“They buried him at Worcester”: Heritage sites, historical fiction and Hilary Mantel’s Wolf Hall

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Abstract

While Hilary Mantel's Booker-Prize-winning novel Wolf Hall has been subject to a range of critical approaches since its publication, no study yet exists which interrogates the novel's interactions with the historical architecture and heritage sites it imaginatively occupies. Taking as its jumping off point an analysis of the representation of Arthur Tudor's chantry chapel within Wolf Hall in conversation with its architectural counterpart in Worcester Cathedral, this paper explores the intersections between the material history present in heritage architecture and the historical fictions that invoke those locations as their settings, asking what kinds of knowledge and effects those intersections produce.

Keywords: Hilary Mantel, Wolf Hall, Worcester Cathedral, Prince Arthur Tudor, heritage architecture

"They buried him at Worcester": Heritage sites, historical fiction and Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*

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On the evening of 4 March 2020, the south side of the Tower of London—a UNESCO world heritage site and the backdrop to myriad key events in the reigns of the Tudor monarchs—received a striking makeover, as an image of a golden lion rampant, on a background of watery blue and green was projected across the building's entire façade. The installation marked the publication of the by then long-awaited final novel in Hilary Mantel's Tudor trilogy, *The Mirror and the Light,* and was only one part of a significant marketing campaign which had begun on 21 May 2019 when a billboard quoting the opening and closing line of the trilogy—'Now, get up'—was erected in Leicester Square. However, the Tower of London installation differed from previous marketing strategies in that, unlike the conventionally commercialised space of Leicester Square, the Tower of London is an example of a historical site which appears repeatedly as a setting in the trilogy. There exists a crucial intersection between Tower and text which the ambiguous projection (as concerned with the fluidity of the river Thames running beneath it as the solidity of the royal history invoked by the heraldic imagery) worked to confirm, however fleetingly: come sunrise on 5 March, the book's official publication date, the projection was gone. This momentary, flickering inscription of the relationship between a heritage site and a historical novel which locates its action there aptly captures the lack of acknowledgement and analysis, both scholarly and popular, not only of the intersections which exist between the material history present in heritage architecture and the historical fictions that invoke those spaces and places as their settings, but also the knowledge and effects those intersections produce. Likewise, while *Wolf Hall* has been subjected to a range of critical and scholarly approaches since its publication, no study yet exists which interrogates this text's reliance upon, subversion of and interactions with the historical architecture and heritage sites they imaginatively occupy.

The Tower of London forms only one such nodal point at which architecture and fiction converge within Mantel's Tudor trilogy and many of the physical buildings and locations referenced in the novels—Austin Friars, Lambeth Palace, Westminster Abbey—are well-known. However, the tomb of Prince Arthur Tudor and its chantry chapel in Worcester Cathedral, a space which is central to the world of the novels, possesses a much more obscure status within the heritage landscape associated with the Tudor period. In this article I focus on the significance of the figure of Prince Arthur Tudor and the space of his chantry chapel and tomb for Mantel's trilogy, identifying an important, and hitherto unrecognised, relationship between the literary representation of Arthur's death and burial and the architectural and archaeological features of his burial place.[5] Such a reading excavates the potential of tomb and text to reciprocally shape the other's meaning. Both spaces are implicated in generating a sense of the historical past for the layperson.[6] Attending to the fact that they do this in a way

[5] While undoubtedly there are heritage sites which are more sustainedly present within Mantel's Cromwell trilogy – Hampton Court Palace, Esher Palace, and Lambeth Palace to name but a few – I focus here upon Arthur's tomb at Worcester for three central reasons. The first is that, crucially, this is a space only evoked in imagination by Mantel's characters, rather than being physically occupied by them. The significance of imagined space for producing an account of history is therefore not only activated with regards to this site for the reader but is dramatized in the characters' and narrator's evocation of it. The second pertains to a desire to respond to the ways in which Mantel's own historical writings frequently concern themselves with the marginal rather than the central, the silenced rather than the dominant. Arthur's tomb constitutes precisely such a place within the context of Tudor history as written and consumed in the contemporary moment, which has tended to take London as its focus. Finally, while spaces such as Lambeth Palace, the Tower of London, and Hampton Court are predominantly secular spaces, Worcester Cathedral, as is discussed in the body of the work, constitutes a hybrid space which has both touristic and spiritual significance, which inflects how its Tudor history is encountered and constructed in unique ways. Furthermore, this approach also derives its methodological justification from the approach espoused by the Warburg Institute, who placed significant emphasis upon reading both literary texts and material artefacts in ways which both related to their social meaning and, according to Peter Sherlock, sought 'multiple readings and critiques of any given artefact, well beyond whatever may have been the single or primary intention of the artist or object in the first place' (2) Sherlock goes on to suggest that these kinds of interpretative engagements with material culture are to be 'most transparently observed in the examination of visual culture displayed in an interactive setting. Monuments, located in the active, lived-in space of ecclesiastical buildings, are obvious tools for pursuing these goals'(2). Arthur's tomb and chantry chapel offer a potent example of such visual culture.

[6] Indeed, as Jerome de Groot observes, historical fictions such as Mantels, alongside heritage sites such as Worcester Cathedral, constitute the predominant mechanisms by which the contemporary subject constructs an imaginative sense of the historical past. De Groot states: 'in the contemporary anglophone world, the ways most individuals encounter time, the past, "history", and memory mostly fall outside of an academic or professional framework. Indeed, in popular culture, the professional historian is at best one of a range of voices contributing to an awareness of things that happened in the past' (2019, 7).

which is co-dependent is important: readers of historical fiction do not read in a vacuum and nor do visitors to heritage sites do so without certain horizons of expectation. By attending to the relationship between Arthur's tomb and chapel (both its archival presence and its existing architecture), and Mantel's deployment of that space in her writing, new ways of reading become available to us which offer counterpoints to 'taken-for-granted' narratives of the Tudor world and make available the ways in which general readerships and lay visitors to historical buildings use those encounters to shape their relationship with the historical past. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the destabilising of dominant narratives of history is not limited to the spaces opened up by contemporary historical fiction, and that the destabilisation such fiction effects is a reproduction of the always already unstable historical record, whether architectural or archival.

