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# Goldmine or bottomless pitt? Exploiting Cornwall's mining heritage

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**Abstract:** *This research paper discusses the rise of the heritage and tourist industry in Cornwall. It aims to historically contextualize this process by analyzing it in relation to the neo-liberal political landscape of the 1980s. The paper highlights several consequences of industrial heritage tourism in the region, including the growing gap between rich and poor that resulted from the arrival of newcomers from the richer Eastern counties and the perceived downplaying of Cornish heritage. It will explain how these developments paved the way for regionalist activists who strived for more Cornish autonomy in the field of heritage preservation and exploitation.*

**Keywords:** Industrial heritage tourism; Cornwall; Thatcherism; Mining heritage

**JEL Classification:** B00, L72, B3

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

“The winding engines used to sing, a melody to Cornish tin [...] The water now reclaims the mine, and young men talk of old men’s time [...] The hammer of the auction man is the only sound we soon will hear, and visitors will make the noise, and order drinks from Cornish boys” (Bryant, 1996).

Cornwall is located in the most south-western part of the British Isles. The county is roughly separated from the rest of England by the Tamar river, which has its source just four miles from Cornwall’s north coast and runs all the way south where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Some Cornish residents find this geographical reality regrettable and wish that Cornwall would be cut-off from England entirely (Laviolette, 2011). Cornwall is indeed separated by more than the Tamar alone; the region has a strong sense of ‘non-English’ identity. The Cornish not only identified themselves through their ‘significant other’, but also took proud in their region’s rich industrial history. The decline of the Cornish tin and copper mining industry in the last quarter of the twentieth century had a disruptive effect on the regional economy and culture. The Conservative government of the 1980s wished to cushion the negative economic and social effect of deindustrialization by transforming Cornwall’s economy,

stimulating the commercial exploitation of former industrial sites.

This attempted transition, however, went far from smoothly. Service jobs in the tourist sector were often seasonal and low-paid. Skilled craftsmen, miners with righteous professional pride were forced into menial and servile jobs like ice-cream seller or car-park attendant (Deacon et al., 1988; Urry, 1990). The county’s real-estate market was hijacked by second home owners. Moreover, many of the new heritage attractions – museums, historic theme parks – seemed to misrepresent Cornwall, either by portraying it as just another part of England, or by making a caricature of its unique and distinctive history (Kennedy & Kingcome, 1998). According to critics, heritage was no longer preserved as intrinsically valuable. Instead, objects were sanitized, wrapped and prepared for tourist consumption. These sentiments gave rise to numerous conflicts between local and national actors over the use, selection and interpretation of heritage objects in Cornwall.

This paper aims to analyze Cornwall’s economic transition in the context of the changing political climate of the 1980s. The case shows that debates about heritage and tourism do not take place in a void but are constantly impacted by broader economic and political changes. The first section describes the history of industrialization and industrial decline in Cornwall. The second section analyzes the Conservative

government's answer to the challenges posed by the loss of industry. It particularly focuses on the rise of industrial heritage tourism in the 1980s. The paper concludes with an assessment of the consequences of the new tourist industry for the region's sense of identity and autonomy. It will show how the rising tourist industry formed a seedbed for activist groups with a strong regionalist agenda.

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## 2 THE RISE AND FALL OF BRITAIN'S SILICON-VALLEY

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The rough land of Cornwall is underlain by extensive deposits of tin, copper, silver, gold, lead, zinc, iron, arsenic, uranium and other minerals, making it a rare geological wonderland. Some historians (Shell, 1978; Trounson & Bullen, 2012) claim that exploitation of these mineral resources had already begun in Roman times, but the history of large-scale mining in Cornwall begins in the eighteenth century with the Industrial Revolution. The new industry's hunger for metal – particularly copper and tin – stimulated the Cornish miners to delve ever deeper. At its peak there were almost 3,000 mines in Cornwall. Mining created a dynamic industrial society in Britain's far west. It was “the Silicon-valley of its day” (BBC, 2003[1986]). All kinds of mining related industries emerged here: iron foundries, boiler works, sawmills, rope works, candle factories, boot and shoe works, clothing manufactories, explosive works, fuse works, and other industries needed to keep the mines running. This society was the cradle of technological innovations like high pressure steam engines and pneumatic drills, that served not only mining but other branches of industry too (Sharpe, 2005).

