

<b>Institution: University of Reading</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature</b>
<b>Title of case study: Charlemagne in England: Supporting local regeneration through the delivery of cultural projects</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Research produced by the University of Reading's Charlemagne in England project played a key role in a successful bid to develop community-based street theatre cultural projects in Walsall as part of a regeneration programme. Four plays have been performed in the area to date, helping to strengthen local identity. International links have been established with audiences in countries such as Canada through video-streamed performances, and there are plans to take the plays to Belgium and France. Set to become an annual tradition, the project has already brought about significant local cultural change in a relatively disadvantaged part of the country.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Two researchers, Phillipa Hardman, Reader in English Literature at the University of Reading, and Marianne Ailes, Senior Lecturer in French at the University of Bristol, working respectively on the Middle English and medieval French-language texts in the insular Charlemagne tradition, made a joint bid to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for a research grant to undertake a major collaborative study entitled 'Charlemagne in England: The Matter of France in Middle English and Anglo-Norman Literature'. The bid was successful and an award was made for 2009-2012.</p> <p>Hardman and Ailes analysed all extant copies of Charlemagne texts in the epic tradition produced in England, both in French and English, looking at the individual manuscript contexts and issues of reception and adaptation of the texts. They examined the continuing popularity of the epic tradition in England throughout the Middle Ages and the particular interest in England in narratives focused on combat between French Christian heroes and Saracen champions.</p> <p>Hardman and Ailes found a persistent history of re-appropriation of the tradition and adaptation of the stories to new circumstances, whether these were political, religious, or cultural. Whereas earlier scholarship had tended to dismiss the later texts as inferior derivatives of poorly assimilated originals, the two researchers showed that the many variations are evidence of a vigorous and continuing creative engagement with the texts, with later writers re-interpreting them to reflect different issues and concerns from those that prevailed at the time of the early epic productions.</p> <p>In addition, the PhD student attached to the project at the University of Reading addressed the question of post-medieval re-appropriations and found evidence of a modern resurgence of interest in the legends, especially in the light of 21st-century concerns such as gender and ecology.</p> <p>The concept of popular engagement with and adaptation of French epics of Charlemagne in later medieval to modern England is what connected with the developing ideas among Walsall Council's Creative Development Team for a cultural project based upon 'Bayard's Colts', a set of early modern wooden artefacts with possible Charlemagne-tradition associations, held by the Council and conserved in Walsall Museum. While there is little documentary evidence for the origin of these club-like items, their presence in Walsall and their role in civic ceremonies can be traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century at least, and the name 'Bayard's Colts' has always been attributed to them in local tradition. 20th-century research on the history of the artefacts (F. N. Bowler, 'Bayard's</p>

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Colts', *Folklore* 81 (1970), 266-7) suggested two possible sources for the attributed name Bayard: the chevalier Bayard (d. 1524), or the magical horse Bayard featured in the medieval French Charlemagne epic *Renaud de Montauban* (wrongly identified by Bowler as the *Chanson de Roland*). Research by Hardman and Ailes showed that, contrary to previous assumptions, there was fragmentary textual evidence to suggest insular appropriation of the French epic known as *Les Quatre fils Aymon*, and that this can be linked, through the English translation of the French prose version printed by Caxton, to records of lost dramatised versions of the Bayard story in the 16th and 17th centuries, indicating a continuing history of creative engagement with the Bayard legend.

**3. References to the research**

P. Hardman and M. Ailes, 'How English are the English Charlemagne Romances?', in *Boundaries in Medieval Romance* (2008), pp. 43-55. [peer-reviewed collection of essays]

P. Hardman and M. Ailes, 'Crusading, Chivalry and the Saracen World in Insular Romance', in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England* (2010), pp. 45-65. [peer-reviewed collection of essays]

P. Hardman, 'Making Use of the Matter of France', online audio-file research seminar (IMEMS, Bangor and Aberystwyth University, 15 February 2011) <http://www.imems.ac.uk/2010-2011.php.en>

P. Hardman, 'Roland in England: Contextualising the Middle English *Song of Roland*' in *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts* (2011), pp. 91-104. [peer-reviewed collection of essays]

P. Hardman, 'Knight, King, Emperor, Saint: Portraying Charlemagne in Middle English Romance', *Reading Medieval Studies* 38 (2012), 43-58. [peer-reviewed journal]

**AHRC Grant Funding**

PI: Phillipa Hardman, title: 'Charlemagne in England: The Matter of France in Middle English and Anglo-Norman Literature', sponsor: AHRC, value: £173,285 plus two funded PhD studentships, period of the grant: three years - 2009-2012.

