

Research asks if 'Poldark effect' threatens sense of Cornish identity

August 16 2019, by Toby Leigh



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A researcher is examining how Cornish people are affected by the rewriting of history and identity in TV programmes like *Poldark*—and the influx of visitors drawn to the county's scenic filming locations.

Alex Rowe, from Sennen in far West Cornwall is carrying out the study, titled "The '*Poldark* Effect': Socio-cultural Impact of Media Tourism on

Heritage and Identities in Cornwall."

His work focuses on the concept of [heritage](#) dissonance: a feeling experienced by a group of people when their understanding of their own culture and history is blurred and threatened.

The project has several aims, including discovering how Cornish identity is represented and perceived, and assessing the extent to which *Poldark* is shaping it, and representations of Cornwall.

Alex is a Ph.D. researcher in Plymouth Business School's Department of Tourism and Hospitality, which is funding his work. To gather data he has been interviewing tourists at *Poldark* filming locations in Cornwall, nearby residents, and local people such as ex-miners, people who work in the mining heritage sector and business owners and managers.

Alongside issues of identity, the early stages of research have also revealed concerns about the threat of overtourism in Cornwall and the ways in which *Poldark* has contributed to this.

The popularity of the *Poldark* novels and TV series has been eagerly seized upon by the bodies that operate Cornish heritage sites, as well as many others involved in tourism in the county. The '*Poldark* effect' has seen a substantial increase in visitor numbers and revenue, some of which can be channeled back into conservation efforts.

But Alex is trying to find out if the focus on *Poldark* and its romanticized representation of mining heritage and Cornish identity is threatening the genuine sense of 'Cornishness' felt by locals.

He said:

"The latest *Poldark* adaptation has meant an increased interest in Cornish mining heritage sites, but this poses various questions concerning the

authenticity of the heritage being portrayed, and has major ramifications for Cornish people living in close proximity.

"Sites like Levant Mine near St Just in West Cornwall, where 31 men died in a 1919 disaster, hold a powerful symbolism for locals, and mining in general is central to Cornish identity. Is this being diluted by the marketing of attractions in a way that plays on the image of Cornwall seen in *Poldark*?"

He continued:

"The uncertainty surrounding Brexit and the almost certain prospect of losing funds available to invest in Cornish heritage will mean that heritage attractions will continue to pursue avenues that will generate the largest incomes. So for now, at least, the *Poldark* effect looks likely to continue playing a major part in how mining heritage sites promote themselves, and generate revenue."

Alex is hoping to interview more people throughout the summer. He is interested in speaking to people who have been affected by overtourism in Cornwall, in addition to the concerns of heritage dissonance and the possible threat to Cornishness. If you would be willing to help with your thoughts on these subjects, or know someone else who might be, please email him at alexander.rowe@students.plymouth.ac.uk

Provided by University of Plymouth

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