

Connected Communities Heritage Network symposium, Sheffield, January 15 2015

Heritage and the unexpected: A workshop

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Agatha Christie's 'Unexpected Guest' arrives at a murder scene with the apparent murderer standing over the body. He helps piece together an alternative past to what the audience thinks must have happened, and in doing so sheds new light on the present too. But in the play one unexpected event merely leads to another – which for Agatha Christie fans is not itself entirely unexpected, of course. The past, it seems, is very much open to the persuasion of the unpredictable: a surprise event, a plot-twist, a new voice from the past or the present.

In this workshop, we will take inspiration from Christie's play to look at the relationship between what was planned – what we thought would happen – and what actually happens in heritage research. While it is a truism to say that good research turns up the unexpected, we want to explore the role of the unexpected during and following heritage research.

- How flexible and responsive can co-produced heritage research be to the unexpected?
- What unexpected events or processes derail heritage research, and what push it forward?
- How can we value the unexpected, in terms of both the process and content of research?
- Who, at the end of the day, dunnit?

In the workshop we will develop individual and project narratives of the unexpected. We will share the narratives in small groups and then bring them together to help reflect collectively on the things we didn't think would happen, and what happened when they did. More broadly, we invite participants to reflect on the variety of outcomes and legacies that co-produced heritage research can bring. The workshop will be based in the AHRC Heritage Legacies project.