

<b>Institution:</b> University of Oxford
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 029 English Language and Literature
<b>Title of case study:</b> Enhancing Public Understanding of 18th Century Popular Culture and Assisting Complex Database Development
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study describes creative educational work carried out by Dr Abigail Williams in collaboration with professional musicians to bring alive the details of 18th century popular culture found in poetic and musical miscellanies. Williams selected from the c.1400 surviving miscellanies to create site specific performances in UK historic and museum venues. She has worked with museums, schools and radio to develop curatorial resources for presenting book-based cultural-historical evidence not easily appreciated via the standard museum or library display of written texts. Her research data also brought knowledge exchange benefits to a Canada-based computer technology business.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Abigail Williams's research into the nature and social function of poetic miscellanies builds on and advances earlier scholarly efforts by members of the Oxford English Faculty to retrieve 18C popular poetic tastes and improve historical understanding of cultural factors shaping them. It responds to the challenge posed by Roger Lonsdale (retired 2000) in his influential <i>New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse</i> (1984), where he observes that 'we still know very little' about 'the landscape of eighteenth-century poetry' because of our ignorance of the innumerable poetic miscellanies of the period. Printed miscellanies (collections of verse by several hands) were among the most popular ways in which poetry was consumed, and a major means by which texts and ideas were diffused. Gathering short selections from longer books, they made poems and parts of poems available to wide readerships, including the less well-educated and economically disadvantaged; but they are complex to describe and time-consuming to negotiate – with the result that scholars post-Lonsdale continued to rely on a familiar handful of examples for evidence of the popularity of individual works or authors. The Leverhulme-funded Digital Miscellanies Index project, led by Williams, built on a bibliography of poetic miscellanies produced for the <i>Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature</i> by Michael Suarez (Campion Hall, Oxford, until 2009) which remained unpublished after cancellation of the series. DMI provides the first fully searchable first-line index of the c.40,000 poems contained in the surviving printed poetic miscellanies published 1700-80. Most are held by the Bodleian Library, with the majority of those contained in the massive collection of popular music donated by Walter N. Harding, a Chicago ragtime pianist. Created and populated between March 2010 and autumn 2013, with 12 contributors working under Williams's direction, the DMI (launched 17 September 2013) has been publishing research findings since September 2010 via its website and blog, <a href="http://digitalmiscellaniesindex.org/">http://digitalmiscellaniesindex.org/</a>. Those findings have challenged some fundamental critical assumptions about 18C literary culture. For example, the database has shown that c.1/3 of the poems in miscellanies were published without authorial attribution, even when the author was known, suggesting that the emergent named professional author did not dominate literary culture to the degree hitherto assumed. The DMI has also shown that the popularity of many poems can only be understood by tracing the life of the poem as a song. The decision to develop performance materials from the miscellanies (see sect. 4) followed a growing realisation that the miscellanies reveal a great deal about the social function of reading and music in the home. They record the persistent vitality of communal modes of reading across the period, and the role of musical settings in the circulation of many lyrics.</p> <p>Williams's research into miscellany culture was spurred by her earlier work on the production and popularisation of poetry in the 18C, especially her study of Whig verse and politics, <i>Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1681-1714</i> (2005), which remarked on the frustrating difficulty, at that point, of accessing the period's miscellanies and assessing their social function.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b> (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>Abigail Williams, <i>Poetry and the Creation of a Whig Literary Culture 1681-1714</i> (Oxford: OUP, 2005). Available on request. "This study [...] identifies in intelligent and erudite ways a neglected tradition in English poetry" <i>Nicholas Hudson, The Age of Johnson</i>.      " ", 'The Poetry of the Un-Enlightened: Politics and Literary Enthusiasm in the Early Eighteenth</p>

Century', *History of European Ideas* 31 (2005), 299-311. Peer reviewed journal.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1016/j.histeuroideas.2003.11.015>

” ” (ed.) with David Womersley and Paddy Bullard, *Cultures of Whiggism: New Essays on English Literature and Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: OUP, 2005). Available on request.

Jennifer Batt [DMI project manager], “It ought not to be lost to the world”: the Transmission and Consumption of Eighteenth-Century Lyric Verse.’ *Review of English Studies* 62 (255) (2011): 414-432. Winner of the *Review of English Studies* Essay Prize for 2010. <http://res.oxfordjournals.org/content/62/255/414.full?sid=d6cfa12b-f05f-4b4c-b65c-8a62d5203b82>

Digital Miscellanies Index (<http://digitalmiscellaniesindex.org>). Website live from September 2010; Beta version of datasets available from Christmas 2012; index launched 17 September 2013. In a survey of UK digital humanities projects the DMI was selected out from many as ‘a powerful example of what can be achieved in the digital humanities’. *THES* 8 Dec 2011.