Cornwall was one of the first regions in Britain to industrialize. However, it was also one of the first regions to experience industrial decline. The prices of lead and tin collapsed in 1866. In the 1880s, the same happened to the price of copper. Ironically, this was in part the result of the success of the Cornish miners, who had helped export skills, knowledge and technologies to regions that now formed Cornwall's biggest competition in the global market (Payton, 2005). Especially metal from Australia and the Americas was so cheap that Cornwall's older and deeper mines were no longer competitive. Deindustrialization had a heavy toll on the county's economy and demography. The workforce began to emigrate in great numbers. One third of the population left to try their luck elsewhere. It took until 1971 before the population rate was back at the level of the 1850s (Deacon, 2010; Deacon, 2004).

Once busy mining settlements were abandoned, harbours silted up, wharves rotted away, and fields were left to grow weeds. Land that had been used for mining was often so polluted that it could not be used for any other purpose. The remains of the mining industry – its pump houses and hoists – were often used as dump sites or as quarries for building materials. According to local historian and archaeologist Adam Sharpe this carelessness was explainable: “No longer were they the power house of the economy, but a painful reminder of hard times” (Sharpe, 2005: 69). Cornwall's deindustrialization process was long and excruciating. One

could claim that even by the late twentieth century, the Cornish economy had still not fully recovered from the downfall that had begun in the 1860s. By the 1980s, Cornwall's unemployment was amongst the highest in Britain at 18.4 percent. The gross salaries of those who were employed was 18 percent below the national average, and Cornwall's gross domestic product was the second lowest of all regions and counties in Scotland, England and Wales (Havinden et al., 1991).

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## 3 FROM TIN TO TOURISM

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By the early 1980s, only a hand full of mines were still struggling on. With the tin prices getting another blow in 1985 and the Conservative government refusing to further subsidize the industry, these mines also closed down one by one. The closure of South Crofty (Fig. 1) – the last working mine – in 1998 led to public grief. As the Cornish historian Bernd Deacon observed: “the despair [that the closure of South Crofty] evoked was deeper than that accompanying normal bad economic news. Local communities mourned the loss of over 2,000 years of mining” (Deacon, 2010: 17; see also Buckley, 1997). On the days following the mine's closure, brass bands led processions of people from the nearby villages to the mine site, where they came together to pay tribute and say their goodbyes. The loss was not only economic, but also social and cultural.

An anonymous graffitist quoted the Cornish songwriter Roger Bryant on South Crofty's wall: “Cornish lads are fishermen and Cornish lads are miners too, but when the fish and tin are gone what are the Cornish boys to do?” (Bryant, 1996; see also Laviolette, 2003: 26). Although the message on South Crofty's wall certainly struck a poignant note of nostalgia, the British government had a clear-cut answer to this question: Cornish boys are to work in the tourist industry (Larkham & Barrett, 1998; Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015).

### 3.1 Conservation and Commercialisation

The Thatcher government stimulated the commercial exploitation of heritage. This neo-liberal approach had particularly major consequences for the way heritage preservation was publicly legitimized. It was no longer just a humble act of piety to the ancestry. Instead, historic buildings were seen to have real present-day market value. The government of those days perceived heritage and the associated tourist and leisure activities as an economic cure – especially for economically deprived regions like Cornwall (Robinson, 1999). One of the envisioned ways to exploit heritage's economic potential was by involving the private sector. Many public buildings that were in the state's care, were sold or rented out to entrepreneurs. In the 1960s and 1970s ‘economic regeneration’ and ‘conservation’ were generally considered antonyms, but in the 1980s the two concepts were presented by the government as essentially complementary (Pendlebury, 2009).