In reading the figure of Arthur Tudor between Mantel's novels and the space of his tomb and chantry chapel, in mapping the implications of such a reading for interpretations of the Tudor trilogy as a whole, and in considering how this approach impacts our encounters with historical fiction as a genre, this article makes a three-fold contribution to the existing scholarship. Firstly, it recognises that while many literary analyses of historical fiction and studies of encounters with heritage architecture, particularly that of medieval cathedrals, consider how these texts and spaces are engaged with by their consumers as apparatus for constructing an understanding of the past there exists a lack of sustained engagement with the idea that these two phenomena might produce those understandings *in dialogue* with each other. Secondly, it reads *Wolf Hall* in dialogue not with the archival historical record, as is the case in much of the existing scholarship, but rather with the material historical record, an approach which expands the disciplinary boundaries of Mantel studies. It does so in a way which pushes back on the tendency Walsh identifies for heritage to '[deny] the uniqueness and importance of local histories' (1992, 135), instead emphasising the local and the regional, through its attention to the figure of Arthur Tudor and his resting place in Worcester Cathedral. Finally, the theoretical framework of this article offers a new critical vocabulary, capable of accommodating an analysis of tomb and text which is productively transdisciplinary.

Critical and Cultural Context

The cultural context into which Mantel's books have emerged, and in which this exploration of the intersection between historical fiction and heritage architecture takes place, is one which

has seen significant developments in the way the public seek to imaginatively engage with the past. In terms of visits to heritage sites, in 2017 the National Trust reported visitor numbers of 26.6 million, the highest annual figure since the organisation's founding (National Trust, 5). More specifically, the last decade has seen a significant increase in visits to cathedrals such as Worcester. In 2012, a Theos and Grubb Report stated that 27% of British adults had visited a cathedral in the past twelve months (2012). These visits are contextualised by Simon Coleman as indicating the development of the status of cathedrals as 'more significant contributors to a still thriving national industry of marketing history' (2019, 121).

The role of literary fiction in the 'national industry of marketing history' is one which English Heritage explicitly sought to harness in 2017 with the publication of their anthology *Eight Ghosts,* a collection of short stories commissioned from established authors and set in their properties (English Heritage, 2017). This decision by English Heritage indicates a clear acknowledgement not only of the potential for literary narrative and historical place to intersect in generating each other's meanings, but also of the commercial appeal of such literary productions. Certainly, the increase in visitor numbers mapped above has taken place alongside an exponential growth in the publication and readership of historical fiction. This is exemplified by the unprecedented success of Mantel's Tudor novels (Fisher, 2021).[7] The popular contemporary appetite for accessing narratives of the past, whether textual or otherwise, shows no sign of abating and alongside these trends a concurrent set of scholarly debates have emerged, looking to analyse the ways contemporary subjects are visiting, reading or otherwise consuming the past.

An enormous amount of scholarship has been produced in recent years on the genre of historical fiction and the historical novel, ranging from field-defining survey texts such as Jerome de Groot's *The Historical Novel* (2009) and *Remaking History: The Past in Contemporary Historical Fictions* (2016), through sub-genre specific works (Butler and O'Donavan 2012; Erikson Johnsen 2009), geographically or period-specific studies (Mitchell 2010; Ungurianu 2007) or publications which understand historical fiction through a particular critical or theoretical lens (Forter 2019). The foundation of the *Journal of Historical Fictions* in

[7] Since their publication in 2009 and 2012 respectively the first two books in the Cromwell trilogy have each sold over 5 million copies while the final instalment, *The Mirror and the Light,* sold 95,000 print copies within three days of its publication.

2016 provides further evidence of the contemporary growth of the field. While Mantel's writing career began decades before the publication of, and subsequent critical acclaim for, *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring up the Bodies* (2012), it was these works of historical fiction which garnered a groundswell of academic attention, generating a significant outpouring of comment and debate, both academic and popular.[8] To date, scholarship on *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* has demonstrated a number of trends. A tendency to read the novels as dramatising various ethical and moral debates is emerging, as is a focus on the novels in conversation with their adapted iterations, whether televisual, dramatic or as audio books (Mullin 2019; Nakawaki 2014). Such studies sit alongside analyses of the relationship between historical figures and their rendering in Mantel's fiction,[9] however, two related strands of criticism announce themselves as dominating the critical conversation. The first of these are reflections on the ways in which the formal and linguistic techniques used in these novels act to reflect on the nature of historiography and the shifting nature of the historical record itself, an approach exemplified in recent works by Renate Brosh (2018) and Siobhan O'Connor (2018). The second is a concern with issues of accuracy and authenticity. For certain scholars this concern manifests in a discussion of what they perceive as the *in*accuracy or *in*authenticity of the Tudor novels, as exemplified by B.D. Stoker's article 'Bygonese – is this really the authentic language of historical fiction' (2012). However, other scholars have begun to explore how *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* articulate an interrogation of these very concepts (Saxton 2020), a critical gesture which underpins the work I undertake here.

If the richness and scale of conversations around historical fiction broadly and Mantel's Tudor novels specifically have burgeoned in the last decade in ways which gesture towards, but ultimately omit, exploring the relationship between those texts and the architectural history they reference, equally key to the arguments I put forward here are current scholarly debates

[8] Central among these debates was the assertion of the novels' status as a 'renewal' of historical fiction as a genre alongside discussions of how readers use historical fiction as an apparatus for accumulating knowledge of the past (indeed, many historians have pushed back against this use of Mantel's books in particular, with some academics complaining that their students experience Mantel's books and the historical record as indistinguishable. See John Guy cited in Mark Brown, 2020. A characteristic example of academic scholarship which has taken a similarly compartmentalising stance towards Mantel's Tudor novels and the relation they have with 'history' can be found in P.I. Kaufman's article 'Dis-Manteling More' (2010).

[9] In addition to Thomas More, Mantel's portrayal of whom has provoked multiple rebuttals from a range of quarters, articles concerning the representation of Anne Boleyn (Roders 2014) and Elizabeth Barton, the 'Holy Maid of Kent' (Murphy 2015) have also been published in recent years.

around historical buildings and heritage sites. There already exists a large body of scholarship exploring how heritage sites are curated, how they are understood and experienced by the diverse range of visitors who use them and how those sites are positioned within the wider tourist industry.[10] More specifically, a smaller but nonetheless significant body of work exists which explores how medieval cathedrals such as Worcester have become situated within the heritage sector.[11] This exploration takes place in the context of a changing tourist industry which has re-imagined such spaces in contrast to the 'large and useless' 'dinosaurs' they were understood to be by the 1970s (Davie 2012). This conversation about how cathedrals have been folded into heritage experience is particularly undertaken in terms of a renewed interest in pilgrimage as a process which can involve both persons of faith and secular visitors (something which is referred to in the literature as 'caminoisation').[12] Crucially for the current study, this is a process which specifically privileges the visitor's understanding of themselves in relation to the place visited, and the experiences they specifically bring with them to the space (Bowman and Sepp 2019).

