

Displaying Ghost Signs Online

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Introduction

As a case study for ghost signs Leicester is an interesting location. A post-industrial city that has been through periods of decline and regeneration in recent years, Leicester contains many painted wall advertisements, aka ‘ghost signs’, dating from the early to mid-twentieth century (with some earlier examples). We have been documenting the ghost signs of Leicester over the last decade, as useful sources of information about former businesses and industries within the city, as well as for their aesthetic value and in recognition of their ephemeral nature. This photographic record is complemented by two further collections of photographs that feature ghost signs, the first dating from the 1990s, and the second, a series of general photographs of Leicester dating from the 1950s to the 1970s. These collections are important resources documenting the changes in Leicester’s ghost signs over the past two decades. The photographs, with accompanying historical details, form a core component of the University of Leicester’s *My Leicestershire History*, an online, open-access website that is part of the University of Leicester’s Special Collections Online, described as ‘a series of digital resources from the David Wilson Library’ (University of Leicester n.d.). While the resource covers the wider county, this chapter provides a summary of the state of ghost signs in the city of Leicester, an analysis of how they have changed over time and the particular value of creating a digital collection of ghost signs as part of a larger online resource that enables cross referencing between collections.

In 2010 the David Wilson Library at the University of Leicester, in partnership with a number of University-based and local community groups, obtained funding from the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) to create an online digital collection that would showcase selections from university, local authority, and community collections. The aim was to digitise previously hard-to-access material and make it available to the public online under a Creative Commons licence.¹ The website was named *My Leicestershire History*,² and the digitised resources uploaded to the collection included oral histories and radio broadcasts held by the East Midlands Oral History Archive (EMOHA); material from the University's Gorrie Collection of political memorabilia; learning resources about Leicester's manufacturing history ('Manufacturing Pasts'); digitised historical directories; a selection of films held by the Media Archive for Central England (MACE); materials from the collection of Rothley Heritage Trust, and, of most pertinence here, a collection of images of ghost signs, the only collection 'born digital'.³

The platform chosen for managing and displaying this online collection was the Online Computing Library Center's (OCLC) CONTENTdm digital archive management software. At the time, the reasons given for selecting CONTENTdm were 'Its rich functionality including full-text searching, [and] faceted search results'.⁴ It had been used successfully by the University of Oxford for the JISC-funded First World War Poetry Digital Archive project,⁵ while a member of the University's library team also had experience of

¹ Creative Commons copyright licences provide a standardised way to give the public permission to share and use creative work. Information can be found at: <http://creativecommons.org/> [Accessed 21 August 2015].

² *My Leicestershire History* may be freely accessed from the University of Leicester's Special Collections Online website: <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/myleicestershirehistory> [Accessed 22 June 2015].

³ Erway (2010) defines 'born digital resources' as 'items created and managed in digital form'. The original collection of ghost sign photographs (Hyde's) had been taken on a digital camera. It should be noted that, while this chapter is concerned with examples of signs in the city of Leicester, the whole collection is called *Ghost Signs of Leicestershire* and includes signs from across the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland.

⁴ Information about CONTENTdm can be found on the OCLC website at <https://www.oclc.org/contentdm.en.html> [Accessed 30 June 2015].

⁵ The First World War Poetry Digital Archive is at <http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/> [Accessed 30 June 2015].

using it to develop a digital archive in Canada.⁶ The resulting website features a growing number of digital resources that are free and fully searchable, and that may be accessed from any computer, tablet or mobile phone with an Internet connection. There is a facility for users to add comments or tags to each item without having to sign in to the website. The comment or tag is moderated by a staff member at the Library and added to the webpage. While this feature has been used very little to date, its potential is demonstrated by local Facebook groups who often use photographs from *My Leicestershire History* (sometimes without credit and rarely with a link to the website). The photographs often generate a lot of comments and illustrate the power of established websites like Facebook for crowd sourcing of information about the ghost sign and its location.⁷

Ghost Signs in Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland

The *Ghost Signs of Leicestershire* collection has directly benefitted from the efforts of ghost sign enthusiasts over several years. Initially it was based on a set of digital photographs taken by Colin Hyde from 2002 onwards. These were not made systematically but were collected because of a general interest in the Victorian and Edwardian architecture of the city and county. Consequently, although the collection is large, it is not comprehensive. Another collection of ghost signs was discovered at the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester & Rutland (ROLLR). These were prints of photographs taken in 1996 by Dennis Duggan and have since been scanned and added to the collection with the permission of ROLLR.⁸ A

⁶ Team member Slavko Manojlovich had previously worked on Memorial University's Digital Archives Initiative at <http://collections.mun.ca/> [Accessed 30 June 2015].