These political mores were favourable for entrepreneurs and investors who wished to exploit heritage sites. When the developer David Bulstrode, who had bought much of the historic mining harbour town of Charlestown in order to build a holiday resort, was asked by a local reporter what these plans would mean for the local population he replied: "Anything that brings money into an area is an improvement" (Bulstrode, 1988, cited in Deacon et al., 1988: 9). The notion that Cornish industrial heritage was mainly a cash cow is also evident in the statements of the industrial historian Mike Hillman. In a radio interview, he comforted those who mourned the disappearance of the mining industry, stating that "your mines may close but you can go on mining your heritage forever" (Hillman, 1987).

The government sponsored several projects that aimed to transform former mining sites into leisure parks or tourist attractions in order to capitalize on this potential. The Cornish steam beam engine at Levant Mine was restored and the site was transformed into a visitor centre. The famous Crown Mine Engine Houses (Fig. 2) at the Botallack mining site were restored and made accessible to hikers and cyclists. Carn Marth, a former granite quarry near Redruth, was turned into an open-air theatre. The large derelict area around North Roskear Mine near Camborne, became a leisure park with walking trails, art installations and play facilities. Moreover, the former copper mine Wheal Jewel in the town of Gwennap was transformed into a camping site. In some cases, the transition from industrial site to heritage attraction was almost seamless. Geevor, for example, became a museum with its machines and buildings as the main exhibition just months after its closure as a working mine. Also, King Edward mine received the status of museum. Several of these sites were linked to each other by the Mineral Tramway Project. This route was created partially by using the old mineral rail tracks that used to take ore from the inland mines to the ports of Portreath, Devoran and Hayle. While such remote areas were not considered suitable for redevelopment into residential or new industrial use, they were deemed perfect for heritage tourism (Wilson & Sainsbury, 2003; Coupland & Coupland, 2014; Orange, 2012).

### ***3.2 Industrial Heritage Tourism: Cornwall's Economic Panacea?***

In the late 1980s, the BBC made a series of short documentaries about Britain's mining past. One of the films opened with two Cornish miners and one of their wives sitting around the kitchen table. "Look at the paper", one of them says in a thick Cornish accent. "Fifteen thousand miners on the dole. Going to have to think about going away". His wife glances up at him and says: "You know yourself. What are we going to sell these houses for?". "Next to nothing", he answers. "We need the backing of the government. It'll cost 'm more to keep us on the dole than to have us in work. They don't give a bugger about we down here. They're lining their pockets, they don't mind about we. All they want for Cornwall is a holiday centre and they're going to get it" (Phillips, 1985, cited in BBC, 2003[1986]). He was right in

many ways. It was 1985 and the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher was caught up in a long and bitter conflict with the coalminers unions. The coal mining sector had been nationalized in the late 1940s and now the government intended to withdraw the subsidies that kept the industry alive. Thousands of miners, especially from northern England, went on strike, threatening to drag the country into another energy crisis. But the Iron Lady did not break: the coalmines closed, and thousands of miners lost their jobs (Hencke & Beckett, 2009).

Although not everyone expected it yet, the Cornish tin miners awaited the same fate. The industry was living on borrowed time (Chandrasekhar, 1989; Mallory, 1990). For years, brokers buying and selling on the London metal exchange had kept the price of tin artificially high, but now Brazil and China flooded the market with cheap produce. The bubble burst on October 25, 1985. Almost overnight, the price of tin dropped dramatically – from nearly £8,000 per ton to just £3,000 (BBC, 2003[1986]). The mine owners looked at the government for help. The owner of Geevor, one of only four mines that had survived into the 1980s, made a request for a twenty-million-pound government loan. The request was refused. On January 28, 1986, some five hundred Cornish tin miners, their families and several thousands of other supporters, marched on Westminster to protest. As it happened, just hours before the Cornish protesters arrived in London by train, the space shuttle Challenger exploded shortly after taking off from the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida. This catastrophe would dominate the news for weeks. Coverage of the tin miners' march was pushed from the headlines to the annexes and the political lobby for financial aid petered out (Phillips, 2003, cited in BBC, 2003[1986]).

