

Heritage and Heritage Tourism of the town of Grimsby

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Simon Bryson and Ian Rodwell are Tourism Management Programme Leaders at the University Centre Grimsby. Both have extensive experience of teaching in higher education and have been collaborating for the past three years on this Heritage and Heritage Tourism research within Grimsby.

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The aim of this research was to undertake a two-year longitudinal study using a qualitative approach to look at the heritage, artefacts and history of the town of Grimsby. Grimsby is situated in the borough of North East Lincolnshire and largely consists of Grimsby, Cleethorpes, Immingham and the surrounding countryside and villages with an approximate population of 160,000 people. All three specific areas, even though they exist in close proximity have their own unique histories and heritages. Grimsby a post-industrial northern fishing town (historically the world's largest fishing port), Cleethorpes a Victorian seaside resort, Immingham a large Humber port with petro-chemical industries, and the surrounding countryside based around agriculture and the gateway to agricultural Lincolnshire. It was decided that the scope of this research would be based around Grimsby and the heritage of Grimsby.

The original aim was to catalogue Grimsby's historical artefacts, and to create an online resource that people could access because the town is limited in regards of museum space, which is largely Grimsby's Fishing Heritage Centre. BA Tourism and Business Management students were involved in some of the desk based research around the historical development of the town. Access to the various repositories of historical artefacts were gained via NE Lincolnshire Council. The four main areas housing these historical artefacts were based around Grimsby Central library and their historical archives, Grimsby Town Hall which has a large amount of documentary archive material, a secret air conditioned site which includes the Doughty collection and a lot of larger historical objects many of which get put on display at the Fishing Heritage Centre. It was decided that a BFI film maker would produce a film cataloguing all of this, which could be used for anyone to gain access to these artefacts but this was cancelled due to the covid pandemic.

Once these visits had taken place along with detailed research into the history of Grimsby. A timeline of the main historical developments of Grimsby was produced which obviously covered approximately 2,000 years of history, from its original small Roman settlement up to the modern town that exists today. It was realised that the size of the task of cataloguing all of the historical artefacts would be too large a task especially with all of the artifacts and history involved in the historical development of a place. After meeting Dom Bowles the series executive producer of Channel 4's 'Britain's Most Historic Towns' and the premise

on which they researched a specific town or city with the historian Alice Roberts. They chose a specific location and linked it to a time period rather than its entire history, for example, they produced a programme 'Roman Chester' or 'Viking York'. This can be seen in Robert's latest book 'Ancestors – The Prehistory of Britain in Seven Burials (2021)', and also Matthew Kneale's 'Rome – A History in Seven Sackings from the Gauls to the Nazis (2017)' about the history of Rome. In both these publications instead of trying to catalogue the entire history they focus on key events to demonstrate the historic development. Therefore, instead of choosing the entire history of a location it makes more sense to choose a number of important historical time periods and in this case those that were/are important to the town of Grimsby. We decided that the most important periods of Grimsby's history started with its creation myth around the Viking legends of its foundations in and around the 9th Century by the Dane Grimmer, even though there isn't much physical evidence of the Vikings left it's still an important 'story', and has been used as a marketing tool to attract visitors in the past by Grimsby and the Fishing Heritage Centre when they put on an exhibition titled 'Grim put the grim in Grimsby'. However, the historical reality appears to show that the specific area was used by the Romans to harvest salt from the Humber prior to the Vikings arrival.

After this we identified medieval Grimsby as being the next important historical time period with the proper development of the town with some buildings still remaining such as Grimsby Minster and parts of the centre of the town. There are also the royal charters and the town maces. The next period that's important is the development of the town as a fishing port and becoming the largest in the world with the building of new docks, the dock tower (a replica of Torre del Mangia on the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena), and the expansion of the town.

Then the penultimate period chosen was around the Second World War and how the town moved into the modern world while still being the largest fishing port. How the town's people purchased two spitfires, along with how Grimsby was used as a test by the German Luftwaffe and carpet bombed with anti-personnel bombs.

The final time period is around modern Grimsby, the collapse of the fishing industry and its move towards a post-industrial future based around the development of the renewable industries, specifically wind energy.

Therefore, instead of looking at approximately 2,000 years of history it gets broken down into four distinct time periods which explains the history of the town or any specific location. Each one of these time periods can be used to market the location as a tourism destination aimed at people with different and similar historical interests. The authenticity debate comes in to this but each period has specific genuine artefacts which can be used. It's often difficult to disengage myth from facts especially when looking at Viking Grimsby but the town does get mentioned in several of the Viking Saga's. However, apart from specific areas such as Torksey in Lincolnshire, and Repton in Nottinghamshire where the 'great Viking army' camped they left on the face of it very little physical evidence of ever being there. We are though beginning to understand more about this time period through DNA research and carbon dating of any finds. It is difficult to use this to market a specific location around the romantic nature of the Vikings, even the city of York the most important settlement in the area of England that became Viking Danelaw there are very few physical remains. The city has the advantage of retaining some of its important medieval streets so utilises this alongside it even though it's not directly linked to that time period. They have developed a visitor attraction to cash in on their Viking heritage with the 'Jorvik Viking Centre' an artificially created modern interpretation of the Viking history of York and the Vikings themselves. The authenticity of this is based on our modern understanding of the culture which we are understanding more about as more archaeological research is undertaken.

As the historian E.H.Carr wrote in 1961, "History is opinion". He argued that history can be divided into 'facts of the past' and 'historical facts' and it's historians who decide what is important according to their own biases and agendas. Therefore, to explain what the heritage of Grimsby is about is very much dependent on the time period covered. It's Viking but we don't really know much about that apart from it running through the DNA of many residents with a long history in the town. It's a medieval market town/port and we do have more genuine physical evidence of this based around the Grimsby Minster and parts of the town centre. It's a famous fishing port which dominates much of the town, with the docks and dock tower being a central physical presence, alongside this you can see how as the town expanded housing developed. It's a town which was heavily bombed during the Second World War but fought back and played its part in the defeat of Hitler. It's a post-

industrial northern town based on modern renewable industries. Which is the authentic Grimsby? It depends on who you are, and it's different things to different people just like every other town and city.

Simon Bryson & Ian Rodwell, October 2021.

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