⁷ One such example may be viewed here:

<https://www.facebook.com/Leicestermemories/photos/a.303757036318447.89737.296186597075491/745095922184554/> [Accessed 28 August 2015].

⁸ It is worth noting that most of the content included in *My Leicestershire History*, including the collection of ghost sign photographs, has been donated to the University of Leicester for use by the original copyright

separate collection, *Vanished Leicester*, which is also part of *My Leicestershire History*, comprises over 1,000 photographs taken, contributed and digitised by Dennis Calow of areas in Leicester that were demolished for slum clearance between 1955 and 1975 (see Wynne 2011: 2). There is no temporal cross-over between this and the other collections but painted advertisements are clearly visible in many of the pictures and have been noted in the collection catalogue. While some ghost signs are represented by one image in the digital collection, others are represented by multiple images across one or more collections. These images may cover different angles, show the position of the sign on the building and in relation to the street, or changes that have occurred to the sign over time.

The ghost signs in the collection can be grouped into categories according to the product or service advertised. For subject categories, the *My Leicestershire History* project team chose to use the Library of Congress *Thesaurus for Graphic Materials*, with anglicised adaptations, for the creation of a controlled vocabulary of several thousand subject terms (Wynne 2011: 6). This has proved useful for cataloguing the wide variety of material on the *My Leicestershire History* website, but for the ghost sign photographic collections, the cataloguer's job was complicated by the many choices of category that could be made. For example, using this vocabulary an advertisement for beer could be tagged under 'Alcoholic beverages', 'Beer', 'Beverages', or 'Brewing Industry', and it is perhaps surprising that not a single advert for an alcoholic drink in the collection has been tagged with 'Alcoholic beverages' ('Brewing Industry' seems to have been preferred). Other online collections employ a wide variety of terms, demonstrating a lack of standardisation in describing ghost signs. For example, Dr Ken Jones's *American Ghosts – Ghost Signs of the United States* website enables users to search a collection of thousands of images by place, product category, or from an alphabetical list of all the products and services featured on the signs.

holders and producers (Dixon 2015b). The remainder, including historical directories, was out of copyright or 'best efforts' were made to contact the copyright holder (Wynne 2011: 6).

But here, for expediency, the ghost signs in the *My Leicestershire History* collection may be broadly categorised as follows:⁹

- Alcohol and tobacco (Ansells, Ind Coope, Capstans)
- Services, businesses and shops (hairdressing salon, cycle shop, Co-operative Society Stables, off licences, accountants, music depot, grocers, jewellers, printers)
- Manufacturing and factories (shoe manufacturers, hosiery, textile trim, knitwear)
- Trades (masons, plumbers, garages and motor engineers, house decorators and sign-writers, contractors)
- Food and drink (Bovril, fish and chip shop, bakeries, tea and coffee dealer, corn and seed merchants, dairies)
- Hotels and Restaurants (Wellington Hotel)
- Media and entertainment (Picture Post)
- Medical and health (throat lozenges, ‘Iron Jelloids’, spa baths)
- Household (shoe polish, cleaning products)
- Miscellaneous (building numbers, street names, unidentifiable/illegible signs)

While this list illustrates the broad range of products and services that were advertised by painted wall signs, any analysis of the numbers and types of the signs would need to bear in mind that those that feature in the collection are the survivors of what would have once been a much greater number of painted signs across the city. However, it is clear that the signs that survive tend to be located in the suburbs and, in particular, outside the city’s inner ring road (constructed in the 1960s-1970s), rather than the (once) heavily industrialised areas or

⁹ These categorisations broadly follow the History of Advertising Trust’s Ghostsigns archive typologies (HAT n.d.), with the addition of the category, ‘Manufacturing and factories’, which reflects Leicester’s particular industrial history rooted in hosiery, knitwear, shoes and boots.

commercialised city centre, which has been redeveloped in several waves since the 1960s,¹⁰ and coincided with the decreasing use of painted wall signs more widely from the 1950s onwards ‘in favour of mass-printed posters and billboards’ (Roberts n.d.).