Although two other mines, Wheal Jane and South Crofty, did get small loans that allowed them to stay in operation for a few more years, the government's overall plans with Cornwall – as the miner quoted above rightly noted – lay with tourism rather than tin. The strategy to focus on tourism made sense because Cornwall already had a rather longstanding history of tourism on which it could build. Cornwall had been a popular tourist destination since the late nineteenth century, so unlike many other former industrial regions it had an infrastructure in place that – at least in part – could facilitate the rising heritage tourist industry (Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2016; Busby & Meethan, 2008; Fisher, 1997). The county was popular with New Age travellers looking for a spiritual connection with Cornwall's mystic Celtic past, with families visiting one of the many beaches, with *nouveau riche* yachting and fine-dining in Cornwall's mundane coastal towns and with literature fanatics following the traces of Daphne du Maurier or John Betjeman (Watson, 2015: 13-54; Thornton, 1997). Visits to former industrial sites, however, were not in these charts. If industrial sites were mentioned in tourist guides at all, it was as dark and dirty places to be avoided (Palmer & Neaverson, 1998).

### 3.3 Exploiting Cornwall's Mining Heritage

This negative attitude started to change, however, when visitor numbers began to decline slightly in the late 1970s. With New Age becoming old-fashioned and airliners offering flights to the Mediterranean for a pittance, the Cornish tourist branch needed a unique selling point to turn the tide. It was helped in finding this by a television series called *Poldark*, which the BBC broadcasted between 1975 and 1977. The series was based on the historical novels that Winston Graham wrote in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It tells the story of former British army officer and American Revolutionary War veteran Ross Poldark who reopens the tin mine that he inherited from his late father. The series sketches a rough but romantic image of late eighteenth-century Cornwall, depicting engine houses situated in a setting of wild, natural beauty. It was a major hit. Week after week, thousands of British families were glued to the tube to follow the adventures of Ross and Elizabeth Poldark (Moseley, 2013). Entrepreneurs and local authorities were quick to realize that industrial terrain once considered dodgy and dangerous could be re-sold to tourists as a romantic and picturesque 'Poldark-country'. The former mine Wheal Roots, for example, was turned into a museum and theme-park, offering underground tours in its old shafts. Following the popularity of the television series, the mine was renamed 'Poldark mine'.

It was clear to many investors and developers that Cornwall's mining heritage could be commercially exploited. Many local residents, however, feared that the heritage industry and the commercial exploitation of heritage would not benefit and could potentially even harm Cornwall's economy and pose a threat to its unique cultural identity (Ireland, 1999). Especially many Cornish politicians were afraid that tourism alone would not be a solid economic basis for the region. Instead, they argued, the government should try to keep the mining industry afloat. In his speech at a rally in Camborne, the Liberal Member of Parliament David Penhaligon, for example, said: "You need more in our economy than just tourism, ice-cream and deckchairs. Our mining industry is not a figment of the last decade or two decades. It has occupied Cornishmen. It has produced wealth for this century, the previous century, probably for the last 2,000 years. And what we're asking the government of today to do is to recognize the great contribution that we've made to the wealth of Great-Britain and in this great time of trial and tribulation to come to our assistance" (Penhaligon, 1986, cited in BBC, 2003[1986]).

Apart from such macro-economic considerations, there existed a deeply rooted fear that the Cornish identity and the Cornish sense of pride were at stake. Indeed, Cornwall was perceived as one of the 'victims' of misrepresentation by the heritage and tourist industry. Following Baudrillard's famous simulacra thesis, the anthropologists Neil Kennedy and Nigel Kingcome talked, for example, about the 'Disneyfication' of Cornwall. According to these authors, the people of Cornwall were encouraged by the government to "become part of the new, clean, heritage industry" (Kennedy & Kingcome, 1998:

54). Yet the heritage industry seemed to make a travesty of the past. According to the authors, this misrepresentation was expressed clearest in the mining museums that replaced former working mines. In these museums the real miners were replaced by "redundant miners attired in clean overalls, objectified for the tourist gaze" (Kennedy & Kingcome, 1998: 54). The heritage industry created an overly romantic image of the Cornish mining industry. According to Kennedy and Kingcome, the 'Disneyfied' Poldark-version of Cornwall belittled the mines by raising the impression that this was a small-scale cottage industry of miners with pickaxes and candles on their helmet, while in fact it was a highly modern, high-tech industry that continued well into the 1990s (Kennedy & Kingcome, 1998).