### Grants

A Leverhulme Trust award of £206,000, March 2010, funded 3 years of data entry and a project manager. A British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship of £80,000, May 2011, supported a year of public engagement events by Williams (‘Bringing Books Home’) and associated research.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impact of all Williams’s public outreach work on digital miscellanies has been focused on **restoring local historical knowledge of 18C popular culture and enhancing appreciation of it through concerts and public performances** where the surviving material evidence has hitherto been little known (and, when known, treated very flatly). She has significantly **improved the ways in which the curators and directors of particular heritage sites create a sense of the lived reality of 18C popular culture**; she has **enhanced the work of a number of schools in teaching social history and literacy** through creative and interactive use of miscellany content.

In late 2010, Williams approached the early music duo *Alva* (Vivien Ellis and Giles Lewin) with a proposal to develop a repertoire of **musical entertainments** based on content from 18C miscellanies. The aim was to enhance the scholarly interpretation accompanying the index and take it to interested members of the public around the UK. In the main, selections were themed to reflect preoccupations found in the miscellanies such as regional, sporting, and comic songs. Williams provided texts and, where available, tunes. In the absence of any record of the intended accompaniment she worked with Ellis and Lewin to find appropriate settings from the period’s fiddle repertoire (combining her understanding of metre and genre with their knowledge of C18 folk repertoire). Performance workshops with other project members helped provide political and cultural context to assist interpretations. Across 2011-12, the group increasingly responded to requests from heritage and educational institutions for themed programmes. The first entertainment programme and lecture were offered to the 2011 York Early Music Festival. c. 250 people attended the concert, c. 70 the talk. Festival organiser Delma Tomlin remarks that the lecture ‘illuminat[ed] the importance of the City of York’s musical history and social status in the 18C [and] was much enjoyed by a capacity audience ... from across the UK and beyond’ (Ref. 1). The concert was warmly reviewed by *The Yorkshire Press*: ‘effervescent singer Vivien Ellis and deft fiddler and occasional vocalist Giles Lewin, unveiled a representative sample of these catchy ballads ... typical of what ordinary 18th-century folk would sing and play at home, in the taverns, on the streets, or at the fair or racecourse. *Alva* brought them vividly to life’ (July 2011). Having attended the concert, Lindsay Kemp, director of the London-based Lufthansa Festival of baroque music, commissioned an hour-long programme of 18C sporting music taking up the Festival’s Olympic theme for the year, ‘Contests, Competitions, and the Harmony of Nations’. The afternoon concert in St Matthew’s, Westminster offered ‘insights into 18th-century attitudes to ... wrestling, boxing, cricket and horse- racing, as well as forgotten sports such as stoolball, cudgels and quarterstaff’ (Programme Note). c. 140 people attended the concert, c. 60 the talk. *The Guardian* covered the event with a 670-word article by Williams in their music blog (readership c. 500,000; 7

shares, 14 tweets). Kemp comments that the events 'provid[ed] the Festival with new and unusual material ... a useful point of press interest' (Ref. i). Radio 3's 'In Tune' interviewed Williams and previewed the music on 18 May. In June, she wrote to BBC Radio 4's *Word of Mouth* suggesting a programme on 18C reading. 'Reading Aloud', structured around interviews with Williams, aired 28 August and 3 September 2012. A further programme on 18C pedagogy and the role of the modern scholar was commissioned by Radio 4, airing 13 May 2013 (Ref. ii).

Over the course of 2012, Williams developed a series of entertainments programmes targeted at the **curatorial and educational work of specific literary heritage venues**. The series began with 'An Evening with Walter Harding', Bodleian Library, 18 January (audience c. 60), exploring the story of Harding's collection and the range of music in his archive. An indicative response: 'Many of the themes sung of are present today in our everyday life – pride in place, snobbery, love. It helped me remember that ... popular culture ... can be celebrated in our homes, by anyone and not just observed on the media' (Helen Hewlett) (Ref. 2). The concert accompanied a month-long exhibition at the library and a Radio 3 concert interval programme researched and presented by Williams. 'Ragtime to Riches' broadcast on 7 February with an audience reach of 202,000 and audience share of 2.2% (Ref. iii). It was a *Guardian Review* 'pick of the day'. Feedback ranged from one listener's reflection that Harding provided her with an insight into her own obsessive compulsive collection, to another (David Paisey) spurred to research ballads with the refrain 'Doodle-[doodle]-do'. For the Beverley & East Riding Early music festival in May 2012, Williams put together a programme of music from Yorkshire miscellanies. Alva performed in the Guildhall, Beverley to a capacity audience of 140. At the following year's festival the repertoire was used as the basis for a workshop for local folk musicians, giving rise to lively debate about surviving evidence for tunes, composers and instrumentation (Ref. 3).