In this chapter, we do not intend to discuss the development and digitisation of the collection in depth, but look instead at the unanticipated consequences of this activity for the study of ghost signs in Leicester.¹¹ That is to say, the strength of the *My Leicestershire History* collection of ghost signs is that, by including several sets of ghost sign photographs taken by different contributors over a number of decades, researchers may undertake longitudinal analyses of particular ghost signs. According to Warwick *et al* (2012, pp. xvi-xvii), ‘it is now commonplace for most memory institutions to create and deliver digital representations of cultural and historical documents, artefacts and images to improve access to, and foster greater understanding of, the material they hold’. The materials that comprise *My Leicestershire History* were digitised for exactly these reasons and are licensed for reproduction and reuse under a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND licence, although it is clear that ‘re-posters’ of images, in the aforementioned Facebook groups, for example, are not always rigorous with regards to crediting the photographer or the *My Leicestershire History* website.¹² Additionally, the ‘interconnectedness’ of online collections has the potential to add value to the examination of objects in their digital forms (Conway 2009: 368). As stated by Conway (2009) ‘digital products that draw together, organize, and enhance access to ...

¹⁰ The city’s planning officer, Konrad Smigielski oversaw many of the changes to Leicester city centre from 1962-1972. See ‘Anon. ‘The man who built modern Leicester’, *University of Leicester News and Events*, 25 January 2012, <http://www2.le.ac.uk/news/blog/2012/january/video-the-man-who-built-modern-leicester> [Accessed 11 July 2015].

¹¹ See Wynne 2011 for an overview of the development and execution of the *My Leicestershire History* project.

¹² This licence stipulates that users may download and share material as long as the author is credited and the material is not changed or used commercially. This was chosen to accommodate the large variety of material that was being added to the website, some of which had uncertain copyright status. The University of Leicester Library now sees this as a conservative choice and recent additions to the website have used the BY-NC licence instead so that material may be modified for teaching purposes.

research materials may have transcendental impact on the people who use them' (pp. 369-370).

Each collection has particular strengths. For example, Calow's collection demonstrates the widespread use of painted wall advertisements in the past and in parts of Leicester long since obliterated in slum clearances. The photographs in the Ghost Signs of Leicestershire collection evidence the changes in and weathering of signs in Leicester over a significant period of time. It is possible, for example, to see the deterioration in the condition of several signs during the six years between the time when Duggan took his photographs and Hyde began to document ghost signs in the city. These images show that some ghost signs had disappeared altogether by the time Hyde began his documentation, but also how quickly the signs had faded. This opportunity to compare and contrast signs over a relatively short period of time is not, as far as we have been able to determine, so easily facilitated by other such online collections and makes the *My Leicestershire History* collection of ghost signs unique. While it is not unusual for ghost sign 'collectors' to compare contemporary images with archival photography (see 'Lisa @ YorkStories' 2014, for example), in many cases, the images in the *My Leicestershire History* collection allow users to view subtle changes in signs that take place year on year, rather than over decades. This is most apparent when viewing images of the so-called 'palimpsest' signs in the collection:¹³ it becomes possible to pinpoint the components of different iterations of a sign and date the iteration with some accuracy, by correlating it with design chronologies and advertising slogans used by companies such as Bovril (see below).

¹³ In the context of ghost signs, a 'palimpsest' is one sign that has been written on top of another but where the original sign can be seen, either because the top sign is fading or because it does not cover the original sign completely. Sam Roberts writes that 'The effect caused by earlier signs being revealed by the fading of more recent painting is commonly referred to as 'palimpsest'. See <http://www.ghostsigns.co.uk/2007/07/gillette-palimpsest.html> [Accessed 25 August 2015].