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## 4 ENGLISH HERITAGE, OR CORNISH HERITAGE?

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As a result of this alleged misrepresentation, the community no longer recognized itself in the image that was being sold to tourists. Many Cornish in the 1980s felt that they had no control over the way they were portrayed and felt that their heritage was distorted by the rising heritage industry. Some believed that Cornwall would be turned into a vast theme park at the expense of the 'real' and 'authentic' Cornwall (Perry, 1993). Historian Philip Payton summed these fears up: "a hitherto wild, dramatic, inherently Cornish landscape was being sanitized and anglicized, made safe and familiar for Home Counties [i.e. English] refugees" (Payton, 2004: 284). It was feared that heritage was devalued for a nostalgic pursuit of an idealized past, dressed up for commercial gain, amounting to 'bogus history'. This perceived lack of authenticity fuelled regionalist critique on the heritage and tourist industry, as well as attempts to take regional control over the heritage interpretation and selection process.

### 4.1 Fighting of the 'Vultures' of the Heritage Industry

Although Cornwall is constitutionally an English county, it has a strong sense of regional identity and distinctiveness. This identity is based on its rich industrial past and elements of Celtic mysticism (Knight & Harrison, 2013; Deacon, 2001; Trower, 2015). Cornwall has its own flag – the banner of Saint Piran, patron saint of tin miners. The flag's white cross on a black background symbolizes tin metal on charcoal ash (Fig. 3). Cornwall also has its own language – although very few people still master it –, its own national dish – the Cornish pasty – and its own national bird – the red billed chough. Most Cornish, however, define their distinct character in relation to their 'significant other': the English (Westland, 1997). Dormant anti-English sentiments flared during the tourist boom of the 1980s when numerous visitors from across the Tamar flocked the Cornish beaches and roomed the county's real estate market in search of affordable second homes. In the late 1980s, Cornwall's largest real estate agency revealed that 53 percent of the homes that it sold were to people from outside the area and one third of those were second homes (Laviolette, 2011). Consequently, the house prices in attractive areas skyrocketed in the late 1980s. Given that the salaries in Cornwall were far below the

national average, many Cornish were outbid and could no longer afford to buy a decent house.

The partisan regional historian Bernard Deacon, who perceived this trend as a form of colonization, noted that: "the Cornish now live in 'reservations' (like American Indians or Australian Aborigines) [...] tucked away on the edges of our towns and villages, in caravan parks or winter-lets in 'resort' areas. Many Cornish people can no longer compete in the so-called 'free' market" (Deacon et al., 1988: 139). Neil Kennedy and Nigel Kingcome described this peculiar situation in a perhaps even more vivid way: "Many [Cornish people] are scathing in their criticism and dismissal of touristic portrayals. This rejection is facilitated by spatial separation, whereby the native Cornish are concentrated residentially in unattractive areas which have not been theme-parked" (Kennedy & Kingcome, 1998: 58). The population, according to these authors, thus increasingly experienced the downsides and drawbacks of the new tourist industry, while not enjoying any of its benefits. Heritage tourism was more and more perceived as a threat. According to Deacon: "the vultures of the heritage industry are poised to strip the bones of Cornish culture bare, scattering in their wake sloppily written tourist guides [...] and smart signs on the way to important places classified as English Heritage, while ignoring the fact that most of these sites had been occupied and vacated by Cornish people long before the English ever came near the place" (Deacon et al., 1988: 36). As a result of such feelings of dissatisfaction, the popularity of Cornish nationalist organizations like The Revived Cornish Stannary Parliament (est. 1974), Mebyon Kernow (est. 1951) and the Cornish Nationalist Party (est. 1975) grew considerably. Anti-English sentiments also gave rise to more militant nationalist groups like An Gof (est. 1980) (Deacon et al., 2003).

