

Institution: University of Lincoln
Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language & Literature
Title of case study: Stories of our own: helping marginalised communities write their stories
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study focuses on the social and educational benefit to local Lincolnshire communities of English research at Lincoln on life writing, creative uses of oral history and literary and dramatic representations of marginalised communities. In particular, it highlights the ways in which research in this area has led to knowledge transfer as a means of empowering rural communities through helping community groups to research, write, document, represent and disseminate their own stories. These acts of recovery have contributed to the self-realisation and empowerment of individuals and have enabled cross-generational connections and community cohesion. English research at Lincoln in these areas spans the 18th to 21st-centuries and has developed over nine years. Research activities in this area include a conference, a festival, publications, public talks and two related Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded projects (details below).</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Research in English at Lincoln has a growing reputation for its expertise in life writing and literary/dramatic representations of marginalised communities and hidden histories. Researchers in literature include Siân Adiseshiah (2004-), Amy Culley (2007-) and Rebecca Styler (2007-). Research in these areas has informed a collaborative multi-disciplinary project involving University of Lincoln colleagues from Health and Social Care, History, English, Education and Media, funded by the AHRC (see Grants in section 3) as part of the 'Connected Communities' programme. One of Adiseshiah's primary focuses of interest in political theatre is the dramatic representation of hidden histories and marginalised communities. She has published articles in the journals <i>Modern Drama</i> (2009) and <i>Utopian Studies</i> (2005) as well as a book chapter (2005), which focus on issues of community exclusion and exclusion within communities. Her monograph, <i>Churchill's Socialism: Political Resistance in the Plays of Caryl Churchill</i> (2009) also has three chapters focusing on the implications of the research processes involved in dramatising marginalised communities as well as the significance of the representations themselves. The contribution of class, gender, cultural, and minority ethnic identities to the experience of marginalisation and an examination of the effects of living in isolated rural communities are key interests in these publications and are motivating factors in Adiseshiah's contribution to the 'Looking Back for the Future' and 'Telling Our Stories' AHRC projects.</p> <p>Culley's research into women's self-narration of the late 18th century addresses the ways in which individuals represent their personal stories and the lives of others in order to find alternative methods of writing the past. She has addressed these themes in her co-edited collection <i>Women's Life Writing 1700-1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship</i> (Palgrave, 2012), and has contributed to the recovery of women's personal histories as an editor of <i>Women's Court and Society Memoirs</i> (Pickering and Chatto, 2009). Her forthcoming monograph, <i>British Women's Life Writing 1760-1840</i> (Palgrave, 2014), discusses life writing as a form in which women explore their relationships to a community (religious, political, social or familial) in order to preserve both personal and collective memories, and this work draws extensively on life stories from the archives. The emphasis in her published research on narrating communal histories, and her interest in the potential of life writing to record marginalised experiences of the past, has directly informed her contribution to the 'Telling Our Stories' AHRC projects.</p> <p>Styler researches women's religious writing of the nineteenth century, including spiritual biography and autobiography. Her monograph, <i>Literary Theology by Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century</i> (Ashgate, 2010), includes a study of 19th-century women's collective Bible biography, in which women write a series of short biographical sketches of the 'lives' of female Bible characters, investing these retellings with their own contemporary concerns about the position of women, their potential, their social disabilities, and resistance to negative stereotypes. This use of biography for purposes of self-construction and self-empowerment and participation in the writing of community narratives directly informs the objectives of 'Telling Our Stories'.</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

3. References to the research**Key outputs**

Siân Adiseshiah, *Churchill's Socialism: Political Resistance in the Plays of Caryl Churchill*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009

Siân Adiseshiah, 'Utopian Gesture in the Cold Climate of Thatcherism: Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* and *Fen*', in *Utopia Matters: Theory, Politics, Literature and the Arts*, ed. by Fátima Vieira and Marinela Freitas, Porto: University of Oporto, 2005, pp. 1833-95.

Amy Culley, "'Prying into the Recesses of History": Women Writers and the Court Memoir', *Women's Life Writing, 1700-1850: Gender, Genre and Authorship*, ed. Daniel Cook and Amy Culley, Palgrave, 2012.