The usefulness of the collection is enhanced by its conjunction with other types of digitised archival material, which are also part of the overarching *My Leicestershire History* framework. This material, which includes oral history collections and historical directories, makes it possible to cross-reference ghost signs, including their locations and the business(es) to which they refer, with additional layers of documentary evidence. For example, signs painted on street corners advertising breweries (see ‘Ansell’s’ below), might refer to a pub or an off-licence. In the Victorian suburbs of Leicester it is not unusual for evidence of the original business to have been obscured by, for example, work to convert the premises into housing stock. The option to cross-reference the address with historical directories provides researchers with the opportunity to determine the nature of the original business, the name(s) of its owner(s) and, potentially, listen to oral histories connected with the premises. Indeed, this ‘interconnectedness’ is a particular advantage of digital collections, as defined by Conway (2009: 366). But the collection’s effectiveness in this respect is, of course, contingent on the accuracy of the metadata attached to each digital object - an issue to which we turn later in this chapter.

How were these collections catalogued?

The platform used for these digital collections is CONTENTdm, described by the Online Computing Library Center (OCLC) as ‘Digital Collection Management Software’ (Dixon 2015a) and uses the Dublin Core metadata standard (see OCLC n.d., DCMI n.d.). All metadata fields are searchable within the collection and by search engines. GPS coordinates are provided for each entry so that, where possible, the ghost signs (or the site of a now lost ghost sign) may be viewed on Google Maps. A typical example of the cataloguing information the user can see and search is in the appendix to this paper. Taking the example provided in the appendix, a search for ‘Bovril’, ‘food industry’, ‘Beaconsfield Road’, or

‘Cundy’, will return the ghost sign on Beaconsfield Road, Leicester and any other similarly tagged items in the collection.

At the time of writing there are 269 photographs of 191 ghost signs in the Ghost Signs of Leicestershire collection, most of which are (or were) in within the bounds of the City of Leicester. These give a pictorial account of a range of local and national companies and products, a history of advertising, a hint at company takeovers, and in the case of the many that have been painted over and the few that have been restored, an indication of the worth the signs are perceived to have, by owners and property developers. Of the 191 different signs, 149 (79 per cent) of the products or services advertised are local to Leicester, 26 (14 per cent) to the Midlands, and only 16 (8 per cent) are national brands. The majority of ghost signs that survive in Leicester and Leicestershire are unique signs for small, local companies. If a brand is represented more than once it is usually for a regional beer, such as Ansells or Mitchells & Butler. Signs advertising national products are unusual. One exists for Bovril, a couple for the magazine *Picture Post* and a few advertising proprietary medicines – most notably Parkinsons Pills and Iron Jelloids.

The success of a project such as *My Leicestershire History* depends to a large extent on the quality of the cataloguing and accuracy of the metadata, which, as Parry *et al.* put it (2009: 99), ‘[turns] data into meaningful objects’. Indeed, the effectiveness and usefulness of the ‘semantic web’ – participatory, interactive, interconnected (see Parry *et al.* 2009: 98) – relies on the accuracy of metadata. One issue that arose with the *Vanished Leicester* collection of photographs, in particular, was that recording the ghost signs featured in some individual photographs (particularly the ‘Callow’ set) were not necessarily the main priority of the archivists when the collection was catalogued. Therefore, at the time of writing, the metadata does not accurately reflect the number of times that ghost signs appear in the collection. Of 1,037 photographs in the collection, 32 are identified as showing a ghost sign

while a further 79 are identified as featuring a ‘sign’, some of which are likely to be painted advertisements (i.e. ‘ghost signs’ in the broadest sense). For example, a 1969 photograph of Allington Street that features a Double Diamond ghost sign does not appear in a search for ghost signs, the brewing industry, or beer, but does in a search for Double Diamond or Ind Coope.¹⁴ That said, the process of cataloguing is ongoing and these absences and any inaccuracies in the metadata may, as they are identified, be resolved in the future, resources permitting.

