about the practice of well-dressing in general, any attempt is full of qualifications, or else it irons out the specific character of particular events. For this reason, and to allow the practice to be examined in sufficient detail and in relation to a specific place, this article will focus on well-dressing in the village of Tissington.

Tissington is a small village within the Peak District National Park. Its population is around 110, a high proportion are retired and there are very few children in the village. Almost all the properties belong to the Tissington Estate, which has been owned by the FitzHerbert family since 1465, and are occupied by tenants. All of the houses were built prior to the mid nineteenth century, and are constructed from local limestone. At the centre stands Tissington Hall, an imposing Jacobean Manor, there is a duck pond and a Norman Church. The village school has been converted into a private kindergarten and there is no shop, post office or pub. There are however several businesses catering to tourists such as an “old-fashioned” sweetshop, a tearoom, a candle making workshop, plant nursery and Bed and Breakfast establishments. Tissington is thought to have the longest tradition of well-dressing (Porteous, 1949, p. 43), and a reputation as the “best” (Naylor, 1983, p. 20).

Each spring, a week or so before Ascension Dayⁱⁱ, large timber boards, shaped like gothic church windows, their surface knobbled with the heads of large nails, are dropped into the village pond,

where they float, soaking up the brown water until their grain is saturated. Clay, dug from a seam in one of the local fields, is pounded with feet until it is sticky and malleable enough to push into the boards, the nail heads giving some purchase for the slippery mixture of earth and water. The surface is worked until it resembles a wax tablet, smooth and even.

In stables, sheds, and a marquee tent, teams of mainly female workers, spend three intense days, fuelled by tea and biscuits, preparing the dressings for display. In Tissington there are six wells: Hands Well, Children's Well, Hall Well, Town Well, Yew Tree Well and Coffin Well. Each well has a team of dressers managed by the designer, who is in charge of devising a new design for the well each year and sourcing the materials.

The design is traced into the clay from original drawings, pricked through the paper in series of tiny dots. Coffee beans or alder cones are then pushed into these outlines to form the foundation of the design – a process called “black knobbing”. Next, come the flower petals, which are individually placed onto the clay surface to represent areas of colour – the red of a robe or the blue of the sky. The petals are arranged to overlap like tiles on a roof, so that they might resist the inevitable rain showers during their display. Heads bowed, it is intricate work and has to be completed on time.

On the Wednesday night before Ascension Day, men and tractors from the local farms tow, lift, pull and push, the stubborn yet fragile well-dressings into place. The complex construction of summer board (the main design) inner columns, outer columns, and letter arch, all heavily swollen with water and weighted with clay, need to be coaxed into a jigsaw-style fit.

The next morning, after a service of hymns and readings, a procession starts from the village church, past the tea tent, past the port-a-loos, and past the National Trust stand selling memberships. In front, a group of clergy, their white surplices blowing in the breeze; behind, a crowd, since it is a weekday morning they are mainly tourists, some locals, many of them retired. At each of the six wells there is a sermon, a prayer, a song.

In the mid twentieth century, local children having been given the day off school, would be excited to get to the fairground rides and stalls that were set up in a nearby field. In the early nineteenth century much drinking and jollity was the order of the day, for locals and those who had travelled into the village in ‘Gigs, chaises, cars, carts, wagons, private chariots, coaches and landaus [that] filled the farm yards and roads everywhere’ (Porteous, 1949, p. 54). These days more tourists come: Sir Richard FitzHerbert, 9th Baronet and current incumbent of Tissington Hall, estimates the figure at around 35,000 over 7 days. They still park their vehicles on the nearby fields, or they come in coaches and are dropped off at the café, owned by the FitzHerberts, for a cream tea.

As with most calendar customs, the origins of well-dressing are uncertain. In this respect, what contemporary participants choose to project as the official story is most significant. The literature on display in Tissington, which includes a leaflet produced each year and a series of public display boards situated next to the wells, cites two possible origin narratives, both centring on the idea of giving thanks for a clean water supply. The first is connected to an outbreak of plague in 1348-49 from which the villagers were saved by their apparently unpolluted water supply; the second, relates to a drought recorded in 1615 during which the Tissington wells miraculously continued to run.

