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# **Delivering the past: providing personalized Ancestral Tourism experiences**

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*Abstract:*

Heritage tourism is increasingly viewed as an individual and experiential phenomenon as well as being related to specific attributes of a destination. Ancestral tourism fits the former perspective and centers on tourists travelling to sites which they perceive to be a ‘homeland’ where, during the visit, they attempt to discover more about their own heritage. This study explores ancestral tourism from a provider perspective focusing on the delivery of tourist experiences and relationships between tourists and the place visited. The research is based on a qualitative study of tourist and non-tourist specific providers across Scotland with data collected using in-depth interviews. This study reveals a phenomenon which delivers deeply personal experiences to visitors and where encounters involve intense, often lengthy, interactions between visitors and providers. Ancestral tourism experiences are also often centered on tourism provision within local communities which can present challenges to both provider and tourist alike.

***Keywords:***

heritage tourism, ancestral tourism, Scotland, community

## Introduction

“From the lone shieling of the misty island, Mountains divide us, and the waste of seas —  
yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland, And we in dreams behold the Hebrides”  
(Excerpt from The Canadian Boat Song).

For many immigrant populations around the world (both recent and historic) the pull of a distant “homeland” (Palmer 1999) can generate strong feelings of attachment to personal heritage (Wong 2015). However, empirical research into individual experiences of heritage tourism, while seen as of critical importance, is nascent and focused on motivations, creation of typologies, and speculation as to touristic experiences (e.g. Poria, Butler, and Airey 2004; Timothy and Boyd 2006; Park 2010). The supplier perspective of delivering personal heritage to tourists remains unexplored (Timothy and Boyd 2006) alongside the significance of the relationship between tourists and a destination (Poria, Reichel, and Biran 2006a; Park 2010). This study, therefore, aims to *investigate how the delivery of individualized heritage tourism experiences impacts on tourism providers*.

The paper address gaps in the heritage tourism literature by offering an alternative supply perspective to heritage studies which either explore the tension between curation and commercialization (e.g. Garrod and Fyall 2000) or general service provision in heritage management (e.g. Calver and Page 2013). The research also offers insight into the management challenges experienced in different heritage settings (Timothy and Boyd 2006; Lin, Morgan, and Cable 2013). By exploring the experiences of tourism professionals delivering ancestral tourism in Scotland, the research provides evidence of one of the “most elusive” phenomena in heritage tourism; a phenomenon that connects attributes of a destination and characteristics of individual tourists through nostalgic, subjective and sometimes spiritual experiences (Poria, Reichel, and Biran 2006b; Timothy and Boyd 2006,

2). Research in this area is likely to gain traction with heritage tourism seen as meeting increasing tourism demands for unique and authentic products over more traditional foci (Lacher et al. 2013). Campelo et al. (2014) highlight the influence of an understanding of ancestry on the habitus and sense of place by inhabitants and wider destination branding issues. Finally, the ancestral context offers the potential for “emotional solidarity” between tourist and host communities when one considers the deep, personal bonds visitors feel with the destination and people living there (Woosnam and Norman 2010).

The ancestral tourism phenomenon has two distinct origins. Firstly, recognition that heritage tourism allows visitors to experience mediated versions of the past in the present and create individual journeys of self-discovery (Nuryanti 1996). Secondly, the popularity of amateur genealogy motivates consumers to combine vacation searches with in-depth exploration of roots (McCain and Ray 2003; Kramer 2011). Empirical research in this area, however, is limited and attends towards sociological approaches (Basu 2004; 2005a). As far as the authors are aware, no study has yet explored the experience of delivering ancestral tourism in a range of tourism facilities.

The paper commences by outlining changes in heritage tourism conceptualization towards individualistic approaches to understanding tourists. This leads to a discussion of ancestral tourism, its roots, likely motivations for visitors and a brief historical background to the Scottish setting. The methodology is qualitative, involving in-depth study with a range of providers associated with ancestral tourism across Scotland. Findings are centered on three themes: the nature of communication between tourist and site; how ancestral tourist experiences are delivered; and challenges faced by providers. The study concludes by offering implications for heritage tourism theory and the delivery of personalized tourism experiences.

## *Literature Review*

Research into heritage tourism increased in prominence in the 1990's with heritage tourism research related to particular attributes of a destination (natural, cultural, built environment) that formed a kind of heritage offering (Millar 1989; Prentice 1993; Nuryanti 1996; Poria, Butler, and Airey 2003). Heritage tourism was therefore viewed as a phenomenon of demand with attributes appropriately packaged for tourists (Silberberg 1995; Palmer 1999).

More recent research on heritage highlights aspects relating to the consumption of heritage resources, the experience of visitors and views heritage more pluralistically and emotively as “connect[ing] the past, present and future of a destination” (Millar 1989, 9; Park 2010; Palau-Saumell et al. 2013). This contemporary view sees heritage tourism as something individually experienced and, more importantly, considers some tourists to perceive sites “as part of their own heritage” (Poria, Butler, and Airey 2004, 20). There has been considerable debate in the literature between seemingly opposing definitional positions of supply and demand of heritage tourism (e.g. Garrod and Fyall 2001; Poria, Butler, and Airey 2001). In our study we focus more on heritage tourism as perceived by the individual (drawing particularly on the pioneering work of Poria, Butler and Airey, amongst others) while acknowledging its consumption within a range of heritage tourism sites. To understand the ancestral tourism phenomenon more clearly the following section explores how the personal experience of heritage has come to greater prominence in recent years.

### **Heritage and the Individual**

Heritage is often seen as signifying a nation, a community with “common beliefs, an historic homeland and as a common culture with legal rights and duties handed down through time” (Palmer 1999, 319). This emphasizes notions of identity and individual tourist's considerations of heritage as somehow “‘personal’ and based on his or her identity,

experience, tradition, or other social or environmental dimensions” (Poria et al. 2006a, 163).