Using the Collections

In the remainder of this chapter we consider three case studies. The first is an example of a single sign that was part of a national campaign. The second comprises a group of ghost signs advertising a regional brand. The final case study is, again, focused on a single sign, but for a local company. Each case study demonstrates different aspects of the value of the *My Leicestershire History* digital collections and, in particular, the benefits of a cataloguing system that facilitates the analysis of ghost signs over a period of time, as well as from geographical and aesthetic perspectives.

Bovril

Evidence of how a sign changes over time can be seen in the example of a Bovril ghost sign on Beaconsfield Road, Leicester. This so-called ‘palimpsest’ comprises what appear to be three signs positioned on top of each other. There are four photographs of the sign in the *Ghost Signs of Leicestershire* collection, taken in 1996, 2002, 2006, and 2013. The top layer is an advertisement featuring the ‘Little Bovril’ calf and the slogan ‘A little Bovril puts beef into it’, written in red block (‘A little Bovril’) and black cursive lettering (‘puts beef into it’). The date of the sign could be anywhere from the start of the ‘Little Bovril’ advertising

¹⁴ See <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/ref/collection/p15407coll5/id/479> [Accessed 22 June 2015].

campaign in 1947 into the 1950s (see fig. 1) (Hadley 1970: 56-57).¹⁵ The 1996 photograph clearly shows the sign fading from the top down so that the first words of the slogan have almost disappeared and a second advertisement is visible beneath. This pattern of fading might be explained by the sign facing south on a fairly open site. Buildings opposite cast a shadow on the bottom of the sign for part of the year, but the top is exposed to the sun throughout the year.

[INSERT FIG. 1 HERE. CAPTION 'THE BOVRIL GHOST SIGN IN (TOP TO BOTTOM) 1996, 2006, 2013']

The 2002 and 2006 photographs show that the red of 'A little Bovril' has almost disappeared and the calf has started to fade. As this sign fades another, older sign has been revealed, featuring the text, 'Bovril the essence of good cooking'. This slogan can be found online as part of the text in an advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald from 1948, so it pre-dates the 'Little Bovril' sign, but we have been unable to track down its origins with any certainty.¹⁶ By 2013, the 'Little Bovril' version of the sign has almost disappeared, 'The Essence of Good Cooking' slogan dominates, and another sign beneath that has started to appear, although this cannot be easily identified and there is no indication that it is a Bovril advertisement. In addition, at the bottom left of the panel, the name Cundy & Son Ltd. has

¹⁵ While 'Little Bovril' had been used in advertisements previously it was only in the 1940s that he became the subject of an advertising campaign (Hadley 1970: 56-57). An online example from 1947 can be seen on the HAT website at <http://www.hatads.org.uk/ads/gallery/31604/34/Food--Drink> [Accessed 30 June 2015].

¹⁶ The text of a Bovril advert on page 6 of the Sydney Morning Herald, 26 April 1948 uses the phrase 'the essence of good cooking'.
<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1301&dat=19480426&id=bVcQAAAAIBAJ&sjid=2JMDAAAAIBAJ&pg=4122,1953334&hl=en> [Accessed 30 June 2015].

emerged. T.E. Cundy & Son Ltd. were local painters and glazers from 1940 until the company's demise in 1997.¹⁷

Assuming the 'Little Bovril' sign was painted no later than the 1950s, it had survived surprisingly well until 1996. However, the presence of two wooden batons running vertically up the sign in the 1996 photograph suggests that an advertising hoarding had been placed over the top of it at some point, thus preserving the 'Little Bovril' sign underneath. An example of a similar case can be seen in Beatrice Road, Leicester, where an advertisement for UCAL throat lozenges was revealed when a hoarding was temporarily removed in 2014.¹⁸ The pace of change of the Bovril sign since 1996 seems to be quite fast but, using the online collection, it is possible to look at other signs that have faded equally quickly over the last 20 years. For example, an Ansells sign on Cross Street, facing south in a similarly exposed position, also shows a rapid rate of decay since 1996 (see below for further examples).¹⁹ We can conclude that constant exposure to the sun leads to dramatic changes in the appearance of a ghost sign in just a few years.