Key stones: Reading Arthur's tomb

[10] Key texts in this field include Sophia Lobadi and Colin Long (eds) *Heritage and Globalisation* (2010), Russel Staiff, Robyn Bushell and Steve Watson (eds) *Heritage and Tourism: Place, Encounter and Engagement* (2013) while the re-issuing in 2009 of Patrick Wright's *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* further demonstrates the re-vivification of the academic conversation around what came to be termed the 'heritage industry', and the architectural remains it relies upon, which has taken place in the last decade.

[11] Coleman's 'From the Liminal to the Lateral: Urban Religion in England's Cathedrals' is a particularly pertinent example of such scholarship, exploring as it does the heterogenous function and status of medieval cathedrals in contemporary town and cityscapes (2012). It is also worth noting here that Worcester is rarely included in studies concerned with England's medieval cathedrals, with York, Durham, and Canterbury taking the most prominent positions in current research.

[12] Such emphasis on notions of pilgrimage need not be necessarily or solely spiritual. Strikingly, on July 30th 1932, Worcester Cathedral formed a locus for what was described in the *BMJ* as a 'pilgrimage' in honour of the life and work of Worcester grandee Sir Charles Hastings, during which a service was held in the cathedral and a commemorative stained glass window unveiled. The write up of this event also included a nod to a key facet of the current discussion, the notion that heritage sites, in this case Hasting's former residence in Worcester, will be interpreted differently by different cohorts. As the former president of the BMA put it during the event: 'There is to most of us a fascination in visiting scenes where great deeds have been done, and where great men have lived and carried on their work [. . .] By this tablet passers-by will be reminded, if they are members of the medical profession, of the man who obtained for them the status they at present hold, and perhaps the layman who sees this tablet will recall that Hastings laboured, not merely for the profession, but for the public health, and that he himself and his fellows owe not a little of their health and happiness to the foundations which Hastings so well and truly laid.' ('The Worcester Pilgrimage', 1932, 214)

To begin at the intersection of text and tomb, it is necessary to examine the historical and architectural reality of Arthur Tudor's tomb and chantry chapel in Worcester Cathedral. As a structure, the chantry mirrors the historical documentary record, in that it appears to offer a narrative and encourage an act of interpretation but then consistently resists any straightforward such act. The challenges to interpretation this structure poses to the visitor mirror other resistances present in Mantel's account of the Tudor world and of Prince Arthur's haunting legacy. Despite being a royal tomb, there is no extant documentary evidence relating to its commissioning and construction, a feature it shares with most early modern memorial monuments (Sherlock 2008, 5). To quote Christopher Guy and John Hunter, 'there is nothing of the quarrying, nothing of the cost, nothing of the labour, and no descriptions. There are no records of a chantry priest and no endowments recorded' (2009, 111). The most basic information pertaining to how long the chapel took to build and whether it has always stood in its current position proves difficult to confirm, with Gunn and Monckton observing how '[m]any apparent anomalies in the actual structure of the chapel suggest either that the period of building was extended, that completion was hurried, or indeed that construction was never properly completed' (2009, 5). The carved panels themselves do not conform to what we would expect from a royal tomb. Mark Duffy points out that though many of the devices used are generic Tudor symbols, present also in the architecture of Henry VII's Westminster chapel, where the former monarch's tomb uses these devices singularly and symmetrically, '[a]t Worcester they appear in random combinations, almost as pastiche and without sequence' with almost all panels differently composed (2009, 81). These inconsistencies are compounded by the fact of the poor workmanship evident in the construction of the chapel: some of the carvings are off-centre while others are inverted, and multiple different kinds of stone are used. As Duffy puts it: '[t]he unsystematic arrangement of the panels, the pastiche grouping of almost half of them, together with inconsistent and imperfect masonry, is not how royal commissions were designed or executed' (2009, 81).

When examined in detail Prince Arthur's chantry reveals itself, to the reader literate in heraldry, as a carved narrative of a Tudor dynasty repeatedly asserting the validity of their claim to the throne. In this respect the chantry epitomises Peter Sherlock's assessment of memorial monuments acting to '[tell] posterity what should be known about the past' and to '[make] claims about a person's heraldry, genealogy and heredity rights to improve the status of the families they represented' (2008, 4). Yet the apparent simplicity of the story it seeks to tell is

misleading, and the complexity of processes of inheritance, legitimisation and ancestry are ultimately underscored rather than occluded in both the chantry's construction and in Mantel's literary treatment of early modern heraldry and funerary sculpture. The chantry features carved pomegranates, the emblem of Katherine of Aragon. These symbols come into conversation with other heraldic carvings depicting the portcullis of the Beaufort family, Yorkist symbols including the *rose en soliel*, the quiver of arrows associated with Katherine's parents, Isabelle of Castille and Ferdinand of Aragon, and the Welsh Dragon, an element of the arms of Henry VII.[13] Also present is a carving of the white greyhound of Richmond, an image which acts as reminder of Henry VII's half-brother, Edmund Tudor's, noble status as the Earl of Richmond. The figure of the white greyhound is also present in *Wolf Hall*, though not as an explicitly heraldic device. Instead, the dog forms the centre of a poignant exchange between Thomas Cromwell and his son Gregory. Gregory complains that his own black greyhounds cause him to be the butt of his school mates' jokes:

> "People in Cambridge are laughing at my greyhounds."
> "Why?" The dogs are a matched pair. They have curving muscled necks and dainty feet; they keep their eyes lowered, mild and demure, till they sight prey.
> "They say, why would you have dogs that people can't see at night? Only felons have dogs like that. They say I hunt in forests, against the law. They say I hunt badgers, like a churl."
> "What do you want?" he asks. "White ones, or some spots of colour?"
> "Either would be correct."
> "I'll take your black dogs." (Mantel 2010, 221)

Gregory's rejected dogs reappear thirty pages later when Cromwell, musing on the rich seam of personal loyalty which is owed to him, reflects '[i]f he dies, he has his son's sable hounds to lie at his feet.' (Mantel 2010, 251) This description, of the hounds lying patiently at the feet of their dead master, recalls the practice in early modern funerary carving, of placing a carved animal at the feet of a recumbent statue[14]. If we read these two sets of dogs, carved and literary alongside each other, a complex articulation of the ways in which the historical dead

[13] For a detailed description of these heraldic panels, see (Duffy 2009, 80).
[14] For further detail on the complex symbolism and significance of these carved animals, and of the use of dogs in funerary statuary in particular see (Marcoux 2020, p. 19).

were memorialised using material narratives themselves open to interpretation begins to emerge. The live black hounds Cromwell imagines already begin to calcify into their stone representations in the phrase above, just as the presence of the carved greyhound on Arthur's tomb re-inflects Gregory's request for pale dogs as a request for a public display of nobility and respectability.

