

## **Inheriting Phantasmal Cities: Urban Ghost Lore as Intangible Heritage**

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### **Abstract**

The first half of this paper focuses on the communal function of urban ghost stories as a form of intangible heritage. Although highly unreliable as collective memory, ghost stories induce a subtle transformation in locals' engagement with their built environment, charging specific locations with supernatural significance that renders them different from their surroundings. These storytelling practices enable elements of tacit ownership and subversion. This alternative folkloric geography destabilizes the 'official' readable surfaces of urban spaces while communally appropriating their meaning. This has particular potency in the modern(ising) city for as a temporal anachronism the ghost represents an implicit challenge to the ideological assertions that are made manifest in the city's rapidly changing architecture. These subversive dimensions give rise to questions about subaltern heritage and whose city is remembered or forgotten. While civic/national narratives seek to fashion the city as a symbol of progress, ghost stories acquire implicitly oppositional dimensions by alluding to memories of less reputable pasts that civic forces attempt to erase. Rather than directly resisting change, urban ghost lore becomes a form of guerrilla heritage, regenerating unmodern 'superstitions' in the very fabric of the modern city. The second half of the paper has a narrower, more practical focus on a pilot study I have recently conducted to capture and preserve ghost lore in Portsmouth (UK). The city's ghost stories have been crowdsourced from local inhabitants, electronically mapped, and, enhanced by historical accounts, developed into a mobile app. The freely available app seeks to transform and enrich locals' perceptions of their inherited spaces and places. It is hoped that this communal 'archive' will be supplemented by ongoing contributions from locals, thereby encouraging recognition, reclamation and ownership of their intangible local heritage. Ripe with interdisciplinary potential and international application, this research initiative aims to demonstrate a way of recognising and preserving the intangible supernatural heritage of our rapidly changing cities.