Ansell's

There are many signs advertising beer in the collection, particularly those pertaining to regional breweries and beers. The search subject 'brewing industry' brings up 44 photographs in the ghost signs collection and a further nine from the *Vanished Leicester* collection (plus an oral history and a couple of written items from the University's Special Collections).

These photographs mainly feature Midlands brands such as Everards (Leicester), Phipps (Northampton), and Mitchells & Butler (Birmingham). Ansell's was a Birmingham-based

¹⁷ While the company maintains a postal address in Leicester an article on the Trades Union Congress website states the company was 'wound down' in 1997. <https://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-issues/health-and-safety/risks-newsletter/risks-2006/risks-245-25-february-06> [Accessed 30 June 2015].

¹⁸ See <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/ref/collection/p15407coll4/id/269> [Accessed 25 August 2015]

¹⁹ These signs can be compared at <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/search/collection/p15407coll4/searchterm/Cross/order/nosort> [Accessed 26 August 2015]

company that is represented in the collection by more than a dozen examples, most of which show the company's slogan 'Ansells, the Better Beer'. In particular, two company takeovers are illustrated by the signs. In 1934, Ansells acquired the Holt brewery and adopted the company's emblem of a red squirrel.²⁰ There are two examples of the squirrel in the collection, one on an Ansells sign, one not. In 1952, Ansells acquired the Leicester Brewing & Malt Company (LBM) and this is graphically illustrated by three examples of Ansells advertisements painted over LBM signs.²¹ On Halsbury Street there is a triple sign showing an Ansells sign on top of an LBM sign, on top of a sign for an unidentified stout.²² On the corner of Leopald Road and Fleetwood Road there is an illustration of the effects of weathering: identical Ansells signs painted over LBM signs but positioned on either side of the corner show the north facing sign to be preserved better than the east facing sign.²³ These are the signs that have been visible at some point since 1996. However, the *Vanished Leicester* collection helps to illustrate how widespread these advertisements were across the city, as it includes images of another nine ghost signs for Ansells plus a billboard advertisement and two pub signs, all now lost in slum clearances. Ansells became part of Allied Breweries in 1961 and the resulting company supplied almost half of the country's outlets, such as hotels, clubs and off-licences, which may explain why most of the signs are placed on buildings that are, or used to be, off licences.²⁴

A search for Ansells across the whole of *My Leicestershire History* brings up 45 results that include trade directories from several counties as well as a photograph of an

²⁰ The history of Ansells and examples of their advertising can be seen on the Midlands Pubs website at <http://www.midlandspubs.co.uk/breweries/birmingham/ansells-brewery.htm> [Accessed 15 July 2015]

²¹ Ibid

²² A brief history of the Leicester Brewing & Malt Company can be found on the Leicestershire and Rutland Breweries website at <http://www.histman.co.uk/brewers/index.php?page=leicester-breweries> [Accessed 30 June 2015].

²³ See <http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/ref/collection/p15407coll4/id/52> [Accessed 25 August 2015]

²⁴ See Saving the Past: The Rescue of the Allied Breweries Archive by Ray Anderson and Mike Brown at <http://www.pubhistorysociety.co.uk/PDF-Downloads/allied1.pdf> [Accessed 25 August 2015]

Ansells pub from another collection. The ability to cross reference with other collections enables the ghost signs to be seen within the context of other locations and designs, while the availability of local trade directories in the collection also enables the viewer to discover who was running the shops on which the signs appear. The photographs show the consistency of Ansell's advertising, perhaps demonstrating a strong visual identity, over the period of time represented by the Leicester ghost signs in the collection. These are either yellow or pink and the slogan 'Ansells, the Better Beer' is used in most of them – a slogan which dates from the 1930s.²⁵ In 1968, the company launched a three month television and poster advertisement campaign.²⁶ It may be surmised that this signalled the end of painted wall signs advertising Ansells beer and could date the Leicester examples to this three decade period from the 1930s to the 1960s. The Ansells brewery in Birmingham closed in 1981, but the name lives on in beers currently brewed by Carlsberg.²⁷