Both the history of the construction of Prince Arthur's chantry, and the narrative it displays, are confusing and slippery, refusing straightforward meanings and significations. These are qualities which are evident in Mantel's representation of Arthur's own communications— both in terms of his reported speech while alive and his post-mortem appearances—which are characterised by ambivalence and enigmaticity. In his account of his dead brother appearing to him in a dream, King Henry repeats how his brother 'seemed to say' (Mantel 2010, 275), a formulation Cromwell himself reiterates as he attempts to offer Henry an acceptable interpretation of Arthur's communication: '*If* your brother seems to say' (Mantel 2010, 276, my italics). At the trial of the King's 'great matter', the instability of Arthur's now famous utterances of 'Last night I was in Spain' and 'Masters, it is a good pastime to have a wife' is emphasised repeatedly, undercut by descriptions of the statements as 'a little boy's crude joke, dragged back into the light' and Rafe Sadler's conjecture that the adolescent Arthur 'was boasting [. . .] that's all' (Mantel 2010, 146-7). Such assessments from Cromwell and Rafe compound the uncertainty surrounding the veracity of Arthur's statements, since one might boast of deeds accomplished or boast to cover up a failure, and while a joke might be flippant, the direction of that flippancy is uncertain— is the joke in the punning 'in', in the euphemistic 'pastime', or in a covert acknowledgement of a marriage unconsummated.[15]

Indeed, throughout Mantel's trilogy, the ambiguity and ambivalence incubated by the historical record is adverted to, formally and thematically, as Gregory states in relation to the copy of the *Golden Legend* he is reading—'some of these stories are true and some are false but they

[15] This anxiety of interpretation is also registered explicitly in an early draft of the novel which asks 'But are those small bones stirring [of Arthur] in their tomb at Worcester saying that was not it? That was not it at all?'. (Hilary Mantel Papers, MN1836). This ghosted refrain, which paraphrases the plaintive 'that is not what I meant at all, that is not is at all' of T.S. Eliot's 'The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock', moves this insistence on misinterpretation from the present tense into the past and indirectly voices an ethical question, of whether it is possible to know what the historical dead 'meant', whether they only ever mean what the living find it useful for them to mean.

are all good stories'(222)—a statement which points obliquely to the ways in which collective memory is formed in no small part through cultural consumption. However, as Sherlock warns '[t]hose who study monuments must be cautious not to take these stories at face value' (2008, 4-5): the solidity and apparent incontrovertible quality of heritage architecture shelters a similar heterogeneity of historical narratives, as further examination of Arthur's chantry confirms. In 2001, a team of archaeologists using ground-penetrating radar located 'an infilled chamber lying to the north-east towards the high altar, most likely the Prince's grave' (Duffy 2009, 79). Rather than being constructed to hold one body however the chamber is much larger than necessary, leading to speculation that a space may have been left for Katherine to be buried next to her husband if she had not remarried before her death (Guy and Hunter 2009, 101). Such speculation seems to confirm Sherlock's position that '[t]he liminal moment of death creates a chance to rewrite both history and the future and a tomb can attempt to change the culture it represents as society is reshaped by the reintegration of the living and the dead in new roles' (2008, 3). The empty space combines with the carved pomegranates which decorate the chapel to attest to a historical narrative which never was, one in which Katherine's marriage to Arthur remained licit and her presence in Tudor history attained a rather different significance.

Lines of Sight

Jane Lovell proposes that '[t]he material heritage environment provides visual metaphors such as ruins, which allow tourists to displace the present and mentally reconstruct the past' (2019, 451). However, as these analyses of Arthur's chapel in conversation with *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies* suggest, what these visual metaphors frequently communicate is in fact the *always already* constructed and reconstructable quality of the past. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of the 'squint' which forms part of the construction of Arthur's chapel. A squint is an aperture included in a chantry chapel to enable a priest to see the high altar during the mass. Such features were common chantry architecture, however, as Guy and Hunter point out, the squint in Arthur's chantry is unnecessary as there is a direct line of sight across to the altar and it is facing in the wrong direction, positioned at the south-west corner, giving a view down the south aisle of the cathedral to the west. Nor does the squint allow the congregation in the quire to see into the chapel (Guy and Hunter 2009, 105). While archaeologically and architecturally a definitive reason for the squint's unorthodox positioning

has yet to be concluded, this 'squint'— which seems not to serve its purpose at all and in fact negates the expected line of sight— speaks powerfully to what Mantel's historical fiction achieves. Her account of events, one version of which is firmly embedded in the cultural imaginary, turns the reader around, provides an alternative line of sight, and asks them to look at things the dominant narrative, the obvious angle, might miss. In its emphasis on what is visible and what is not, what a visitor is encouraged to look towards and look away from, the squint is an architectural feature which speaks to Staiff et al's designation of heritage as 'on one level, a scopic regime' (2013, 16). With reference to the museum visitor whose acts of looking and observing are often tightly controlled, Kevin Walsh describes 'the power of the gaze' to 'observe, name and order, and thus control' (1992, 15). However, Arthur's tomb, with its complexities, absences and mysteries evades this 'observ[ing], nam[ing], order[ing] and control[ling] gaze' (Walsh 1992, 15).