#### *4.2 Claiming Ownership Over Cornish Heritage*

All these groups combined in their programs claims for more political autonomy with strong opposition to the tourist industry and the associated Anglicization of Cornwall. The economic transformation of the region, thus, gave rise to conflicts of a socio-culture nature too. In 1981 and 1982, members of the Cornish Nationalist Party protested against the sale of Land's End – the most western tip of the British Isle – to foreign investors who wanted to build a hotel and theme-park there (Ireland, 1999). And in the mid-1980s, Mebyon Kernow called for a tourism tax, a moratorium on second homes and actions against realtors who advertised homes in national magazines (Orange, 2012; see also Orange, 2011; Orange, 2015). In other cases, tourists themselves became victims of hostilities. In 1984, for instance, An Gof claimed responsibility for placing broken glass under the sand at Portreath Beach – a popular 'bucket and spade' holiday destination for English tourists (Ellis, 1985). The national heritage agency English Heritage, as a perceived agent of English 'cultural dominance' and a promoter of heritage tourism, has often been at the receiving end of Cornish nationalist critique. Protesters have argued that the information provided by English Heritage in their brochures, on plaques and in visitor centres is not 'authentic' because it excludes Cornish history and culture. Instead, the public is

presented a centralist and assimilationist narrative of English history. The Cornish critique on English Heritage is as old as the organization itself. In response to the chartering of English Heritage in 1983, a group of activists protested against the name 'English' Heritage and circulated a petition to stop it from operating in Cornwall. The campaign against the allegedly offensive name of the organization continued throughout the 1980s. Several times English Heritage signs and information plaques were vandalized, mostly by scraping the word 'English'. There have also been systematic efforts to replace all the 'English roses' that mark tourist direction signs with Saint Piran's flag (Hale, 2001).

At first sight, such actions could be mistaken for sheer vandalism, but in fact they point to a profound concern that the Cornish people are denied the right to self-define and materially control their own heritage. The violation of English Heritage signs was driven by a fear of being misrepresented and being culturally assimilated. Even the very presence of national heritage organizations like English Heritage worked as a provocation as it was seen as an expression of English cultural imperialism. John An Garrack, one of the most vocal protesters, noted that English Heritage was deliberately not acknowledging any aspects of Cornish history at their sites in an 'imperial' effort to eradicate the Cornish entirely (An Garrack, 1999). The trend described here shows the emergence of a movement of local actors aiming to radically change the English heritage field by advocating devolution of power over the interpretation of heritage from the central to the regional level.

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## 5 CONCLUSION

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The closure of the Cornish tin mines left many of the regions' inhabitants out of a job. This was not the result of diminishing resources, but of fundamental changes in the global economic system (Deacon, 2010). The socio-economic consequences would be felt for years. Cornwall's average salaries, unemployment rates and gross domestic product would long remain below the national average. The region experienced the fall from incredible richness to immense deprivation. Mines that once formed the powerhouse of economic growth – symbols of strength and craftsmanship – were now constant and pervasive reminders of the predicaments and sorrows caused by industrial decline (Berend, 2014). The British government saw the abandoned mining sites as property with great economic potential and stimulated their transformation into heritage sites. Industrial heritage could attract tourists and associated businesses to the region.

Yet, the Cornish heritage industry arguably did not serve the Cornish. Politicians from the region argued that tourism could never form an economically sustainable alternative for mining. A heritage industry, they argued, could never compensate for the loss of real industry. Moreover, many Cornish felt excluded while others profited from the economic restructuring of their region. The Cornish heritage industry, in their perception, was run by foreign – including English – investors. The sentiments that the Cornish themselves barely picked the fruits of the new leisure industry fuelled the critique on the Thatcher government and reinforced the call for Cornish autonomy. An increasing

number of people in the region felt deprived of their heritage. English Heritage, as the perceived representative of English cultural dominance and an advocate of the commercial exploitation of heritage, was criticized.