McCain and Ray (2003, 7216) observe that despite a “proliferation of sub-segments, the very personal nature of one’s own ancestral legacy seems to epitomize the core idea of ‘heritage’”.

Heritage tourism is therefore positioned here as a subjective phenomenon relating to the “actual relationship between the space and the individual” (Poria et al. 2003, 239).

Traveling to places of personal, religious, cultural and/or vocational interest may, in certain circumstances, stimulate feelings of nostalgia or deep emotion (Timothy and Boyd 2006).

The role and significance of emotion as a motivating factor for visitation and as an enhancement of experience itself has been discussed from varying perspectives in the tourism and heritage literature (Hosany 2012). However, it has been noted that “personal heritage attractions draw people who possess emotional connections to a particular place” (Timothy 1997, 753). This further emphasizes the appeal of smaller heritage sites to consumers, who feel an emotional connection to their past. On this basis, a distinction can be made between heritage tourists simply visiting a heritage attraction or learning about a destination, and visits by those that perceive sites as part of their personal heritage (Poria et al. 2003). Personal relevance may also relate to repeat visitation, with a link between connecting a site with personal heritage, emotional involvement and passing on a legacy (Poria et al. 2006b).

It is within this conceptual space that interest in ancestral tourism takes root and these issues appear relevant from both supply and demand perspectives. For the visitor, the desire to keep family history alive for another generation will be strong; for the attraction, the need to connect with future tourists also suggests an opportunity. This potential strength of this relationship may also place pressure on heritage “attractions” to be able to deliver individualized experiences and improve “conductivity from the intellectual core to the visitor’s imagination and knowledge base” (Calver and Page 2013, 34). This pressure may center on personal heritage tourists being in some way more ‘mindful’ (Moscardo 1996) with

stronger motivations and greater knowledge than other tourists, particularly tourists from culturally similar locations (Wong 2015). The provider's role may also be critical here in terms of both providing appropriate information but also mirroring emotions appropriately (Palau-Saumell et al. 2013). However, research by Garrod and Fyall (2000) suggests that managers of heritage attractions can face conflicting priorities and ideologies around the delivery of heritage tourism. These are centered on a preservation focus and apparent reluctance to acknowledge their role in the tourism industry (Garrod and Fyall 2000). We explore these issues of personal heritage and the challenges it may bring to heritage tourism providers in our study of ancestral tourism. The following sections provide greater exposition on this phenomenon and the Scottish context.

### **Ancestral Tourism**

Heritage tourism can offer tourists a representation of peoples' ethnicity and sense of nationhood, but is "subject to different meanings and multiple interpretations" and formed by a range of sources both official and unofficial (Park 2010, 117). Given the heritage tourism role of providing symbolic representations of national identity this also offers ancestral tourists the opportunity to "conceive, imagine and confirm their belonging to the nation" (Park 2010, 119). However, this sense of belonging is also seen as a form of 'nostalgia tourism' (Salazar 2012) where the "industry relies upon a form of nationalistic rhetoric as a way of conveying images and meanings about what it considers to be the nation's communal heritage" (Palmer 1999). Nuryanti (1996) suggests that where the 19<sup>th</sup> century is often seen as bearing witness to the destruction of the past, the 20<sup>th</sup>, and now 21<sup>st</sup>, centuries are associated with an increased awareness of the past and ways in which we communicate with it. Palmer (1999) observes how questions such as 'who are we?' and 'where do we fit in?' are becoming increasingly common in today's world. Ancestral tourism is therefore, a "reflexive response to a sense of loss that underpins modern society, assisting in reaffirming both a



generational sense of the self and a self-recognition that one has one's own perspective on the world" (Santos and Yan 2010, 56).

Ancestral tourism is reported as one of the fastest growing segments of the heritage tourism market (Basu 2004; Santos and Yan 2010), consumed by a globalized class of highly desirable 'mobility-capital' rich consumers with the requisite financial and time resources needed to experience heritage *in situ* (Hall, 2005). Yet attention must also be paid to the specific historical relations which motivate people to reconnect across spatial and temporal distance. Scotland, along with Ireland, has powerful ancestral connections, real and imagined, with major English speaking markets in North America and Australasia and both countries appeal to tourists emotional motivation to reconnect with long-lost 'homelands' (Basu 2004; Wright 2009; Hughes and Allen 2010). Other examples are perhaps more intimate in historical and geographical terms such as Maruyama, Weber and Stronza's (2010) study of Chinese Americans return to China and the subsequent effects on their own perceived identity. In Turkey, the current government is involved in the rehabilitation and restoration of Islamic heritage sites across former Ottoman territories in the Balkans as well as Christian and Jewish sites in Turkey itself. This exercise in cultural diplomacy is designed to open up opportunities for touristic 'return' of descendants of refugees from the Balkan Wars of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Luke 2013). Additionally, ancestral tourism may not always be associated with 'return' to a 'homeland', as for many Australians and New Zealanders, journeying to the battlefields of Gallipoli in Turkey is seen as a 'pilgrimage' to sites which have particular ancestral resonance (Lockstone-Binney, Hall, and Atay 2013).

Although empirical evidence is relatively limited, growth in this diverse market may be related to an increase in interest in researching family history and increased media attention given to ancestral matters (Yakel 2004). Television programs such as 'Who do you think you are?' (which follows celebrities on often emotional journeys into their past) suggests, that

“along with Australia, Canada and the USA, contemporary British society is immersed in a seemingly unprecedented boom in the family heritage industry” (Kramer 2011, 428). The success of this form of tourist activity may also relate to its role in self-making, self-exploration and self-understanding (Basu 2005a). Hirsch (2008, 106) notes how, individuals often appear ‘haunted’ by a past that they did not experience, but one which has been transferred to them by other family members. The personalizing of history appears then to make its consumption more meaningful. A desire to know where your ancestors lived and what they did turns the tourist act into one of self-discovery, where individuals seek to “affirm, negotiate, and maintain their identities” (Santos and Yan 2010, 57). This interest is supported by increased access to a huge range of historical records, both physical and digital, alongside websites that allow the creation of customized family trees (Kramer 2011).