Through this examination of Arthur's tomb alongside his representation in Mantel's novels, we begin to see how this intersection between the books and the building enacts a 'freeplay, or intertextuality amongst signifiers' which Walsh argues 'leaves the referent (history) remaining only as a superfluous notion' (1992, 55). Certainly, historical fiction acts as a key intertext for heritage sites, shaping a visitor's engagement with them. Encounters with material history, whether in heritage sites or in museum cases tend to be, as Walsh points out, dependent on the written text to give them meaning (1992, 37-8). While Walsh is speaking here to texts produced by curatorial voices, I argue that historical fiction acts unofficially as such a meaning-endowing 'written text'. Likewise, when Staiff et al acknowledge that 'travel paraphernalia, guidebooks and websites' constitute the heritage site in the mind of the visitor to some extent (2013, 11-2), an acknowledgement that texts change our expectations of and relationships with place, they open the door to ask if the same can be said for historical fiction.

Books like Mantel's Tudor novels have the potential to be mobilised, consciously or unconsciously, by the visitor encountering Arthur's tomb. In the cathedral itself, particularly with regards to the tomb which to the untrained eye may become homogenous with the rest of the cathedral's medieval architecture, we experience precisely the situation which Walsh points to: 'if the visit is to be a learning experience, and no guides are available, the visitor is left to admire the "thingyness" of the object for itself. To understand, or appreciate the site, a certain amount of cultural competence is required' (1992, 98). Novels such as *Wolf Hall* are

available to function as such producers of cultural competence in the absence of the 'curatorial or interpretative messages' (Smith 2014, 125) that might be applied to Tudor spaces or objects which are not also places of worship. As Laurajane Smith puts it in her analysis of visitor emotion, affect and registers of engagement at heritage sites a 'visit is about reinforcing not only what [the visitor] already [knows], but more importantly, what they already feel and believe' (Smith 2014, 125). These beliefs and feelings are shaped and scaffolded by cultural representations of the past such as those historical fiction provides, 'representational narratives' which pertain to material history and to heritage sites, both 'those which press upon us in our here and now' and 'those that we have accumulated over time and which are internalised forms of knowledge and knowing' (Staiff et al 2013, 9). The historical novel forms part of the 'everyday' which Staiff et al invoke, that which is in a 'permeable, open-ended and dynamic relationship' with 'heritage places and objects' (2013, 15).

As Lovell puts it, the 'detect[ion] of the poetic "reverberations" (Bachelard, 1994) of the past' (2019, 450) in the architecture of heritage sites is an inherent element of engagement with those sites. Furthermore, when a visitor to a heritage site has what Lovell terms an 'auratic encounter with vestiges of the distant past' (2019, 450) that encounter is characterised by the same kinds of affect and engagement which are produced when undertaking the imaginative work involved in 'mentally recreating the stories within the composition of paintings, or when reading fiction' (2019, 450). Such engagements are even more potent in a heritage building such as Worcester Cathedral, in which curatorial acts of commentary and interpretation are less pronounced than in a museum setting. Visitors who encounter Arthur's chantry chapel and his tomb, spaces and structures which are characterised by incompleteness and incoherence, find that an act of imaginative engagement is demanded of them, which has the potential to be scaffolded by the narratives historical fiction provides.

"Continue in their footsteps"[16]: Touching and feeling or empathy at the intersection of text and tomb

Thus far I have focussed on the materiality of Arthur's tomb, that which is observable and touchable. However, his presence in Worcester Cathedral, much as in Mantel's trilogy, is also a profoundly spectral one. I want to move now to examine how Arthur's simultaneous present

[16] This quotation appears on a sign displayed to visitors to York Minster.

absence and absent presence is registered in both tomb and text and the wider significance of this absence? for visitors and readers. If Arthur is represented as a haunting presence in *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the Bodies*, he also hides in plain sight in Worcester Cathedral where the chantry chapel, to the untrained eye, is in keeping with the rest of the cathedral structure. Furthermore, even if the visitor enters the chapel (whose openness to visitors also feels unstable, as its status as a place which can be entered is uncertain and shifting depending on the events taking place in the cathedral at the time) and 'find' Arthur there, the nature of his tomb and the inconclusive information about where his body is buried means that our act of finding is really the act of re-discovering an absence.[17] Read in light of this absence of a corpse, Henry's anxious statement 'I never saw him dead' (275) takes on new significance, acknowledging the pressure Arthur's present absence in the historical record places on historical memory and the unregulated quality of his circulation there. Indeed, within the Tudor trilogy there is a persistent re-iteration of Arthur's death and burial, a nodal point existing outside of the text that implies the liveness of Arthur's absent presence.[18] Such a liveness has the potential to effect visitors to Arthur's tomb, as well as readers of Mantel's novel. Emma Waterton draws attention to 'the subjective experiences of a body in relation to other bodies passing through the same spaces of heritage' (2018, 222). However, I wish to deploy that formulation with regards to the relation of the body of the living visitor sharing space with the body of Arthur: what does it mean to share space with the bodies of the historical dead, to be told that is the space which we are sharing? Waterton describes certain heritage sites as 'landscape[s] haunted by absence – of the dead and of their memories' and states how '[s]uch a haunting has the capacity to turn an absence into "a pressure on the body . . . a physical presence that is felt and thereby affects" (Gordillo 2014, 31)' (2018, 231). Mantel, too, is interested in reproducing this 'physical presence that is felt and thereby affects' in her physical descriptions of Arthur, 'going down into the dark' (2010, 146) of his tomb alone, as if, even in

[17] A first-time visitor to Worcester Cathedral might reasonably assume that Arthur's body lies, either within the box tomb, as King John's corpse was discovered to be when his tomb was opened by Valentine Green in 1797, or beneath the box tomb. But, as Guy and Hunter point out, the box tomb is a 'red-herring', it does not contain Arthur's body, and the chamber to one side of the chapel has also not been conclusively demonstrated to house it, the space having been infilled, rather than left empty as would be usual.

[18] This repetitious focus on Arthur's death and burial is mirrored in the activities undertaken at Worcester Cathedral where a mass said in the chantry chapel every year on the anniversary of Arthur's death and, in 2002, a re-enactment of Arthur's funeral was staged.

his post-mortem state he can experience the conditions of the grave, and in turn we as readers shiver and grope about in the dark.