Several Cornish nationalists wondered how an organization that did not even have an office in Cornwall, could say anything sensible about their heritage. In the late 1980s, the dissatisfaction with this situation led to several – sometimes violent – campaigns of Cornish separatists. The Cornish industrial heritage became a ball in a game of identity politics. Most actors and organizations involved agreed that the sites should somehow be preserved, but what meaning should be attributed to them remained highly disputed. Several commercial exploiters of heritage sites wanted to paint a romantic ‘Poldark’-picture of the Cornish mining industry, hoping to attract more tourists. They had the full support of the Thatcher government. Regionalist critics, however, claimed that such an image belittled the Cornish and their global achievements. They wanted Cornwall to be remembered as a cradle of high-tech innovation and an engineering hotspot; as “the Silicon-valley of its day” (BBC, 2003[1986]).

The case discussed in this article shows that national political circumstances and economic developments had a major impact on debates in the fields of heritage and tourism. Under the Conservative government of the 1980s, devolution of power from the national to the regional level was simply not an option. The Thatcher government took over many responsibilities that used to be in the hands of local or regional governments. The politics of Thatcher also led to several confrontations with the unions and other less conventional political movements. Historian Paul Byrne noted that between the end of World War II and the 1980s, the British political culture could be characterized as being “consensual” (Byrne, 1994: 442).

However, in the 1980s, this political culture began to change. The policies of the Thatcher government were often met with unconventional political responses: unorganized strikes, riots or civil disobedience. Economic and political oppositions in Britain grew as a result. Critical observers even talked about “the two Englands” (Findley & Rothney, 1998: 298); on the one hand the prosperous south-east – the England of the rich London suburbs and the City –, on the other the impoverished north and far west – England’s former centres of industry. In Cornwall, these growing political, social and economic oppositions formed a seedbed for regionalist hostilities. In recent years, the call for more Cornish autonomy seems to have become less loud – or at least now has a different tone. While radicals in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s were prepared to use violence and foul language to support their case, nowadays the battle for Cornish autonomy takes place on the diplomatic level. The question of who owns Cornwall’s industrial heritage and controls its exploitation remains, however, an issue of debate up to this date.