### **Ancestral Tourist Types and Definitions**

Extant literature suggests that ancestral tourists are not a homogeneous group and a range of terms are offered to describe their activities. In their book on tourism and global diasporas, Coles and Timothy (2004, 14) use the term *diaspora tourism* where members of diasporic communities “make trips in search of their roots and their routes with aims of reaffirming and reinforcing their identities”. This broad perspective, where travelling is associated with general ancestral interest, is also referred to as *roots tourism* which is closely associated with the work of Basu (2004; 2005a, b) and specifically relates to:

“Journeys made by people of Scottish Highland descent (or part-highland descent) ordinarily living in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in other regions where Scots have historically settled, to places associated with their ancestors in ‘the old country’” (Basu 2005b, 131-132).

The term has conceptual overlap with *legacy tourism* which describes tourists who have “personal connection with their heritage beyond a general relationship of collective ancestry... [they travel]...to engage in genealogical endeavors, to search for information on or to simply feel connected to ancestors and ancestral roots” (McCain and Ray 2003, 713).

Other forms concerned with a search for roots, are termed *genealogical* or *family history tourism* (Coles and Timothy 2004). These final types align more closely with amateur family history research and “travel to destinations that make available resources that support family history research” (Santos and Yan 2010, 56). *Genealogy tourism* “enables acts of reflexivity, allowing capacious imaginary margins to ponder over, recount and personify objective historical narratives, igniting a virtual ‘outward’ and a real ‘inward’ journey” (Santos and Yan 2010, 62). However, unlike the roots tourist, genealogy tourists are seen as more detailed and purposeful, positioning the genealogical tourism experience as driven by intrinsic motivation (Santos and Yan 2010). Other forms include ‘*personal memory*’ and ‘*homesick tourism*’ (see Marschall, 2015), the key differentiator here being that the tourist has some direct personal recollection of the destination being visited; links that have also been explored in a family heritage tourism context (Kidron 2013).

In our research we opt for the term *ancestral tourism* for two main reasons. Firstly, we view ancestral tourism as a subset of the wider area of heritage tourism and define it as ‘any visit which might be partly or wholly motivated by a need to connect or reconnect with an individual’s ancestral past’. We suggest that ancestral tourism can act as a superordinate term which encompasses a number of subordinate motivations. For example, the desire to establish factual evidence of ancestral heritage (*genealogical* or *family history tourism*), to a more general wish to visit a homeland or embark on an activity akin to pilgrimage (*roots, diaspora, homesick* or *legacy tourism*). The term therefore, draws together the range of terms that have been used in the past under one collective banner. Secondly, ancestral tourism is the

term used within Scotland to describe this form of tourism activity (Visit-Scotland 2013a; Tourism Intelligence Scotland 2013) and the research team were keen to make our research practically meaningful to those in the sector and avoid the trap of spending too much time debating meanings in principle and losing “time considering what it signifies in practice” (Garrod and Fyall 2001, 1051). The next section provides additional context relating to ancestral tourism in Scotland.

### **Ancestral tourism and Scotland**

Mass emigration took place from Scotland in various phases over more than 250 years (Devine 2011). The motivations for leaving are complex and often oversimplified but follow a number of themes, which include searching for improved quality of life, being forcibly removed or leaving due to reduced economic circumstances. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the incorporation of Scotland within the wider United Kingdom, with its rapidly expanding colonial empire, afforded many opportunities for Scots to travel overseas (Devine 2011). This period also bore witness to a decline of the Clan system (the complex, and often violent, sub-structure of families in Scotland), a decline which accelerated after the second unsuccessful Jacobite rebellion in 1745/6. As the power of Clans declined Clan chiefs embarked on an extensive period of agricultural realignment with subsistence farming by tenant farmers replaced by more profitable sheep farming. The local populace was removed from the inland highlands initially to the coast, where some were encouraged to take up fishing as a means of subsistence, while others were transported by ship to one of the British overseas colonies or territories. The removal was sometimes by mutual agreement, but more violent removals have gained popular traction and the brutal image of the Highland clearances has remained. The potato famine in Ireland (which was the main catalyst for mass emigration from that country) also affected the Highlands of Scotland and so starvation, alongside economic stagnation, led to a further wave of emigration (peaceable or otherwise) in the mid-19<sup>th</sup>

century (Devine 2011). The early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed further economic challenges and led to additional waves of emigration (mainly from the industrial central belt of Scotland), again largely to the four main English speaking territories of what became the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Cameron 2002). While exact figures (particularly for early emigration) are hard to establish it can be estimated that between 2.5 and 3 million people emigrated from Scotland between 1700 and 1989 (Devine 2011; Forsyth 2014).

The Scottish Diaspora (international citizens who can lay claim to Scottish ancestry) is estimated to be anywhere between 20 and 90 million people (with 50 million seen as not unrealistic). Ancestral tourism is estimated to be worth a potential £2.5 billion to Scotland over the next 5 years (Visit-Scotland 2013a). This suggests a need to explore how the phenomenon is delivered and its impact on tourism providers. Although our study is contextually applied, the existence of vast emigrant populations around the world from elsewhere in the UK alongside those from Ireland, Italy, India and China (to name but a few), suggest that ancestral tourism has the potential for significant growth within many markets.