That said, the first source that records well-dressing at Tissington in its present form is much later. It dates from 1818 and notes that in addition to the older tradition of wreaths and garlands adorning the wells that:

sometimes boards are used, which are cut to the figure intended to be represented, and covered with moist clay into which the stems of flowers are inserted,...the boards thus adorned are so placed in the spring that the water appears to issue from amongst beds of flowers (Porteous, 1949, p. 18).ⁱⁱⁱ

A description which still accurately portrays the practice as it is carried out today.

Recording well-dressing

There have been several local publications on well-dressings, perhaps the most well-known and certainly the most entertaining is the *Beauty and Mystery of Well-dressing* by the journalist and mid-twentieth century chronicler of the county of Derbyshire, Crichton Porteous (1949/1978; see also Naylor and Porter, 2002). In this publication, the first devoted to the subject, he tours Peak District villages visiting festivals, talking to locals and tries to discover the origins of the tradition. It is notable that on visiting Tissington he is surprised to find that there has not been any well-dressing since 1939. This was not only because a shortage of labourers during the war but also, because the hostilities had stopped the supply of dried flowers, which were dyed and used to form the basis of many of the Tissington well-dressings. In response to this news Porteous (1949) exclaims:

Foreign everlasting flowers – dyed! Here in the mother-place of the ancient custom I had confidently expected to be told that the rules of screen dressing were the strictest in the world. Yet, no, I learned that rice also was one of the basic “pigments” before the war, and that for skies it was often shaded with wash-day “blue-bag” (p. 46)

Porteous was writing during the period of nation building that took place after the Second World War, in which the Festival of Britain played a central role, attempting to integrate a modern future for the nation with a vision that valued its heritage through the valorisation of rural crafts and folk art (Conekin, 2003). While well-dressings may have remained a regional practice, the attention devoted to them in Porteous’ volume situates their “discovery”, analysis and chronicling as part of this wider project. This saw the rural community and the deep past, which this symbolised, as being strong, vibrant and as central to the conceptualisation of post-war British national identity as new towns and Scandinavian influenced interior design.

The practice also features in texts that record British folklore, many of which were published in the 1970s. This was a period when the everyday practices of rural life were perceived to have changed to such an extent that many museums began to preserve everyday things such as farm machinery, tools, and rural crafts. In these works, short descriptions of the festival appear alongside other regional customs, demonstrating the anxious impulse to capture these traditions before they died out (Hogg, 1971; Long, 1977 and Christian, 1972). This impulse is also present in the much earlier work of pioneering photographer of folkloric practices Benjamin Stone, who took photographs of the Tissington well-dressings in 1899 (see Ford, 1974 and Victoria and Albert Museum [V&A], 2016).

More recently, well-dressings have featured in two significant projects which have marked the recent resurgence of folk art as a serious subject in both contemporary art and art history. At the turn of the millennium, the artists Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane travelled the country collecting evidence of contemporary folk art practice as self-styled artists and anthropologists (Deller and Kane, 2008, p. 1). Deller and Kane’s *Folk Archive* redefined the possibilities of folk art in contemporary society; as well as more traditional practices their project included crop circles, hand crafted protest banners, and decorated lorry cabs. Deller and Kane place well-dressing amongst this wide-ranging arena of visual and performative practices, with images from the Derbyshire Villages of Chapel-en-le-Frith, Eyam and Buxworth, featuring alongside customised cigarettes and sand

sculptures in the ephemeral category of the archive. The subject experienced its big institutional moment with a major exhibition *British Folk Art* at Tate Britain in 2014. In the exhibition, (although sadly not the catalogue) well-dressings featured amongst an array of photographs surveying regional calendar customs (Kenny, 2014).^{iv}

There has only been one in depth piece of academic research on the subject, carried out by Anthropologist S.Elizabeth Bird in 1983. Bird conducts a functional analysis of well-dressing speculating on its social and economic functions and maps the moments at which the festival has been revived, drawing on data from eighteen different communities. Bird (1983) concludes that:

The basic function of well-dressing over time has been social integration, either as a celebration of a felt unity and continuity, or as a conscious attempt to create a sense of community, A more practical function has been the attraction of tourists; in a few cases this motivation has become paramount (p. 71)

Since Bird's study 33 years ago, Tissington has changed from what Bird described as a 'Working Village' (1983, p. 66), where a large proportion of residents work in and around the village, to a community centred on tourism, where most of those employed in the village travel in from outside and most of those residents who are still of working age commute to jobs elsewhere (Interview, 1 March, 2016). While her assertion that well-dressing is linked to social integration is still relevant to an analysis of the contemporary practice, this article attempts to recognise the complexities of many different forms of social relationships and connections, which are performed through well-dressing. Furthermore, it expands this idea towards a mapping of the different landscapes articulated and produced by well-dressing as it is practiced in Tissington.

A regional Landscape

In Mike Pearson's (2006) account of and response to festive performance in his home village of Hibaldstow, Lincolnshire, *In comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape*, he orientates the discourse and physicality of performance in relation to the place or landscape in which it happens. Pearson designates this approach as, 'topophilic in attitude, acknowledging the affective ties between people and place' (2006, p. 4). This article also adopts a topophilic methodology, in its attunement to the ways in which well-dressing is both a product of certain landscape conditions and at the same time produces different forms of landscape.

Many theorists draw on the idea that landscape can be conceptualised as the integration between natural and human phenomena, including cultural elements such as images, stories and histories (Cosgrove, 1984 ; Sharma, 1996 and Wylie, 2007). Similarly, geographer, Michael Woods (2015) has written about the rural as an assemblage a term that is usefully attuned to the connections and entanglements, which characterise any account of landscape. For Woods the rural assemblage is composed of many different elements, a perspective that includes the material composition of the landscape – its geology as well as the plants, animals and people who live there. All these agents are active in producing landscape. This article attempts to map some of the landscapes that are articulated or produced by well-dressing practice.

Like Pearson's account of the calendar customs that he has grown up with in Leicestershire, this research is located in the discourses of regionality, localness and the situated self. These are themes that are richly developed in the work of anthropologist Kathleen Stewart. In her essay *Regionality*, Stewart (2013) conducts a 'writing experiment' about her hometown, tuning in to its specificities, its

ways of doing and being. She asserts that: 'Approaching regionality means finding ways to sidle up to its peculiar ongoing generativity, the way that its affects become native, attending to bodies and socialities, to an ethos, to the very possibility of an ordinary' (Stewart, 2013, p. 283). This approach aligns well with the topophilic, acknowledging that the minutia of the quotidian - gestures, speech, ways of thinking and behaving, emerge as important and distinctive markers of place, affective relationships with the landscape and of the nature of everyday life. Regionality also suggests that forms of localness - being from somewhere, or connected to it - can be a way of "sidling" up to a place, of indirectly tuning into its particularities.

Stewart attempts to capture the affective nature of being from a place: 'Being "from here" nests in concentric rings stretching out from encounters to tastes, bodies, neighbourhoods, a valley, a state, a geographical region' (2013, p. 280). In Tissington, I am a researcher, an academic, a stranger, but I am also almost a local. I glimpse the feeling of being "from here" in moments of personal recognition, certain words run together, a self-deprecating modesty of achievement, a farm kitchen interior with the fire lit at 8am. I am "from here", but not "from here". Growing up in South Derbyshire, the landscape, of soon-to-be-closed coal mines and over-grown slag heaps, seemed a long way from the Peak District Derbyshire that we visited on bank holidays, where we hopped precariously across the famous stepping-stones at Dove Dale, or climbed the footpaths, which seemed impossibly steep, to the summit of Thorpe Cloud. I am from a different sort of Derbyshire, but well-dressing has been part of my Peak District landscape since I visited Tissington on a school trip when I was 6. I bought a postcard and kept it for many years, it was of Town Well. The dressing depicted two men in long robes, one of whom was holding an old fashioned looking lantern, the lettering arched around the picture read: 'I am the Light of the World'; I remember feeling confused about the meaning of this, but enjoyed the rich purple colour of the petals.