**4. Details of the impact**

Hardman and Ailes' research was instrumental in helping Walsall Council to design and execute a street theatre project based on the Bayard's Colts as part of a wider regeneration programme for the town.

In 2010, the University of Reading's publicity officer interviewed Hardman and Ailes about their Charlemagne in England project, and made a podcast available on the internet via the University website. In the interview, Hardman and Ailes outlined the background to their research and what they expected their investigations to produce, and also what they saw as the interest their findings about a multilingual cultural tradition (Charlemagne texts being produced and read in Latin, French and English), with concerns about inter-faith encounters (Christian/Saracen combat and conversion), might hold for modern multilingual and multicultural Britain.

The interview was heard by the manager of Walsall Council's Creative Development Team, who contacted Hardman in May 2011 to discuss ways in which the academic research might contribute to their street theatre initiative. Their aim was to enhance a sense of local identity in the community through putting on a series of plays that would exploit public interest in the unique set of Bayard's

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Colts artefacts held by the council, and would involve as wide a range of people from the local area as possible. Hardman and Ailes gave their support to Walsall's bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project grant, writing a section of the application outlining their proposed role as academic advisers to the project, and advising the Creative Development Team on appropriate texts that could be used as resources for the plays. The bid was successful, and the project was launched at a public event in Walsall on 29 February 2012, at which Hardman and Ailes gave illustrated presentations on their research and its connections with the Bayard's Colts project. This event was attended by some 50 people from a range of institutions, as well as the general public, and all were encouraged to sign up to take part in the development of the first street theatre production, planned for performance in August 2012.

Since the launch in February 2012, the Bayard's Colts project has successfully achieved its targets: the four plays, with local participants involved at every level of the production, were performed in outdoor settings in Walsall town centre in August and November 2012 and February and May 2013, and the performances were repeated in indoor settings in Walsall and neighbouring Bloxwich, with live video streaming to audiences in Canada and other countries around the world. The November indoor performance was a gala event at which the Mayor of Walsall was present, and video interviews were played to provide context for the performance of the play. These included an interview with Hardman and Ailes in which they shared their research findings and discussed their significance in relation to the Bayard's Colts community street theatre project. All the video interviews have subsequently been made freely available on the Bayard's Colts website ([www.bayardscolts.org.uk](http://www.bayardscolts.org.uk)), which also contains photo galleries from the street performances and comments from the public.

The first year of the Bayard's Colts project concluded with an awards ceremony on 14 May 2013, at which the Chairman of Walsall Civic Society outlined its achievements and described the cohesive impact it had had on the local community, both for those who had taken part in the productions and for those who had enjoyed the performances. The Mayor of Walsall presented awards recognising the contributions of the instigators and supporters of the project, including Hardman and Ailes, and gave certificates to the local apprentices and students who had worked on the initiative. The event organisers have reportedly been asked to take the plays to Stratford-on-Avon, and plans are underway, with advice from Hardman and Ailes, to make connections with towns in France and Belgium where Bayard-related activities are held.

**Testimonials**

Walsall's street theatre initiative received highly positive feedback, as did the involvement of Hardman and Ailes.

Recognising their role and their underpinning research, the Chairman of Walsall Civic Society wrote: 'None of this work could have happened without you.' Similarly, the playwright stated: 'To see the audience enjoying it was terrific! I feel very enriched by the whole project', while one of the actors said: 'It's part of my life now - it's put a spark back into my life I never thought I'd have again... I've seen a real sense of community develop.' Moreover, the director of the plays expressed his aspirations behind the project- 'It's about making something really exciting happen in Walsall - using the past to give us a future.'- and this is reflected in one of the tweets: 'What a day on Saturday! Great performances, great crowds and great music. That's how to breathe life into old Walsall town!'

**Impact case study (REF3b)****Future impact**

Looking forward, the impact to which the academic research of Hardman and Ailes has contributed will continue to be achieved as long as the Bayard's Colts street theatre tradition persists in Walsall. This will help to enhance a strong sense of identity in the local community through engagement with the project and involvement in the performances, either as participants or as audience members.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

The Manager, Walsall Council's Creative Development Team can corroborate the role of our research in (i) inspiring the development of the Bayard's Colts Project, (ii) supporting its successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, and (iii) feeding in to the exploitation of the Bayard material in the street-theatre plays (\*)

Chairman, Walsall Civic Society can corroborate the role of our research in (i) inspiring the development of the Bayard's Colts Project, (ii) supporting its successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, and (iii) feeding in to the exploitation of the Bayard material in the street-theatre plays. (\*)

Director, Digital Native Academy can corroborate the role of our research in providing support, via recorded interviews published on the Bayard's Colts website, for the significance of the Bayard's Colts Project within continuing cultural tradition from medieval times to now. (\*)

(\*) Contact details provided separately