### ***Methodology***

Given our research focus on the supply of personalized forms of heritage tourism we selected a qualitative approach. An investigation on the current delivery of ancestral tourism both through trade publications (e.g. Tourism Intelligence Scotland, 2013), websites and social media gave us an initial set of attractions and public archives that we approached to participate in our research. The final sample was constructed using a combination of judgement and snowball sampling. We undertook data collection in various phases, initially in Scotland's two largest cities, Glasgow and Edinburgh, and thereafter the Far North, East and Central Highlands, the West Coast (including both the Inner and Outer Hebrides),

Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders. In total 31 individuals were interviewed at 27 sites, including archives, heritage centers and museums (see figure 1). Ancestral tourism offerings at these sites included: availability of historical documents or artifacts, personal consultations regarding visitors' ancestors, or information about nearby sites of importance. Scottish tourism publications and both national tourism and visitor attraction websites were assessed to determine the nature of specific ancestral offerings. It is noteworthy that not all of these sites (such as archive centers) would be seen as tourist attractions in a traditional sense (see table 1). Each of the sites was contacted, and those who dealt with ancestral tourists were asked to participate in the interviews. Participants included: museum curators (14 interviews), archivists (7 interviews), managers (3 interviews) and volunteers (7 interviews). Data was collected between March and July 2014.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

Insert Table 1 about here

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Conducting our research within a subjective epistemology and thereby considering our participants as individuals whose unique perspectives were valid (Higham, Cohen, and Cavaliere 2014), we did not attempt to impose our own perspectives on participants. This is consistent with commonly held approaches to qualitative data collection (Fontana and Frey 2005). The majority of interviews were conducted *in situ*, with one exception occurring at a neutral location when a particular attraction was closed. Some interviews were conducted as part of multi-day research trips due to their distance from the city where we are based, while others were conducted on an ad-hoc basis to fit in with the availability of participants. In all cases, where the interview was conducted *in situ*, the researchers (either alone or as a team)

spent time in the attraction before or after the interview. The interview protocol was exploratory and sought to reveal types of ancestral visitors, aspects of the visitor experience (pre, during, and post), and the ongoing impact of ancestral tourism (see table two). In addition to these predetermined questions, which enabled comparison between interviews, we took the opportunity to follow interesting avenues of discussion during the interviews, allowing participants to discuss issues which may or may not have been immediately relevant.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Throughout the duration of the project the research team had regular meetings where emergent themes were discussed and noted. When the data collection phase was completed each team member analyzed a portion of the data using a process of open and then selective coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998) within NVivo10 to create an initial coding structure. After this phase researchers discussed and adapted a final coding structure. The data was then analyzed using the agreed upon structure, with NVivo 10 revealing intercoder agreement of around 97% (Pan, MacLaurin, and Crotts 2007). Our findings were extensive and included insights into the motivations of ancestral tourists, market size, funding for and nature of services offered at attractions and the experiences of providers. However, in relation to this particular study we focus principally on the providers themselves and reveal a complex series of encounters between ancestral tourists and a range of heritage tourism providers, genealogical services (archives, libraries) and, in some cases, members of the local population.

Our findings center on three themes of ancestral tourism derived from our data: the first theme is *communications and research* which explores the communications between attraction and visitors, and how pre-visit and post-visit communications intensify the relationship between the attraction and the visitor; The next section *ancestral tourism experiences* looks at the range of emotions generated and the complexity of delivering a highly personalized visitor experience and; finally the *challenges* associated with the delivery of ancestral tourism experiences are considered.

### ***Research Findings***

Ancestral tourism experiences are atypical, with actual and potential visitors engaging in communication with attractions both before and after their experience. The nature of their interest means that often extensive prior research has been undertaken and this can shape expectations of the experience.

#### **Ancestral tourism: communications and research**

Ancestral tourism often involve pre-visit communication between the potential visitor and the attraction. This involves personal story-telling and a desire for involvement in the services provided by heritage sites, thus co-creating an experience through engaged behavior (Feighery 2006; Jaakkola and Alexander 2014). This communication was common amongst participants, for example, “95% of the time they will pre-contact us”. The information requested could be instrumental (inquiries about opening times) but in other cases pre-visit communication makes explicit the extent of information potential visitors already have indicating ‘mindfulness’ on their part (Moscardo 1996). The site itself may be one element of a palimpsest of ancestral research and focused identity-creation (Lee 2002), transcending the site and indeed the destination itself. This, therefore, invites more detailed responses:



*Quite often people are writing a long essay about their family and they say that they want any information ... people come in and they tell you their story - what do they want to know now and where can they go with this (Participant information withheld).*

For local government or national museums, appropriate charges are often levied for advance research or, in one or two cases, a limited free search acted like a teaser, hinting at what might be gained from a wider visit. This commercial element, however, highlighted important tensions present in the discourses informing professional curatorial ethics amongst participants. Museums are framed primarily as communities of cultural practice (Wenger 2000) and curatorial staff may see their primary role as custodians and enablers of heritage and its interpretation (Delafons 1997; Bryce and Carnegie 2013). One participant bridled at the very name ‘tourists’ to describe her visitors “*it is more of a pilgrimage, that is more how I see it, tourism gives it a kind of commercial [feel]...and it does not sit comfortably to use the word tourism after it*”. In smaller museums, responses to these communications takes time and effort, often from very few paid staff and/or volunteers, and participants here also seemed reluctant to charge for this service. Despite this, most museums recognized the value of communicating with visitors in advance, or getting advance warning of a visit as arriving without much warning or research can disappoint visitors, as the next section reveals.