Both Arthur's tomb, and his treatment in Mantel's Tudor trilogy, are designed in certain respects to forge a connection between the reader and the historical dead, to give them a new kind of presence based on empathy. This empathy is established by Mantel through her descriptions of Arthur as a 'little boy' (146), giving Arthur the status of a child which in the historical context of the novel is anachronistic, calibrated for a contemporary audience,[19] and in the chapel through its apparent re-iteration of the narrative of Arthur's nobility, but also through Arthur's poignant absence—even in the place he should be most permanently present this presence is compromised. Nonetheless, the materiality of his tomb is still central to the visitor's experience of and engagement with this figure. The recent trend towards the caminoisation of visitor experiences in medieval English Cathedrals mentioned above is understood to be driven by 'a sense of walking in others' footsteps' (Bowman and Sepp 2019, 83), an attraction to the age of these spaces and the sense that 'those walls have heard so many prayers' (Bowman and Sepp 2019, 83). At the entrance to Arthur's tomb there appears to be a physical inscription of such footprints, a smoothed dip where, according to the historical record, Elizabeth I stood when she visited the tomb of her uncle (Green 1797, xl).[20] A visitor to the chantry chapel has an opportunity to engage with a haptic and embodied connection with the Tudor past, to be in the same space once occupied by the historical dead. De Groot describes the quality of such spatial positionings strikingly, declaring them to encapsulate 'the oxymoronic corporeal spectrality of the encounter with the past: physical and conceptual, ghostly and frozen. This sense of the actuality and materiality of the past, somehow linked with place, but nostalgically, mournfully, tragically distanced from us – a sense of frail mortality and chronological specificity, a self-conscious historicity' (2016, 20). Moreover, this smoothed

[19] At fifteen Arthur would not have been thought of as a 'little boy' but a man grown, married and in charge of the Welsh Marches, a situation which by necessity defined him as an adult, as Joanne M Ferraro points out, stating that marriage and establishment of an independent household 'ushered prosperous males into adulthood' (2012, 73).

[20] The source for this account given by Green, 'The Order of Receiving the Queen's Majestie' states that Elizabeth I visited Worcester Cathedral in 1575, and 'diligently viewed the tomb of King John, together with the chapell and tombe of her deere uncle, late Prynce Arther, all richly and bewtyfully adorned' (1797 [1575], xl). However, I first encountered this narrative through the Dean of Worcester Cathedral, who told me of Elizabeth's visit while we stood at the threshold of Arthur's tomb, allowing us both to reflect on the significance of sharing architectural space with the dead.

surface also possesses a metaphorical significance, serving as a reminder that we may still be on uneven and slippery ground when we engage with material history, even when we might assume we are at the most stable intersection between the past and the present, one which is 'set in stone'.

Heritage architecture and the Tudor novels

In the opening of the section of *Wolf Hall* entitled 'An Occult History of Britain', Mantel describes a mythical narrative of Britain's origins, which sees 'Albina' populated by a race of giants (2010, 83). This description references the acts of storytelling which Larrington asserts were undertaken by Anglo-Saxons who sought to '[explain] the ruins of Roman buildings in Britain as the work of giants', demonstrating, as Lovell puts it, 'how multi-layered historic environments have traditionally been explained by fairy tales' (2019, 450). When viewed in this light, Mantel's authorial strategy is seen to exist in a continuum of creative narrativization which lay people have used to generate historical interpretation for centuries. This recognition of the inextricable and longstanding relationship between literary historical narratives and heritage architecture exceeds the treatment of Arthur and his resting place and is acknowledged throughout the Tudor novels in a multitude of ways and through reference to numerous historical structures.

At first glance heritage buildings project a sense of unchanging permanence and solidity which might appear as a stark contrast to historical novels, with their multiplicity, their attendant debates around issues of accuracy and their complex and ambiguous relationship to the historical record. However, when interrogated more closely, it becomes clear that material history, in the form of heritage buildings, is not static or uncontestably coherent in the narratives it shelters or the meanings it produces. As Gutierrez puts it:

> space was never simply an inert material template on which human social processes were enacted but was also a product of and agent in the processes of human history. Thus, landscapes were both a record of previous human interactions with the material world and an ontic component of ongoing processes through which society recreates itself' (2017, 4).

This Such an assessment is particularly true of cathedrals such as Worcester. As Simon Coleman puts it, '[t]he outward stolidity of English cathedrals in both 'city-' and 'church-scapes'

(Jokela, 2014) belies their dynamic internal heterogeneity, their ability to house activities that complement but also seemingly contradict each other's spatial, ritual, and ideological logics' (2012, 386). For Coleman, cathedrals are characterised by 'disjointedness, heterogeneity, by incoherence and admixture' and this is born out in Worcester Cathedral, architecturally, functionally, and narratively (2012, 386). As Coleman points out, Anglican Cathedrals like Worcester are 'faced with difficult choices as to which eras to emphasise or occlude: Pre- or Post- Reformation? The biography of one saint over another? Events of religious or secular, national or regional significance?' (2019, 126). Cathedrals are spaces which are necessarily curated in ways which privilege a particular set of narratives over others. Experiencing such spaces in conversation with historical fiction set there can begin to diversify and complexify these narratives, allowing the visitor to recognise that '[w]hile the built heritage of historic cities is seemingly static and immutable [. . .] cathedrals [. . .] are also soft, phenomic places of legend and memory (Nora, 1984-1992; Smith, 2006.)' (2019, 451). An examination of Mantel's treatment of the built environment in both of her Tudor novels clearly articulates such an understanding of material history, and historical architecture in particular, both in terms of the novels' composition and in terms of Mantel's own writing practice.

Architecture is vitally important to these novels and Mantel's construction of Cromwell's world, both internal and external. *Wolf Hall* opens with a quotation from Vitruvius' *De Architectura* detailing which architectural features are appropriate for which manner of dramatic scene: 'tragic scenes are delineated with columns, pediments, statues and other objects suited to kings; comic scenes exhibit private dwellings, with balconies and views representing rows of windows, after the manner of ordinary dwellings' (2010, xxiii). The fact that the quotation is taken from the section of Vitruvius' book which is concerned with architecture not in quotidian contexts but in the theatre, 'a present tense storytelling with differences in every enactment' as Siobhan O'Connor puts it, indicates from the outset of the text not only the 'instability of historical narrative' as O'Connor suggests. It is also indicative of a certain suspicion of the apparent solidity and uncontrovertibility of architectural space may be warranted, both with regards to the built environments Mantel's characters inhabit, and their surviving historical counterparts (2018, 31).