The Geffrye Museum in Shoreditch, East London is the museum for the domestic interior, with three rooms focussing on the eighteenth century. On 15 November 2012 Williams used miscellanies and contemporary diaries to recreate an evening at home in 1745. The interactive programme of readings, music and singing, with a demonstration of how to sew a housewife (a small sewing kit), attracted a capacity audience of 42 and will be repeated in November 2013. Williams also addressed an audience of 15 curators at a Specialist Subject Network 'Histories of Home' event at the Geffrye on 3 October 2012, alongside Mark Purcell, Libraries Curator to the National Trust. 'Histories of Home' is an Arts Council funded network connecting academics with museum, library and archive professionals to disseminate research on the home. Williams spoke about how to make books come alive in museum spaces. Assistant Curator Hannah Fleming comments that the 'description of her research and discussion with curatorial and learning staff about how it could be applied to creating new displays and interpretation helped us to develop a new collections app, due to be launched in October 2013. The app, a mobile-friendly website that can be viewed on smartphones and tablets, allows visitors to access information about hard-to-see objects like books in the museum's period rooms'. Williams's research also 'very much informed' the design and content of new pull-out drawer cabinets for books in the museum's permanent display collection, 'with interpretation that focuses on the history of reading in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and the liveliness of people's reading habits' (Ref. 4, iv). Further events, similarly tailored to specific locations, took place at Dr Johnson's House, Gough Square, London (19 April 2012, c. 30 people), Richmond Georgian Theatre, N. Yorks (17 June 2012, c. 70 people), Chawton House Library, Sussex (17 February, 2013, with a library display of miscellanies, c. 30 people). Indicative feedback: '[E]ducational & entertaining and well presented. It has prompted me to think about recording some of my own thoughts on "family" entertainment prior to the advent of television' (Roger Tee, Werburgh, 19.4.12) (Ref. v).

Because many miscellany compilations aimed at entertaining and educating children, Williams also designed a number of events for **schools** in Leicester, Winchester, and Richmond, North Yorkshire, speaking to **year 11 and 12** children on the theme of domestic entertainment 'before TV'. Liz Moss, drama teacher at Richmond School, reported: 'you could tell from the students' responses that they really engaged with what you were saying. It's great for them to ... see how academic research can result from an evolving interest – that you don't know the endpoint as you embark.' A children's author in the audience at Leicester, Michaela Morgan, went on to use

Williams's research in her own efforts to promote reading aloud in schools (speech to teachers from Northampton, Warwickshire, and Leicestershire, June 2012; and speech to the Children's Writers and Illustrators Group, September 2012). Williams spent two terms working with Gifted and Talented children in St Michael's C of E primary school, Marston, Oxford (March-July 2012) using children's miscellanies as the basis for a Key Stage 2 history and literacy project. The programme of activities – inventing dictionary entries, reading aloud, playing rhyming games, writing short stories with morals – was written up as an ongoing teaching resource. Children's responses included (Madeline) 'I learn't lots of new games and how children in the eighteenth century [played]'; (Dan) 'I usaly find litracy really boring but this was intresting!' (Hanan) 'I now think a lot differently of the past. I've realized how different things were!' (Ref. vi)

Independently, the research data collected in DMI brought **Knowledge Exchange benefits for Gnostyx Research Inc.**, Ottawa, Canada. In February 2011 Williams was approached by Joe Gollner, Managing Director, and a former student of Lonsdale, seeking database content that could be used to model flexibility and responsiveness to change of the kind needed for corporate datasets. Gollner states that 'the DMI project has provided Gnostyx Research with a real-world laboratory for exploring ways to managing and use complex data, and for supporting the needs of specialists working with that data.' (Ref. 5). The services of his company over the last 18 months of the project are conservatively estimated to the value: £55,000. A podcast for the Oxford University Oxford Impacts series describes the collaboration.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

##### Testimony

- (1). Corroborating email from Delma Tomlin, 17.9.13.
- (2). Email feedback from attendee at Bodleian event, 11.1.11.
- (3). Email correspondence with organiser, Beverley & East Riding Early music festival, 29.5.13-30.5.13
- (4). Corroborating email from Curatorial Assistant, Geffrye Museum 17.9.13.
- (5). Corroborating email from Managing director, Gnostyx Research Inc., 20.9.13.

##### Other evidence sources

- (i). <http://www.lufthansafestival.org.uk/fileadmin/downloads/LHFbMbrochure2012.pdf>; 'What was the X Factor of the 18th century?', *Guardian Music Blog*, 17 May 2012  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2012/may/17/18th-century-songs-alva>; Corroborating email from Lindsay Kemp, 17.9.13.
- (ii). *In Tune*, BBC Radio 3, 18 May 2012: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01hjpst>; 'Reading Aloud', *Word of Mouth*, BBC Radio 4: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01m5jth>; 'The Pedant's Progress: An Intimate History of the Arts Scholar', BBC Radio 4, 13 May 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01sdcf>
- (iii). Audience figures for Ragtime to Riches, from audiencesportal.com (subscriber only): <http://www.audiencesportal.com/Page/98327>.
- (iv). Geffrye Museum: winter events leaflet from the Museum (pdf and hard copy).
- (v). Williams and *Alva*, *Visitors' Book* (over 40 comments). Scanned pdf.
- (vi). Feedback from Richmond School, to Williams, 18.6.12; *Being a Child in the Eighteenth Century* – record book, with children's responses, from St Michael's C of E School, Oxford.