Now, after many years away "down south" I am once again "from here" but not "from here". Introduced as an academic from Manchester Metropolitan University, I noticed well-dressers visibly relax when I told them that rather than being from Manchester, I lived near Chapel-en-le-Frith (a small Derbyshire town some 25 miles north of Tissington). There was a recognition of shared landscapes, experiences, localness, but still a difference "well you'll be used to the cold in this barn then living all the way up there".

As a researcher, occupying this liminal space between "from here" and "not from here", enables Stewart's sense of 'sidling' up to a place; in particular, it allows the development of a complex overlay of different, yet simultaneous articulations of landscape. These landscapes are intertwined within the well-dressing experience, however, attending to them separately allows their differences and characteristics to be drawn out more fully. What follows is an account of four of these landscapes: the geological, botanical, community and hegemonic landscapes.

The geological landscape

In a sense, the geological composition of the Peak District landscape itself produces well-dressing, through the production of an abundance of natural springs which are at the centre of the festive practice. Much of the Peak District is on a limestone plateau, bordered by margins of millstone grit. Limestone areas are referred to as White Peak and mill stone grit areas are called the Dark Peak, named for the comparative colours of these stones, found in housing stock and field boundary walls. Tissington sits within the White Peak area. The porous limestone drains rainwater from the earth, which can lead to dry conditions even where rainfall is high. Within the limestone, are strata of

impervious volcanic lava. Where the strata outcrop into the landscape they create the natural springs that are characteristic of the area (Naylor, 1983, p.5). In Tissington, the village wells are fed by these springs and therefore never run dry, whereas wells and streams on the limestone uplands often suffer from droughts. As detailed above, one of the origin stories relating to well-dressings is that in 1615 the area experienced a terrible drought, however Tissington's wells were able to provide water for the surrounding villages and their livestock, and well-dressings were made in thanks. While the dates of this story are disputed (Porteous, 1949, p. 38) the relationship between the geological landscape and the tradition is clear.

Other local geological features have also played a role in shaping the form and appearance of the well-dressings. The intricate designs are made by pressing flower petals into a surface of wet clay. This material is still dug each year from a seam beneath the surface of a local field. In addition, traditionally, the background of many of the designs is filled in with fluorspar or spar as it is called by the well-dressers. This takes the form of tiny white stone chips with a slight iridescence. Because of this quality, it was thought to be good for representing clouds and as a contrasting background behind lettering (Figure 2). When the sun shines on the fluorspar it reflects brightly, and appears to glisten.

Fluorspar was a by-product of the Peak District lead mining industry. Lead mining ceased in Derbyshire in the 1950s however, recently some of these old mines have been reopened specifically to mine fluorspar as demand and subsequently prices for this mineral have risen substantially since 2000 (tertiaryminerals.com). It is used in the manufacture of Polytetrafluoroethylene, a substance that is best known by the brand name is Teflon™. This substance of course has many applications including communications cables, one of the reasons for the leap in demand during the 21st century. Interestingly it is also used in the manufacture of GORE-TEX™, often found in the waterproof clothing popular with many visitors to the Peak District National Park. This shift in technologies and world mineral prices has been felt on a local level and had the effect of increasing the price of fluorspar and decreasing the quality of the product that is available to the well-dressers. Increasingly, fluorspar is being replaced in the well-dressings by alternatives such as the gravel used in the bottom of fish tanks bought from local pet shops. This commodity also reflects contemporary topologies of global trade as according to the packaging it is sourced from China.