In her own writing practice Mantel forges a connection between physically being present in a place and generating a literary representation of that place. De Groot reflects upon this

connection in his discussion of *Wolf Hall,* describing Mantel's own affect-laden visit to the house of Ralph Sadleir as 'somehow regenerative or like a kind of imaginative resurrection' (2016, 19). He quotes Mantel as recalling how: 'It was then that the shock of the past reached out and jabbed me in the ribs. They were as alive as I am; why can't I touch them?'(2016, 19). The author goes on to state that the task this emotional response poses her as a novelist is to 'unfreeze antique feeling, unlock the emotion stored and packed tight in paper, brick and stone.' (2016, 19) The outcome of this practice of Mantel's, of being present in the historical sites which pertained to her work, is inscribed in the archival holdings for *Bring up the Bodies* which include a collection of papers headed with the handwritten note: 'These are the notes made at Brick Place [Rafe Sadler's house] with Ben and George November 2015' (Mantel MN1677 2015).[21] However, while the archival document contains no more indication of Mantel's reflection upon Brick Place as a structure, the space appears in *Bring up the Bodies,* subject to imaginative renovation:

> At New Year he visits Rafe in his new house at Hackney, three storeys of brick and glass by St Augustine's Church. On his first visit at summer's end, he had noted everything in place for Rafe's happy life: pots of basil on the kitchen sills, garden plots seeded and the bees in their hives, the doves in their cote and the frames in place for the roses that will climb them; the pale oak-panelled walls gleaming in expectation of paint. (2012, 170)

As de Groot observes in relation to *Wolf Hall,* what takes place here is '"unlocking", rather than creating: Mantel acts as a conduit (and translator)' The past is there as a spectre, unseen but not disappeared' (,2016, 20). However, what is significant about the passage is the way in which the building is in a state of anticipation. It is a new building, recently constructed, waiting 'in expectation' to be inhabited. That the historical buildings now owned by organisations such as the National Trust and English Heritage are represented here as family homes built in anticipation of a life to be lived, futural spaces rather than material remains is significant. It emphasises the status of these buildings as always in flux, shaped and re-shaped by generations of owners and containers of multiple narratives.

[21] Hilary Mantel, Hilary Mantel Papers, Huntington Library, Box 94 MN1677 [The Mirror and the Light: novel, notes for 'salvage' and 'wreckage']. Brick Place is now known as Sutton House and is owned by the National Trust.

Though Brick Place still exists and can be visited, many of the buildings mentioned in the trilogy are now lost. Their description in these texts serves briefly to re-erect them, to superimpose them palimpsestically on the contemporary land or cityscape. A key example of such a structure is Cromwell's home at Austen Friars, a space which is described in rich sensory detail throughout the trilogy. Towards the end of *Wolf Hall* Cromwell meditates on Austin Friars as an architectural inscription of the infallibility of his legacy. He muses that: 'At Austin Friars he holds the lease for ninety-nine years. His great-grandchildren will have it, some unknown Londoners. When they look at documents his name will be there. His name will be carved over the doorways.' (2010, 583) While the documents Cromwell invokes do survive, his name, 'carved over the doorways', did not. All that remains of Cromwell's Austin Friars now is the Draper's Hall and Dutch Church, the rest having been demolished, destroyed by fire, and finally bombed during the Blitz. A road named Austin Friars now runs through the site, marking it as a place to travel through, not a place to stay.[22]

The textual re-erection of historical buildings now long since demolished is not the only way in which these works encourage readers to understand the built historic environment as incomplete, fragile and available for re-working. Throughout the trilogy our attention is repeatedly brought to acts of architectural editing which articulate the ways that material history may still prove slippery and inconclusive despite its apparent solidity since, as Sherlock puts it, this architectural 'process of shaping memory involve[s] censorship, even fabrication' (2008, 3). These processes of architectural editing are explored in Mantel's depiction of Anne Boleyn's ruthless campaign against the material traces of her predecessor Katherine of Aragon. Mantel's narrator reports how '[Anne] is planning to commandeer Katherine's royal barge, she tells him, and have the device "H&K" burned away, all Katherine's badges obliterated' (2010, 387). Cromwell himself is depicted engaging in some architectural editing of his own. Following Cardinal Wolsey's fall from grace and subsequent death Cromwell considers his former master's coat of arms, painted on the walls of Austin Friars. Mantel writes:

> 'He looks at the place on the wall where the Cardinal's arms blaze out: the scarlet hat, at his request, recently retouched. "You can paint them out now." He says "And what shall we paint else, sir?"

[22] For further information on the history of the architecture, grounds and occupation of Austin Friars see Holder (2017), Grell (1989) and Lindebom (1950).

> “Leave a blank”
> “We could have a pretty allegory”
> “I’m sure.” He turns and walks away. “Leave a space.” (2010, 271)

This erasure of Wolsey, through the obliteration of his arms, does not stand. Later in the novel Cromwell fills this ‘blank’ ‘space’ with his own newly granted arms, whose design contains a tribute to his fallen master:

> The space where the arms of Wolsey used to be is being repainted with his own newly granted arms, *azure* on a fess between three lions rampant, or a rose gules, barbed vert, between two Cornish choughs proper. “You see Helen,” he says. “Those black birds were Wolsey’s emblem.” He laughs. “There are people who hoped they would never see them again.”’ (2010, 420)[23]

Mantel dramatizes the layering of historical reality for her reader, drawing our attention to how the historical record, whether documentary, geographical or architectural, is constantly shifting. These acts of architectural erasure track shifting political, ideological and religious allegiances, and when undertaken in physical buildings, potentially wrongfoot us as visitors into interpreting sites such as Worcester Cathedral as a straightforward and incontrovertible historical record. However, closer investigation reveals a palimpsestic surface whereby layers of history are sedimented one on top of the other.