The background research collected by visitors using internet family history search engines such as *ancestry.co.uk* or ‘*Scotlandspeople*’ is usually beneficial for museums. This can assist staff in finding information, thereby highlighting the interlinked nature of the individual site, national databases and the destination in associational not simply hierarchical terms:

*What usually happens is that our visitors come here with some information already because they have done research before they leave ... If they know just even enough we are able to point them straight to the grave (Nicola, Elgin Cathedral).*

Other participants highlighted differences between national groups with regard to what research they would bring and their level of involvement with the visit itself. For example, Canadian visitors, and to a lesser extent Australians, feel the ancestral connection with Scotland most keenly and tend to be well prepared (Visit-Scotland 2013b,c), this was supported by our data:

*It can also vary on Nationality and I find that the Australians and Canadians are really good and they do a lot of the research prior to coming here but they know that there is other material available that will never be on the internet and they are very persistent, so they come here very prepared, they have got everything either on a file or on a laptop... Americans tend to be a bit more woolly, they tend to come over here with “My name is MacDonald and I believe we come from Skye”, then they expect us to pull out the family tree and be prepared and if you give them material they don't really have the patience, they will sit there for maybe half an hour, an hour if you are lucky, and if they don't find what they are wanting they will thank you and move on (Chris, Highland Archive).*

Although not as common as pre-visit, many participants mentioned that post-visit contact was maintained with visitors. Therefore, in some cases long-term relationships might translate into extra support for museums, both materially and financially:

*It has happened, not often, but yes there was one lady with a connection to the Isle of Eigg and she volunteered to transcribe some of the Census records for us and became a member of the center as well, so it does happen (Malcolm, Mallaig Heritage Centre).*

Post-visit communication can help a museum extend its knowledge of local history through the sharing of family trees and may also encourage repeat visitation. In many cases there was a desire for greater engagement with visitors post-visit but resource challenges prevented this. Some museums with a Clan association also collected data on visitors with a corresponding

Clan connection. This data was used to generate newsletters and other forms of communication, thereby creating a nucleus for potential future relationship marketing initiatives, both at site and destination levels (Conway and Leighton 2011).

### **Ancestral tourism experiences**

*I thought of one family. We were tracing their history for them and the man who was related was [really] interested, his wife was in floods of tears and when we looked round there was a lady sitting at the coffee bar who had nothing to do with them whatsoever and she was in floods of tears. So it can be very emotional (Bill, Seallam Harris).*

Ancestral tourism experiences are surely some of the richest and most emotional that a tourist can experience. Most participants that took part in our research were able to recount at will two or three emotional anecdotes about recent visitors. The positive experiences of the visitors were also mirrored by those of the staff, often heightened by local connections, and in some cases actual family ties.

Expectations are usually high, and a lack of reliable information or that which is dissonant with received expectation, may often leave visitors disappointed. This can place additional pressure on staff to salvage some kind of experience for visitors that might be perceived as 'positive', again highlighting tensions between the curatorial or heritage ethics and commercial service provision.

*The thing about it is that when people are enthused like that and they really truly believe that they are descended from this person, it has given them a certain amount of satisfaction and enjoyment. They are roaming about Dumfries and the whole of Scotland looking into it. I would hate to dampen their enthusiasm (Sandy, Dumfries and Galloway FHC).*

Many participants described heightened levels of interest from visitors when staff devoted focused professional attention to their enquiries and as a result could provide specific ancestry information. Some are:

*Absolutely thrilled, even if you cannot find very much I think that people are very, very happy to think that you have looked and taken their queries seriously (Dorothy, Gairloch Heritage Museum).*

This level of provision need not involve deep archival research beyond living memory, but also engage experiences of profoundly emotional personal association with first generation family members who had emigrated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

*I had an American family whose great grandmother's gravestone is out there [museum located in old church building] and she emigrated, I think it was about the 1900s, and she had this photo of her leaning on her mother's gravestone. So, she was able to come back and see the actual gravestone that her grandmother was leaning on and things like that. We were able to find the house, the location where the family home was (Sonia, Strathnaver Museum).*

Many participants had at least one 'incredible but true' anecdote. At the Highland Archive in Inverness family historian Chris told us about a visitor who claimed an ancestor had fought at the Battle of Culloden (1746), was transported to Jamaica, escaped, made his fortune and returned to Scotland. Chris at first was skeptical:

*I warned her before she came. I said we will not have any material, but we have books that were written by one of his descendants, and then you get out the maps and you see the names and the places where he stayed, Glenmorrison, Invermorrison. They are still there and Drumnadrochit and it all fitted in and she met the local historian. He took her to the site where the house used to be and to the cemetery and she sent me a picture of his*

*gravestone. It is still there and still legible...he died in 1790 having been here in 1746 at Culloden (Chris, Highland Archive).*

Making these connections for visitors was a rewarding experience for staff as much as the visitor, highlighting certain particular consequences of the crossover between professional curatorial and archivist discourses and the commercial sphere. This may be specific to ancestral tourism because of the demand for direct professional engagement demanded by many visitors (Apostolakis 2003):

*I had one lady a number of years ago, in fact I had two people who were working on the same family and one was from Australia and one was... from somewhere in England...and they both came to visit at different times and so I was able to link them up and that was really nice (Rachel, Highland Folk Museum).*

The findings did, however, reveal situations where visitors were disappointed with their experience and, anecdotally, there often appeared to be a roughly even split between positive and negative experiences. In most cases these disappointments were due to a lack of accurate or available information, lack of time in the visit, or a lack of research on the part of the visitor. Yet the emotional value invested in the experience still heightens visitor expectations:

*It might be something that they have been stumbling on for years and if you are able to break that brick wall down then it is a great release of emotions for some people (Chris, Highland Archive Centre).*

*I have had a lot of people come in clutching bits of paper and desperate to find a graveyard because they know that their great granny or great grandfather was buried in this graveyard and they are just desperate to get there (Rachel, Highland Folk Museum).*

A lack of formal genealogy training may mean that visitors often have pre-formed ideas about what they will be able to discover about ancestors. However, the existing historical record often disrupts these notions:

*I think the other thing that visitors particularly don't appreciate is the fact that in communities half the village has got the same surname. They don't see that there are clusters of Johnstons and clusters of Maxwells ... they don't realize that there will be 10 people by the name of Robert Johnston within a very small community, all born within two years of each other and that because of the Scottish naming pattern you can have a whole family with the same name. You might not be descended from the root you think you are (Sandy, Dumfries and Galloway FHC).*

One participant also highlighted that 'official' documents from the past are not always totally reliable, yet visitors have a degree of naive faith in them, which staff feel obliged, professionally, to correct:

*... that is the biggest problem I have with people that they are so sure that because it is an official record the ages have to be right, and I mean sometimes the ages on them can be 20 years out and they [historical records] are notoriously bad (Michele, Tarbat Discovery Centre).*

Additional disappointments present a particularly interesting theme of our study. Scotland, like most European countries, has a rich and complex history. The need to feel an association with events in that history, and 'heroic' historical figures was a common theme. Additionally, popular culture products that present destinations including Scotland, in heightened terms often blur the boundaries between historical veracity and fantasy. Films such as *Braveheart* or, more recently, the *Outlander* series, may evoke notions of an 'imagined past' in which visitors may have an emotional stake and which, however, create expectations which range

from unrealistic to the realms of fantasy. These inflated expectations are features of late-capitalism where ‘purchased free time’ (Baudrillard 1998) and the purposive ‘quest for [and expectation of] authenticity’ (Beverland and Farrelly 2010) are important elements of consumer culture:

*Well all of them think that they are connected to a famous ancestor like Robert the Bruce, Robert Burns, Rob Roy, Flora McDonald...or we own a castle that is another one. Yes you do get some like that...there are quite high expectations (Chris, Highland Archive).*

Misapprehensions about important events in Scottish history can also shatter the illusions built up by visitors. This was particularly poignant at the site of the Battle of Culloden, where the rebel Jacobite army was defeated by troops loyal to the government and seen as the final act in the destruction of the Clan system. As such the site has a strong resonance with visitors:

*They are looking for an emotional connection with the site ... we get people who expect to be on the Jacobite side and find out that actually their family was affiliated with the Government soldiers and Hanoverians and that is an interesting thing to see. Some people get very emotional about it and they seem to have invested a huge amount in this idea of being Scottish and being Jacobite when in reality the story of this uprising is incredibly complex and people are dealing with a Civil War (Katy, Culloden Battlefield Visitors Centre).*

The ancestral tourism market offers sustained economic potential to the wider Scottish touristic economy and opportunities for collaborative service provision both on the supply and demand side. However, the sector faces particular challenges related to competing and not always convergent professional discourses perceived by curators and other heritage related staff, as well as unrealizable expectations of certain consumers. This is underpinned

by the fact that staff are, unlike in other forms of heritage consumption, expected and expect to participate directly in the provision of experience.

### **Contemporary challenges in delivery of ancestral tourism experiences**

Delivering these personalized, often deeply emotional, experiences presents challenges to museums. Individual visits take time and effort and, as a result, many museums are heavily reliant on local volunteers. One participant outlined the benefits and drawbacks of working with volunteers:

*We are very lucky that we have a couple of volunteers...who are very, very knowledgeable. People who know the traditions, know the family trees and can link people very quickly and they are only a phone call away...you phone one of my uncles for example and there is anticipation and 20 minutes later he turns up and he goes 'yes I know exactly who this is' and then you see the even more overwhelmed reaction of people (Gordon, Applecross Heritage Museum).*

However, not all volunteers had the same degree of local knowledge. This could create situations that were difficult to manage:

*Somebody came in who was from a family that had been researched previously and we had one volunteer on the front desk, myself and my uncle. This lady was talking about her ancestor and she was naming him by his sort of nickname and the volunteer at the front desk was going 'somebody must know, I am sure somebody will know who the father is'. My uncle and I are just standing behind the visitor [indicates frantic but subtle hand waving] because there was a [very unhappy story] and there were people here who knew all about it and were too closely connected to the story. We were just trying to say, just ease off until we can pick this apart a little bit more sensitively – it can be a real diplomatic balancing act (Gordon, Applecross Heritage Museum).*



Many of our participants reported that dealing with ancestral tourist enquiries were time consuming and, outside of more formal archive centers, took time that was difficult to balance against the limited amount of payment brought in and the need to assist other general visitors. This finding is in line with research by Garrod and Fyall (2000) who observe that curators are reticent to overly commercialize as excessive demand may lead to attraction overuse and deterioration:

*It [charging for time] is one of those things that we find a little bit tricky. We are trying to get better at because our genealogy group are volunteers, they are expert in what they do but unless you have a firm saying 'we need payment for this because this is work that we are doing and we are spending money on Scotland's People and things like that', it is only covering costs. It is a difficult thing...we should not sell ourselves and our expertise short (Jacqui, Timespan Helmsdale).*

*I suppose one [challenge] would be expectations versus what is actually possible especially if they have come to you...about an hour before they have to leave for their flight and they are expecting to do their entire family history in that time is just not possible (Juline, Hawick Heritage Hub)*

The resourcing of many museums and heritage centers was also a challenge. Entrance fees are small and many museums operate on a shoestring budget moving from grant to grant just to stay open. This presents a paradox in our findings in that tourists can often achieve high levels of satisfaction and emotionally rich experiences. They also, based on government funded research, stay longer and spend more (Visit-Scotland 2013a). However, for these experiences to work, tourists have to source information at a local level and rely on locally held records and human information to achieve their ultimate goals of gaining access to

another generation or walking in the footsteps of their ancestors. This places additional pressure on small locally resourced museums often reliant on volunteers.

### ***Conclusions***

This research draws further attention onto individualized forms of heritage tourism and a focus which is more intangible and local (Palau-Saumell et al. 2013; Poria et al. 2004; Park 2010). Ancestral tourism is a phenomenon delivering deeply personal experiences, focused around encounters which involve intense and often lengthy interactions between visitors and the attraction. These encounters take place, by necessity, at a micro (local) level and thus present challenges to providers where the delivery of complex personal histories are often delivered by volunteers within community led heritage facilities.

### **Implications for Theory**

Our study contributes to literature on personal heritage tourism. We show that when tourists perceive a site as part of their own heritage it has management implications, both in terms of the interpretation offered and, significantly, the importance and intensity attached to specific interactions between tourists and providers (McCain and Ray 2003; Lin et al 2013). Unlike studies where individual responses are centered on sites of religious or broader cultural significance (e.g. Poria et al. 2004, 2006a), our case places individual tourists and their experiences as both geographically and phenomenologically unique. This places increased pressure on those delivering the experience as each visitor's story, expectations and response is likely to present its own unique challenge.