The botanical landscape

In Tissington the accepted rule is that well-dressings have to be made from natural materials. In practice, the sourcing of these natural materials varies between the different wells and between the local and the global. At Hall Well most of the flowers were bought in bulk from florists, who are likely to have sourced their supply from The Netherlands and Kenya (Hughes 2000). At Hands Well, flowers sourced locally and through international trade are intermingled as large buckets full of locally gathered bluebells stood next to commercially grown carnations. At this well, a dresser was sent out to collect more 'orange flowers [Kerria japonica 'Pleniflora'] from grandma's garden'. The inclusion of this plant synthesises these different geographies combining its local source with its Chinese origins.

The practice of well-dressing and the sourcing of natural materials this entails, produces an affective relationship with the landscape that is alert to the smallest variations in the tone or colour of plant material. At Coffin Well the designer explained to me that catkins gathered last year and catkins gathered this year were used to give two slightly different shades of khaki, the difference only being perceptible when the dressing was moved outside and stood in its vertical position. Leaves from the snowberry bush were shown to be deep green on one side and silver green on the reverse.

The well-dressing designers also articulate an imaginative relationship with the landscape, they are always assessing botanical elements for their capacities to represent other things. One designer said that she noticed some dried lavender heads in her garden and thought they looked like locusts' legs, an engagement with the landscape that inspired a representation of the different biblical plagues in 2007. Similarly this year furry pussy willow buds were used to represent woolly sheep.

Botanical topographies of these landscapes are produced and held in the memory of the designers, for example, each well-dressing is edged with springs of yew and well-dressers carry a map in their heads of where these very old trees grow. There is also an attunement to seasonal variations, with the designers making evaluations about which buds, flowers or leaves will be ready for the festival and which materials can be picked now and preserved for use later. Traditionally, alder cones are collected in late winter for black knobbing (outlining), alternatively and in more recent years, coffee beans are used for this purpose (Figure 3). Perhaps surprisingly, these have also been gleaned from the local landscape, in that they have been provided by the Nestlé coffee factory situated in the village of Hatton about a 40 minute drive away, a further example of the intertwining of the global and the local and evidence of the ways in which folk practices evolve within dominant economic conditions.

The community landscape

Festive forms like well-dressing are often theorised as tools of social integration, which create and maintain community identity (Bird, 1983; Liepins, 2000; Picard and Robinson, 2006). Scott McCabe's work on the Shrovetide Football in Ashbourne, a small market town that is a close neighbour to Tissington is perhaps especially relevant in this regard. McCabe (2006) asserts that knowledge of the official and unspoken rules of the game marks players and observers as 'local', belonging to a community, which is made distinct by this festive practice (p. 108, 110). There are parallels here with well-dressing in that dressers belong to a team attached to a specific well and don't often move between wells; knowledge of the different techniques and the amount of years a dresser has been involved also act as markers of belonging. Many of the well-dressers told me about their connections with the festival, often asserting their "right to be there" through many years of involvement, or through family ties to a team of well-dressers. The idea that many of the dressers have been involved for much of their lives and that well-dressing is often a family affair creates an atmosphere of community, stability and cohesion. This adds to the touristic appeal of the practice: one visitor to the village who came to see the dressings being made said, "this is what we need more of", meaning traditional village communities.

Given this appearance of community and stability, it is perhaps surprising to find that the majority of the well dressers do not live in the village of Tissington. They live outside the village boundary, or once used to live in Tissington and have now moved to Ashbourne or surrounding villages, some have moved further afield but return to the village each year for well-dressing and to renew old acquaintances. One member of a dressing team has come on holiday to the area specifically to help with and see the well-dressings for the past 10 years. In this way, instead of the expected, permanent, stable village community, well-dressing builds a temporary annual community. This flexible communal landscape is a product of the mobilities, both physical and virtual, which have been a feature of post-modern societies, in which movement away from perceived "home" communities is valorised and often economically necessary. In the case of Tissington, the decrease in farm labour, the rise in tourism to the area, particularly after the formation of the Peak District National Park and the nearby Tissington Trail and changes in the management of the Tissington estate have transformed the composition of the village, towards a population which has a majority of retired residents who have come to the village later in life.^v

This demographic is well suited to voluntary activities like well-dressing however few of these newer residents take part. It seems that well-dressing is perceived by non-participants as an activity for those who have long standing connections with the village, even if they don't actually live in it anymore. That localness or community belonging is achieved in contemporary rural places through longevity of connection rather than geographical location. One might live in a village but not identify as being "from" that place. In this way, the resident community becomes somewhat hollowed out, overshadowed by community events that engage few of the actual residents.

