



FACTVM
FOVNDATION
FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY
IN CONSERVATION



Heritage and Minitrue

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Though Governments are feeding stories to the press of flickering recovery and use local stories to bolster their claims we are, all of us, still living in an economic turmoil of historic proportions. Some are lucky - they were in the right place or positioned themselves, some were unlucky or made a mistake. But we had little knowledge of where to be or how to react, whose fault it is is not my subject.

The economy does a lot more than create wealth or poverty, it is the way we deal with each other, not just commercially - it is a social and moral issue. To try to get it right we need to understand how it works. Adam Smith helped us to open our collective eyes after the warlord/kingdom years in the west and the C18th and C19th which played out as we began to understand what industry was and what the shift from rural to urban living meant and what intervention could do depending on the instruments and methods used.

Our heritage is a lot more important than short term political expediency - we all understand that and we are beginning to understand that we are part of this economic system that allows these vast shifts in our comfort or misery, but we are part of something bigger. When we look at history we start to understand - after all what is economics other than behaviour and what is behaviour other than a culmination of our history. We began to understand this in the mid C19th - surprisingly, ironically or obviously it is at just this time that archaeology and the idea of conservation and preservation of our heritage took hold.

Of course a large part of that might be blamed on the extraordinary creation of wealth and consequent leisure (we have to ignore for our present purposes the terrible and tragic levels of degradation and deprivation that this required in factories and workhouses) but that wealth allowed those able to think beyond tonight's dinner about their past and what it meant. Exhibits of strange things from Egypt and Iraq, ancient languages newly interpreted, peoples newly met at the Great Exhibitions, cultures brought together for commerce. They realised that we were our past - we are living alongside our culture - it lives and matures with us and through natural selection (late C19th), we are what we came from. What a change and what openings and opportunities. We are our history but the difference is, we die. It doesn't. Unless we let it. And we don't have the right to let that happen as our descendents are just as needy of a biography, a soul, as we are.

It's simple really. Unless we look after what communicates our past and our cultural heritage we might as well throw away all we have achieved and enter an Orwellian existence - being told how to feel, not having the knowledge of where we came from and where we might be going to combat the Minitrue's version of truth. The Foundation wants to conserve and preserve, using the wonderful technology that Orwell believed would create evil - it has created good and we have to use it.

*Minitrue is the Newspeak name for the Ministry of Truth in 1984.