Baker & Soars

Baker & Soars are plumbers' merchants and suppliers of bathrooms and kitchens. The company's website emphasises that the company has been in business locally for over 70 years and reinforces its provenance with an image of a ghost sign on Wellington Street, Leicester.²⁸ This ghost sign image is designed to emphasise the longevity of the company and its connection to the local area. Sited on the side of Baker & Soars' former premises, the sign been visible for many years and, although the building has been turned into apartments, is still called the 'Baker & Soars Building', with the ghost sign adding to the visual appeal of the building (see fig. 2). In 2004-5, an extension to the building was demolished and another

²⁵ The history of Ansells and examples of their advertising can be seen on the Midlands Pubs website at <http://www.midlandspubs.co.uk/breweries/birmingham/ansells-brewery.htm> [Accessed 15 July 2015]

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ The ghost sign appears on the Baker & Soars website at http://www.bakerandsoars.com/?page_id=7 [Accessed 30 June 2015].

sign, 'Manufacture', was revealed. Two years later the word 'Warehouse' had just started to appear above 'Manufacture' and by 2009 this had become quite clear.

[INSERT FIG. 2 HERE – CAPTION 'THE BAKER & SOARS GHOST SIGN IN (TOP TO BOTTOM) 2003, 2005, 2015']

By 2015 further weathering had exposed more lettering from earlier signs. This is another example of the way an updatable website can capture changes to ghost signs that have occurred across short periods of time. Ironically, a sign that has been used to emphasise stability and to create a visual identity for the company's website is now weathering to reveal a previous history of the building. Trade directories state that at the turn of the century, before the building was used by plumbing merchants, it housed Hurst & Williams Ltd., bookbinders, stationers & printers, Shimeld Bros., boot and shoe manufacturers, and Miss Mary Carnall, a dress maker.²⁹ It will be interesting to note if any of these names are revealed in the coming years.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the benefits to researchers of making digital collections of ghost signs freely available. Such collections allow users to analyse signs over a number of years and to cross-reference individual records with other types of complementary archival material, such as business directories and oral histories, as well as providing a record of signs now lost. But this chapter has also highlighted some of the limitations of such collections, most notably with regards to the accuracy or otherwise of the metadata attached to each image record. These issues are not unsurmountable however, although dependent on the availability of financial resources and the staff time in order to amend and augment records. When an archive such as *My Leicestershire History* features many different collections, and

²⁹ *White's Directory of Leicester* 1904 p.135.

continues to add materials, a rigorous approach to cataloguing that anticipates the potential links between the various collections is necessary. *My Leicestershire History* used volunteer and community cataloguers at the start of the project, with support and assistance provided by seconded members of University Library staff (see Wynne 2011: 3-4; 7-8). The challenge was to ensure a high standard of cataloguing while also completing the work to deadline. Volunteer cataloguers were provided with metadata ‘helpsheets’ (Wynne 2011: 10), but necessarily there could have been some trade-off between expediency and accuracy as a result. Indeed, community partners, commented on the time-consuming and laborious nature of digitising, uploading and providing metadata for collections (Wynne 2011: 10). With specific reference to the sets of ghost sign photographs included in the collection (i.e. the ‘Hyde’ and ‘Duggan’ sets), the metadata was input to the ContentDM database by a paid member of staff on secondment and in liaison with Colin Hyde (Unwin 2015).

In terms of sustainability, the collection benefits from institutional support and is not reliant on the efforts of a few dedicated individuals. OCLC hosts the ContentDM database on its servers (Dixon 2015b), and the David Wilson Library at the University of Leicester has made a commitment to maintain public access to the collection (Wynne 2011). *My Leicestershire History*, as a whole, is now a component of the University’s wider Special Collections Online (Dixon 2015b), and as such will, assuming these arrangements remain in place into the future, have a lifespan beyond those who created the collections, continuing to be maintained, developed and interpreted in new ways according to the particular needs of the time.³⁰ A 2015 addition to the *My Leicestershire History* collection of ghost signs has been a map, imported from Google Maps, onto which the location of each ghost sign in the collection is plotted. This will facilitate the development of self-directed ghost sign trails,