Our work is responsive to calls for contributions to the understanding of visitor experiences at heritage sites (Poria et al. 2006b). Access to extensive genealogical resources online

appears to have liberated ancestral tourists. However, this access, alongside increased media focus on genealogy and family history, also appears to have significantly raised visitor expectations. Our research reveals a wide range of human emotions from extreme joy to disappointment and sorrow and which, critically, also impact on those providing the experience. The personal nature of the ancestral tourism experience seems a particularly heightened one and further research is needed to explore the impact of emotional responses on satisfaction and revisit intentions.

Poria et al. (2006b) question the extent to which heritage tourism activities need to take place within authentic settings. Our research highlights that ancestral tourism experiences are underpinned by encounters in a variety of both tourist and non-tourist specific sites. These include visits to: sites with a personal connection; sites with no direct personal connection; and sites for information gathering. As such, our research should broaden the horizons of heritage tourism to include facilities and offerings which may not be seen as tourist facing but which are necessary for the creation of an appropriate experience.

Our study reinforces the importance of provision of tourism at a local level. In line with recent studies (e.g. Hamilton and Alexander 2013) we demonstrate how local actors can enrich visitor experiences with their passion and local knowledge. Alongside Hamilton and Alexander (2013), we highlight the importance of community involvement in the tourist visit and the additional value that this can generate. However, the deeply personal connection developed by ancestral tourists during visits; the identification of ancestry as a key contributor to a sense of place for residents (Campelo et al. 2014) and the ethical quandaries faced by providers regarding fees, suggests that the fundamental definition of these visitors as tourists to the local community is problematic. Like Poria et al. (2003), participants indicated that ancestral tourists are motivated by feelings of obligation when sites are perceived as connected to their past. However, this obligation is matched by providers' desire to send

visitors away with a positive experience, perhaps at the expense of delivering more empirically grounded narratives. Future research might explore role conflict experienced by those delivering such powerful tourism experiences.

### **Implications for Practice**

This research differentiates ancestral tourism from other heritage segments. This is articulated through the need for involvement of tourists with the heritage sites themselves, not simply as passive cultural consumers, but as active contributors to co-created heritage experiences and identity formation (Calver and Page 2013). Collaborative encounters demand an active, sensitive but nonetheless empirically robust professional involvement with visitors by curators, archivists and related staff. However, the research revealed distinctive differences between provision available to ancestral tourists between locally and publically funded museums particularly with regards to the commercial aspects of ancestral tourism. Whilst publically funded museums usually had formal charges in place and procedures with which to administer them, local museums appear to struggle to gain commercial traction from ancestral tourism. This either stemmed from a lack of appreciation of the value of the service provided or reluctance among museum staff to charge visitors who often seemed like ‘family’. More attention should be given to the training of local volunteers (often responsible for addressing deeply personal issues) and, more broadly, the funding and support that can be given to heritage tourism at a local level.

Heritage tourism is seen as a growth sector, increasingly sought after by tourists seeking more unique and authentic experiences over more predictable tourist offerings (Lacher et al. 2013). Alongside associations with regional and economic development and consumption by higher spending ‘mobility rich’ tourists (Kerstetter, Confer, and Graefe 2001; Hall, 2005); ancestral tourism, in a range of cultural contexts, is likely to become an increasingly important type of heritage tourism. The Scottish tourist board estimates a 50 million strong Scottish diaspora (inc. 15% of the Canadian and 3% of the US population) capable of contributing billions of pounds to the Scottish economy (Visit-Scotland 2013a). Similarly, Marschall (2015) notes that there are 50 million Americans with German roots (15% of the population) suggesting that Diasporic communities around the globe offer rich potential for tourism development.

Our research also resonates with themes in the wider tourism literature. Ancestral tourists align with notions of ‘mindful’ consumption (Moscardo, 1996). Extant research suggests that mindful tourists are more likely to be highly educated, more satisfied as a result of their experience and demonstrate an enhanced propensity to revisit (Kerstetter et al. 2001). Additionally, McKercher and Guillet (2011) argue that entire outbound tourism markets may display greater propensity towards destination loyalty than individual consumers of tourism, and that macro rather than micro levels of research are needed. We found evidence that both levels of analysis are relevant in ancestral tourism with evidence of the propensity of Diasporic markets in Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand to revisit Scotland for ancestral purposes year after year, often to precise locations where they have established a real or imagined family connection. On that basis we also contribute to understanding of the dimensions of destination brand equity. By embedding responsiveness to the particular needs of specific cultural tourists, Scotland, for example, can entrench the likelihood that already receptive markets will both engage in repeat visitation, and extend both stays and spend

(Gartner and Ruzzier, 2011; Wong 2015).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Our study offers up significant potential for future research in this area. It was not our intention to conduct research with ancestral visitors but to focus on the supply of ancestral tourism. However, future research could explore the impact of technology on increasing visitor expectations; the effect of ancestral motivations on wider tourist experiences and the relationship with tourist satisfaction and repeat visitation patterns.

Ancestral tourism disperses visitors away from sites of ‘national’ importance to sites of ‘local’ and ‘personal’ importance. Our research serves to raise the profile of the local museum, heritage center or library. These sites may appear peripheral within wider tourism offerings often centered on cities and high-profile attractions but our research suggests that encounters at smaller, geographically dispersed sites may transcend their particularity by delivering deeply meaningful experiences for visitors. For the ancestral tourist it may not be the ancient monument, Cathedral or city square that takes precedence, but the local graveyard, the name on a school roll, the fuzzy black and white image, or the meagre pile of stones that represents what was once a dwelling place. The discovery of their roots far from home provides perhaps the most meaningful tourist product of all – a sense of original ‘home-coming’.