The hegemonic landscape

Folk art is often seen as a creative practice of, or belonging to "the people", in this way it can present a challenge to the establishment (Nivan, 2010). In aesthetic form if not in subject matter, the well-dressings bear a visual resemblance to trade workers union banners that often articulate socialist ideals of solidarity. However, as pieces of folk art, well-dressings are in many ways deeply conservative and reflect and reinforce local power structures and more over-arching hegemonic agencies. One way in which this is expressed is in the subject matter depicted in the dressings. This is overwhelmingly based around the Christian church, the monarchy and the military. There are of course exceptions to this rule - depictions of Winnie the Pooh, Alice in Wonderland or local anniversaries - however even these examples present a comfortable, white, middle class, valorisation of heritage and tradition.

This relationship between folk practice and power structures is nothing new: many historians of festive forms alert us to the role that even the most raucous events played in making visible hierarchical community structures such as the church and the state. In this visibility lay the possibility for critique and counter hegemonic activity. This often took the form of ritualised reversals, for example, when the priest becomes the fool for the day or the servants rule the town. However, these traditional folk festivals have also been conceptualised as "safety-valves" allowing communities to misbehave for a day, after which normality would be resumed and any real challenge to power would be suppressed (Burke, 1978; Hill, 1984 and Humphry, 2001). The Tissington well-dressing festival creates little opportunity for misbehaving; it does however articulated this hegemonic landscape in a number of ways.

Tissington is relatively unusual in that the village is part of an estate, which is owned by the FitzHerbert family, who still occupy Tissington Hall. As noted above, the great majority of the properties in the village are owned by the estate and their occupants are the tenants of Sir Richard FitzHerbert. The importance of the FitzHerbert family is made visible through the Hall Well: this is situated at the centre of the village opposite Tissington Hall, and it is the grandest of the wells, with a large stone canopy and substantial channel of water running from it (Figure 4). It is the first well to have its dressing erected on the evening before Ascension Day and it is the first well to be blessed by in the procession on the following day, even though geographically it is not closest to the church.

Sir Richard's position as a figure of authority is reinforced throughout the well-dressing festival. He is responsible for choosing the theme for the Hall Well each year, he takes an unofficial leadership role on the well-dressing committee, and organises much of the infra-structure for the festival. As a public figure, Sir Richard takes ownership of the festival, often mentioning it in his monthly columns for *Derbyshire Life* magazine. During the accompanying church service, he is the only person to read a lesson from the bible who is not a member of the clergy. In addition, he acts as an ambassador figure: this year, during the ceremonial procession, he conducted an impromptu talk about the well-dressings for some French visitors which turned into a public address.

The role of the church in this festival is also notable in terms of its influence in the community. The origins of well-dressing cannot be traced, however some commentators speculate on possible Roman or Pagan beginnings, citing the connections between well-dressing and Roman shrines to water deities (Naylor, 1983 and Porteous, 1949). In Tissington, although not in all villages that dress wells, the festival is conceptualised as a Christian celebration and linked to the Church calendar by Ascension Day. Ronald Hutton, the historian of folk practices, notes that the church sought to increase its influence through adopting older pagan festivities: this is a recurring pattern in the history of festive forms, which can be seen the inclusion of harvest festival and yuletide into the Christian calendar (Hutton 1996 p.277).

In the contemporary festival, the influence of the church seems to be at its most powerful as a marker of desirable heritage rather than as a strongly practised faith. There is some discussion amongst the well-dressers as to whether the dressing should always have a biblical theme. One designer told said that in her opinion they should, but because that was the tradition, rather than because it reflected deeply held beliefs. Often, it seems that a theme is chosen, for example in 2016 Hands Well took the 150th anniversary of Beatrix Potter's birth as its theme, and then a bible story is found to fit in with this theme, on this occasion Adam naming the animals. While the biblical story takes the centreboard in the conceptualisation of the well, it is the smaller outside columns where Peter Rabbit and Mrs Tiggy Winkle are depicted that take precedence.