³⁰ At the time of writing, Colin Hyde is responsible for maintaining and augmenting the *Ghost Signs of Leicestershire* section of the *My Leicestershire History* archive, which is itself overseen by Dr Simon Dixon, Digital Humanities and Special Collections Manager at the University of Leicester.

focused on particular areas of the city/county, or particular types of sign. Several projects have used Google Maps, Historypin or other mapping methods to locate ghost signs and some of these projects have developed trails, which could become models for a similar initiative in Leicester. For example, collections from Stoke Newington, UK, Louisville, USA, and Dublin, Eire, have used Historypin to create trails. *Dublin Ghost Signs* also features a timeline, which is another way in which the changes in ghost signs might be compared over time.³¹ Dr Ken Jones has used Google Maps to locate the ghost signs he has photographed across the USA,³² while Kasey Smith has used both Google Street View and Google Satellite View to map ghost signs in San Francisco.³³

Mapping also makes it possible to visually determine the distribution of signs around the city and identify pockets of particular types of signs, which point to particular areas of Leicester having been associated with particular trades or businesses. For example, a number of signs in the collection are associated with motor vehicles, garages and car mechanics in the Victorian area of Clarendon Park, adjacent to the affluent suburb of Knighton to the south of the city. This may, for example, provide an indication of the levels of car ownership amongst wealthy Leicester industrialists in the first decades of the twentieth century. While recognising that the Leicester digital collection only features ghost signs that have survived until the last forty years, there is scope here for further research into the distribution of different types of business around the city, taken in conjunction with other types of material, such as historical business directories.

³¹ The trails can be found at:
Stoke Newington <https://www.historypin.org/tours/view/id/527/title/Stoke%20Newington%20Ghostsigs>,
Louisville <https://www.historypin.org/tours/view/504/title/Ghost%2520Signs%2520of%2520Louisville/>,
Dublin <http://dublinghostsigns.com/about/historypin/> [All accessed 26 August 2015]

³² *American Ghosts – Ghost Signs of the United States* by Dr Ken Jones is at <http://www.drkenjones.com/> [Accessed 26 August 2015]

³³ Perception Filter, Kasey Smith's blog about ghost signs is at <http://www.perceptionfilter.com/category/ghost-signs/> [Accessed 26 August 2015]

A further benefit of the map and its integration with Google Street View is that it becomes easier to determine the potential causes of damage and deterioration to particular signs. Whether a sign is south or north-facing becomes more evident, allowing a researcher who may be at some physical distance from Leicester or otherwise unable to visit the sign in person, to track the effects of the environment on painted signs. Finally, as some ghost signs disappear, either through the ravages of time, building work, or the efforts of high pressure washers, 'new' signs will continue to be revealed, as hoardings come down and walls are demolished, and these will be added to the collection.

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Appendix

Title	Ghost sign for Bovril on Beaconsfield Road taken in 2013.
Photographer	Hyde, Colin
Description	Bovril was developed in the 1870s but was only known by the name from 1886. This advert was used as part of the advertising campaign in the 1950s. This ghost sign has faded considerably since the first photo in this sequence was taken in 1996. Previous layers are being revealed and the name of the painter - Cundy & Son (probably local firm TE Cundy & Son Ltd) - can now be seen in the bottom left corner.
Subject	Advertisements Food industry
Company Name	Bovril
Location	United Kingdom -- England -- Leicester -- Beaconsfield Road

Place name	Leicester
GPS co-ordinates	52.626512 - 1.150968
GPS note	To use the GPS co-ordinates please enter them into Google Maps at http://maps.google.co.uk/maps
See also	Bovril
Date of photograph	06/10/2013
Date created	2013
Type	Photograph
Format	image/jpeg
Rights	You may use this image for personal use or study in accordance with our licence http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/uk/
Metadata Licence	You can re-use this metadata record under a Creative Commons Zero 'no rights reserved' licence: http://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/
Download available	Yes
Contact us	Please contact library@le.ac.uk for enquiries or to seek permission to use this image.
Collection	Ghost signs of Leicestershire
Themes	Ghost signs