Conclusion

In closing I wish to analyse a scene of writing. The seats of the quire stalls at Worcester Cathedral feature a series of carved misericords dating from the 1300s. The Worcester misericords, as is the case with misericords elsewhere, combine the spiritual and the profane, the quotidian and the supernatural. Because they are not on general display, like the rest of the cathedral statuary, or its stained-glass windows, they become sites for surreptitious subversion and play, sites where alternative narratives might play out. For the purposes of this article, one misericord stands out among the rest, a carving which has come to be described

[23] Since Cromwell’s arms were granted rather than assumed, their contents would have been directed by Henry VIII, with the choughs a reference to the historical Cromwell’s first master. Mantel’s omission of this detail in her rendering of this moment positions it as a triumphant gesture which rehabilitates, if subtly, the legacy of his former master. For more details on the difference between assumed and granted arms see (Friar 1987, 27).

as ‘the Cunning Scribe’ (Grice 1980). It depicts a woman dressed in a gable hood sitting at a writing desk. In one hand she holds a quill and is captured in the act of writing. Her other hand appears to be taking a bottle from the beak of a large bird at her feet, or else is placing it there. From the sleeve of her left hand, a serpent or dog is emerging, snatching a smaller, trusting bird in its jaws.[24]

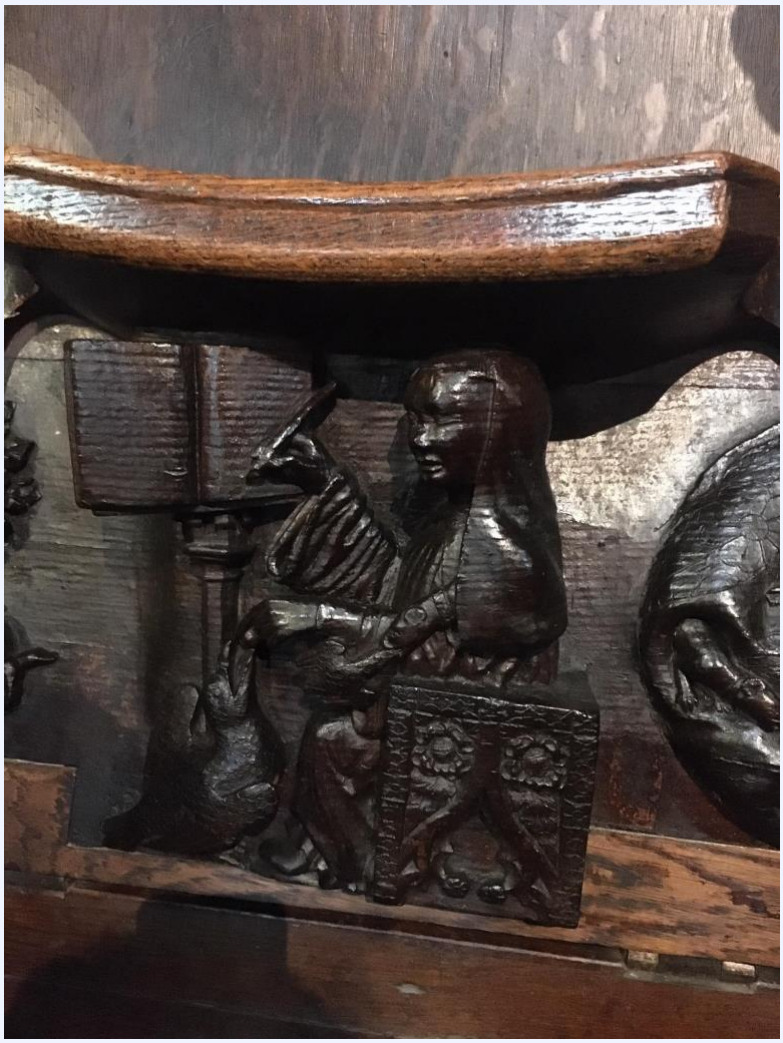

Figure 1 An image of the 'Cunning Scribe' misericord, taken by the author at Worcester Cathedral, 2020.

[24] For more detailed descriptions of the Worcester misericords see (Grice 1980).

This scene of writing is instructive for us, as readers of historical fiction, and as visitors to historical sites. It provides us with an elegant allegory for our consumption of history as contemporary subjects. The Cunning Scribe appears focussed on something beyond her writing surface, the work fuelled perhaps by the contents of the bottle taken directly from the beak of the larger bird, a device which is easy to see and to recognise, and which pulls focus in the carving, just as dominant historical narratives take on the quality of a singular truth, drowning out all other potentialities and might-have-beens. Staiff et al speak about the dominance of the 'very particular narratives that are deemed embedded in the culture of England' and upon which heritage tourism depends (2013, 14) and Waterton goes on to state that these curatorial representational practices 'inevitably hide and silence alternative narratives, other possibilities of knowing and other ways of enunciating heritage values in the place-tourism engagement' (2018, 14). Reading Arthur's chantry—the way it seems to offer an authorised narrative which at a closer look is much more complex, contested, incomplete and anomalous than it first appears—and Mantel's Tudor novels alongside this carving, and in light of Waterton and Staiff's comments, it becomes possible to understand the image as a warning not to be seduced by an apparently simple, comfortable and recognisable historical narrative, lest we be lured into the error of oversimplification ourselves, like the snatched bird in the jaws of the creature surreptitiously emerging from the scribe's sleeve. In his study of cathedral tourism, Coleman proposes that buildings such as Worcester Cathedral are appealing to a visiting public because of 'their ability to act as spectacular gateways to the past' (2019, 122), an ability which is shared by substantial works of historical fiction such as Mantel's Tudor trilogy. The architectural depiction of a moment of writing which is constituted by the 'Cunning Scribe' misericord serves to encourage readers and visitors alike to be wary of such a statement, which risks making this threshold crossing, which is at once spatial and imaginative, appear a singular and straightforward one.

Such acts of imaginative engagement have the potential to be subversive. Just as readers produce unique interpretations of literary texts, visitors to heritage sites are similarly capable of producing unique, and potentially divergent, disruptive engagements with material history. To quote Staiff et al visitors to places of historical significance have the power 'to subvert [. . .] to make unauthorised meanings [. . .] to remake place and significance, to create new connections and paths, to invent new modes of representation, to mistranslate, to contrive and enact narratives so numerous that, paradoxically, they both challenge and add to the semiotic

richness of special places' (2013, 2). This ability, I argue, has the potential to be shaped by literary representations of such spaces. For example, the visitor to Worcester cathedral who has read *Wolf Hall* is capable of remaking the significance of Arthur's tomb for the wider space of the cathedral, to forge a path to it which makes it central to the narrative of that space, in ways which both challenge and enrich conventional narratives about the historical figure of Arthur Tudor and his tomb. Moreover, this relationship is reciprocal. If, as Lovell suggests, visitors to heritage sites 'imaginatively authenticate those sites by drawing on sites like them in the fantasy fiction which they have read' (2019, 450), visitors may also architecturally authenticate the imaginative fiction they consume, confirming *Wolf Hall's* proposition: 'Beneath every history, another history' (66).

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