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**Tables and Figures**

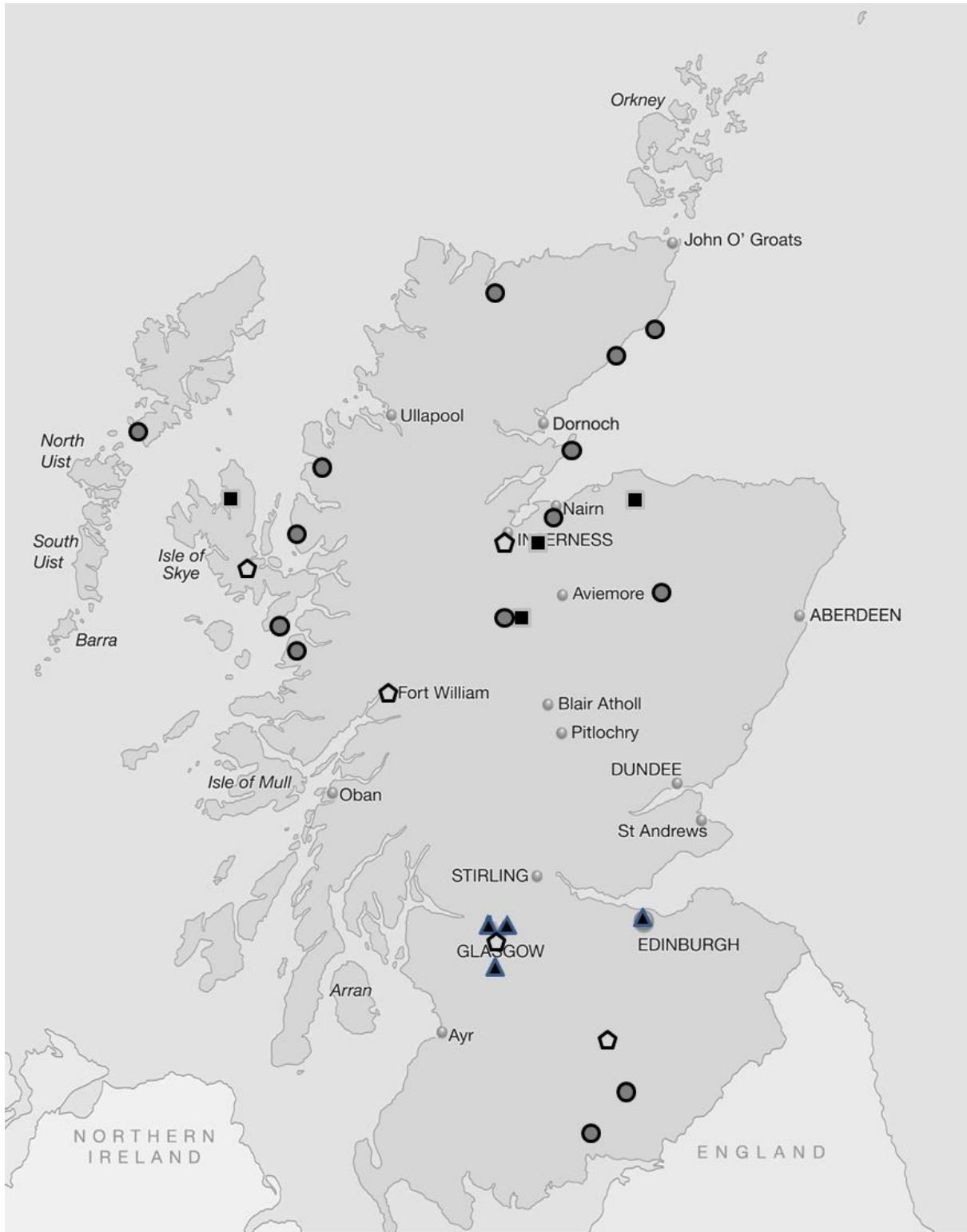
<b>Attraction type</b>	<b>Participating organizations</b>
National museums	National Museum of Scotland; Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum; National Museum of Rural Life; Riverside Museum
Archives	Glasgow Museums Resource Centre; Highland Archive; Hawick Heritage Hub; Lochaber Archive; Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre
Local museums and heritage centers	Dunbeath Heritage Centre; Grantown Museum; Timespan; Nairn Museum; Strathnaver Museum; Tarbat Discovery Centre; Applecross Heritage Centre; Gairloch Heritage Museum; Liddesdale Heritage Centre; Mallaig Heritage Centre; Seallam! Centre, Isle of Harris
Historic Site/Place of Interest	Culloden Battlefield; Elgin Cathedral; Highland Folk Museum; Skye Museum of Island Life;
Family History Societies	Clan MacPherson Museum; Dumfries and Galloway Family History Society; Clan Donald Centre

**Table 1 - Interview protocol summary**

<b>Interview Section</b>	<b>Main Areas of Focus</b>	<b>Examples of guiding questions</b>
(1) Ancestral tourism marketing and experiences	Exploring knowledge and perceptions of ancestral tourism and their experiences with the sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How long have you had visitors coming with a specific ancestral interest?</li> <li>• What are your experiences of working with ancestral tourists?</li> </ul>
(2) The ancestral tourist visit	Discussing promotion of the attraction and communications with ancestral tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What facilities/ support do you provide to ancestral tourists during their visit?</li> <li>• Are there any specific challenges you face when dealing with ancestral tourists?</li> </ul>
(3) Impact and ongoing effects of ancestral tourism	Assessing value of ancestral tourism to an organization, funding or support received and how ancestral tourism fits with other strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you perceive ancestral tourism fitting in to the wider destination product in Scotland?</li> <li>• How does ancestral tourism fit in with your future strategies?</li> </ul>

**Table 2 - Interview protocol summary**





- = Local Museum/Heritage
- ▲ = National Museum
- ◻ = Archive Centre/Library
- = Historic Site/Museum

**Figure 1 - Locations Visited During Data Collection Phase**