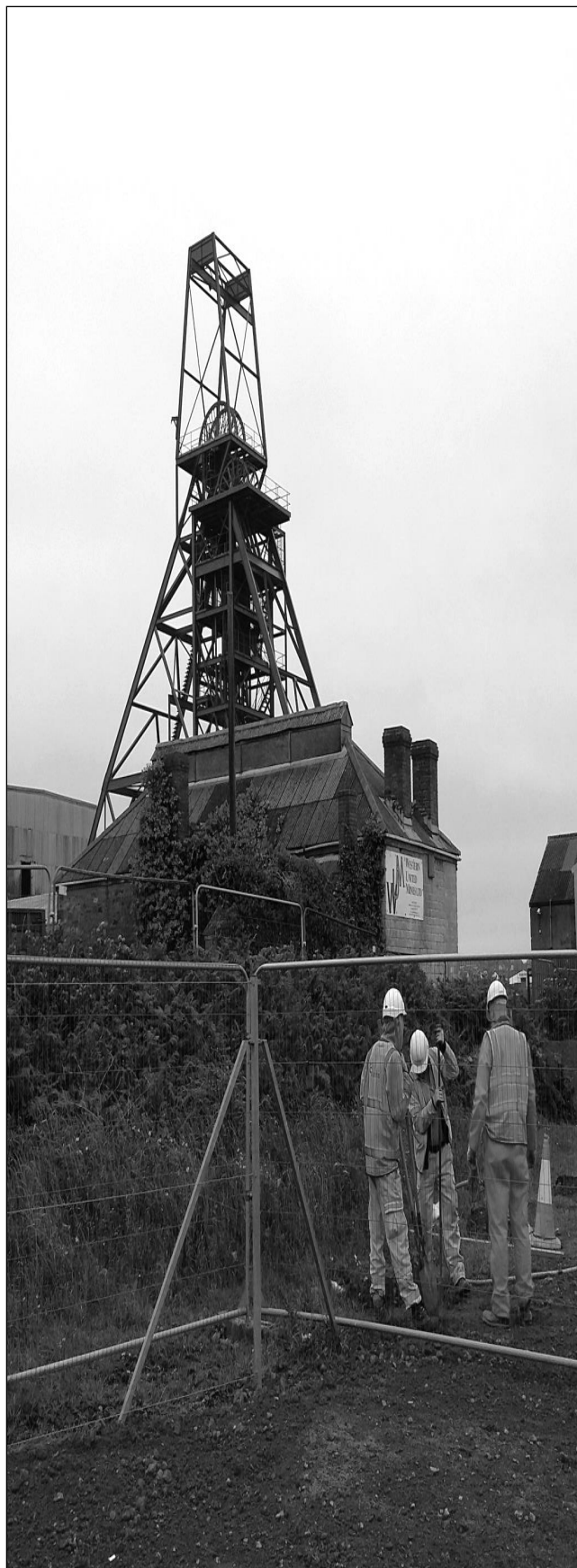
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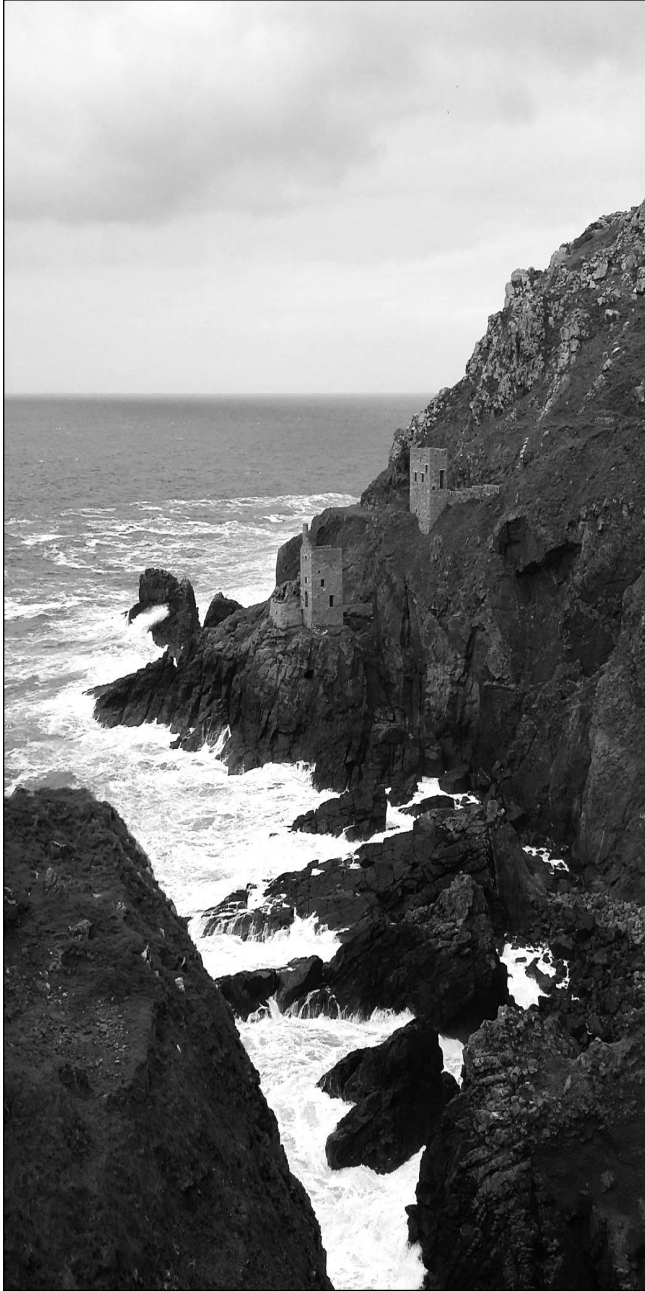
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*Fig. 1 South Crofty in Pool, near Redruth and Camborne. Picture by the author (2015)*



*Fig.2 Engine houses at Botallack mine, Saint Just mining district. Picture by the author (2015)*



*Fig. 3 Saint Piran's flag flying on top of Robison mine shaft. Picture by the author (2015)*

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