

Places, Memories and the Internet of Things

Dr Hay's title for the talk differed from the original suggestion, and he began not in the Olympic Park but in **Whitechapel**. Here CASA is investigating the histories of buildings, and their predecessors, in collaboration with the Survey of London (hereafter contracted to Survey). The Survey had been established by Charles Robert Ashbee in 1894, an Arts-and-Crafts architect and social thinker, with a desire to record and preserve London's ancient monuments. It has covered about a quarter of London boroughs with detailed descriptions of their buildings. The Whitechapel project is described on: <https://surveyoflondon.org/>

This web based platform has a map of Whitechapel, and carries detailed Survey descriptions of buildings that have been highlighted and has an invitation for people to contribute personal stories relating to them and their surroundings. The Survey does not cover all aspects of the area, street markets and open spaces getting short shrift. This is work in progress, with many more buildings still to be covered.

The first major difficulty was to produce a map. Ordnance Survey maps are freely available for consultation, but not republication if more than just the outline of buildings is involved. Use of the scan of an out of copyright map may still be restricted as the person who scanned it has copyright. They eventually had the use of three maps: John Rocque 1745; the mid 19C large scale OS map (scanning original, much used, sheets); and a LIDAR plot, taken from the air which showed vertical dimensions – even showing chimneys.

There are over 1000 entries from the Survey, and so far the public has made over 400 contributions. These contribute to Personal and Academic histories – or Official and Unofficial. One such story was of a man who wore a coat with bulging pockets who toted a gun – which he used to shoot the odd pigeon on a building parapet, and put in his coat pocket making it bulge even more - he would sell his pigeons to pie shops.

The Whitechapel project can be accessed with a smart phone as one walks the area, but more easily on one's computer at home.

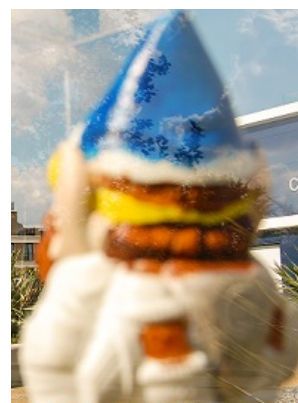
<https://talesofthepark.com>

Security: anyone using a mobile phone leaves a trail – on the base stations it communicated with. The Tube has WiFi hotspots – the passage of phones past them is noted to help with crowd control. Big brother can watch your movements, however well your message (to the bank?) is encrypted. A tweet to a friend wishing them a happy birthday tells big brother when their birthday is. If you have an automated fridge (more and more gadgets are coming with embedded chips) he can tell which grocer you use... Your mobile phone, when on, advertises where you are – removing privacy. It can act as an agent for third parties – advertisements for items you have shown interest in are likely to pop up. You do not have a confidential link to someone you have rung. Internet 'assistants', eg Alexa, may be a boon but also advertise your habits. The ethics of all this are uncertain; it is becoming less possible to separate ones private and public spheres. One can try to avoid inadvertent disclosure, but what about a toddler or an elderly relative not used to your latest gadget.

Dr Hay quoted Prof Timothy Bloxham Morton of Rice University in the USA who coined the term 'hyperobject' to describe a notion, eg global warming, which is not a thing to be grasped but whose effects are real (*google him for the full description*). 'Security' is a hyperobject - that has been called dystopian.

Tales of the Park – the Olympic Park in Stratford. Tales of Things began with QR codes (square arrays of pixels shown black or white – two-dimensional bar codes) placed beside an item of interest – a camera phone could respond to the code which and retrieve information about the item. This was an early stage project described to us by Dr Hudson Smith (*see BS² minutes of 18-2-11*).

The Olympic Park project is funded by the Government who have to deal with security. The project is minimally intrusive, with a number of talking 'gnomes'. These are mounted under a transparent cover on a plinth



which houses a short-range Google beacon. A notice on the plinth gives instructions to activate the gnome using your phone. The gnome will say a few words about the place in front of which it stands, then leads a very simple conversation (with key pad replies) asking for your name (some give their name others a pseudonym), and a story. The gnome says it will pass on what is said. Not all gnomes are coloured or even look like this, and may be programmed to interact with people in different ways.

No one has yet said anything rude to a gnome. There have been 4 or 5 interactions a day from (a restricted set of) people who are patient and not technophobes. By the end of the year they should be able to do a meaningful analysis of the 'stories'. If developed and scaled up machine learning would be called in.

Both the **Whitechapel** and **Tales of the Park** projects are to provide information to visitors to an area; and to find a way that minimises security risks.