Therefore, while the church may claim this festival as its own, and all appearances suggest its primary position in the proceedings, there is an ambivalence around its role in contemporary village life. It is interesting to note that very few of the well-dressers attend the church service that accompanies the blessings of the wells, with the congregation primarily comprised of tourist coach parties.

Conclusion

Informed by my own connections to place, this article has sought to map some of the affective relationships between the festive practice of well-dressing and landscape. It has argued that well-dressing is a product of specific geological landscape conditions, which create the naturally occurring springs in the area. Furthermore, it asserts that the occurrence of the mineral fluorspar and the availability of local clay are factors that have shaped the form and appearance of this distinctive regional practice. It goes on to argue, that not only is the festival a product of a specific landscape, it also produces or articulates a set of different landscapes.

A detailed and imaginative relationship to botanical landscape is cultivated by some of the well-dressing designers, including new geographies of the locality, produced through an attunement to seasonality and a mapping of the location of useful plant materials. It was found that well-dressings articulate the complex nature of the community landscape in contemporary rural places. Rather than being a straightforward community building activity for the residents of Tissington, it produces a temporary community of dressers from different locations and with different relationships to the village. This highlights the population change in the village, which reflects conditions that are both specific to Tissington and global shifts in industry, economy and lifestyle that have changed the nature of many rural villages in the UK.

Finally, well-dressing makes visible a deeply conservative relationship to the past and tradition. This is a characteristic cultivated by rural places, not simply as a reflection of the attitudes of the residents, but as a response to the important role that the tourist industry often plays there. The old, the traditional, the unchanged, this is what many tourists want to experience when they visit the

countryside. However this performance of the past also serves the power structures of the village, primarily the estate and the church. This hegemonic landscape is inscribed in the festival from the subject matter depicted to the order in which the wells are blessed. However, it is also possible to see that in practice rather than in appearance the Church's role is one associated more with tradition and the performance of a cosy, tourist friendly, national past, as any deeply held beliefs.

An examination of the festival through the lens of landscape in the expanded field reveals the practice to be dialectical. It is an opportunity for creative expression, the practice of skilled crafting techniques, and space in which new communities are temporarily brought together, while simultaneously it is also a mechanism for the enacting of village power structures and an agent in reinforcing the relationship between the rural and conservative constructions of the past. Attending to the detail of this regional practice contributes to a multi textured rendering of contemporary rural life.

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ⁱ A small number of villages that border the county in Staffordshire, Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire also practice the tradition. In addition well-dressing takes place in a small amount of locations outside this specific geographic region, particularly in the western counties of England, though it rarely takes the distinctive Derbyshire form of pictures made from flower petals, pressed into clay coated wooden boards (see Naylor and Porter 2002).

ⁱⁱ Ascension Day is part of the Christian calendar, it falls 40 days after Easter and commemorates Jesus Christ's ascension into heaven.

ⁱⁱⁱ There is an earlier source relating to 1758, however this reported the wells being adorned by garlands, not the petalled boards which have become central to the tradition (Christian, 1972, p. 46)

^{iv} Folk Archive and the exhibition at the Tate are part of a wider recovery of interest in the subject by artists and institutions. This includes the artist Vladimir Arkhipov's collections of handmade objects from soviet era Russia and beyond (Arkhipov, 2006), together with exhibitions such as *An Alternative Guide to the Universe* at the Hayward Gallery (Wertheim, 2013) which presented the work of "outsider artists" as a challenge to orthodox understandings of society, and *Disobedient Objects* at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Grindon and Flood, 2014) which showed handmade and collectively created objects that had been used by different protest movements in struggles towards social change.

^v The Tissington Trail is a walking/cycling trail developed on the site of a closed down railway line