Amy Culley (ed), *Women's Court and Society Memoirs*, Vols 1-4, Pickering and Chatto, 2009.

Amy Culley "'One cannot judge what is like oneself": Elizabeth Fox and the ties of community', *Life Writing: The Spirit of the Age and the State of the Art*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009.

Rebecca Styler, *Literary Theology by Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2010, chapter 4: 'A Scripture of Their Own: Collective Biography and Feminist Bible Criticism'.

Grants

£25,000 Feb-Dec 2012 **Adiseshiah** was a member of the cross-disciplinary research team on the AHRC-funded 'Looking Back for the Future: The Value of the Past in Developing the Lives of Young People'. (£25.00 PI Leslie Hicks submitted under UOA 22). She provided research-informed workshops to help stimulate ideas about life and community history representation.

£37,000 Feb 2013-Feb 2014 **Adiseshiah** was a member of the cross-disciplinary research team in the AHRC funded 'Telling Our Stories', support for Heritage Lottery Fund communities groups. (PI Leslie Hicks submitted under UOA 22. **Adiseshiah** and **Culley** have provided research-informed workshops to help to enable members of local communities to write their lives.

£475 'Lives in Relation' conference, University of Lincoln, October 2009 (£250 from the British Association for Victorian Studies, £175 from the Royal Historical Society, £50 from the Midlands Romantic Seminar). The conference was co-organised by **Culley** and **Styler** and included both academic scholarship and creative writing exploring life narration and interpersonal and collective identities.

4. Details of the impact

Researchers in life writing and literary/dramatic representations of marginalised communities and hidden histories have been keen to use their research to benefit communities socially, educationally and economically, outside Higher Education. This has involved working with local communities to discover, narrate, make visible and preserve marginalised life stories and histories. Workshops and events focused on this work have been held both at the University of Lincoln and in community centres in the villages in question.

The primary manifestation of social and educational benefit of this research can be seen in the various local Lincolnshire research projects which have been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. These community-based projects are being supported by the cross-disciplinary AHRC 'Connected Communities' project, 'Telling Our Stories' (February 2013-2014) of which **Adiseshiah** is a named co-investigator and to which **Culley** has actively contributed. There are five separate local projects from communities in Lincolnshire and Humberside: two projects in the town of Caistor; one from Chain Bridge Forge near Spalding; one from a suburb of Hull; and a further project from West Deeping. These local heritage projects involve exploring local industry and architectural connections to the history of a local school; capturing stories of life and work in Caistor; connecting the experiences of the Huguenot people's journey to the Hull area as refugees in the 16th century with stories of contemporary immigration; recording the memories of Chain Bridge Forge in Spalding and developing it as a heritage site; and researching and writing the history of a section of the defunct Stamford Canal as part of a wider local history narrative.

The impact of this project involves educational, social and economic benefit. **Educational benefit** has resulted from the 'Telling Our Stories' project's promotion of knowledge transfer, where skills and knowledge - such as research methodologies, political/ethical considerations of oral interviewing, theoretical issues in life writing, practical methods of involving communities in sharing stories through creative poetry/drama workshops, and the recording/documentation of these

Impact case study (REF3b)

stories by means of traditional and contemporary forms (including digital media and social networking) – are shared with local communities. Through this direct educational benefit, local communities have been empowered to control their own research processes and narratives.

Social benefit has occurred as the project has enabled communities to connect through their participation in local history projects and has supported these groups in sharing their knowledge and skills in researching, writing/representing and documenting new histories of their own. These activities help to foster more inclusive, cohesive and confident communities. Cross-generational and inter-cultural community exchange form part of the local project activities, which produce better understandings and appreciations of community diversity.

Economic benefit is also in evidence. In supporting the development of local heritage projects, the University-based team is helping to promote locality interest which will pay dividends in terms of economic developments locally. For example, the community-based research is supporting bids for museum status, which has inevitable prestige and longer term economic benefit for local communities. Engagement with the University enables these endeavours.

Research insights into the particularities of group life writing were drawn on to underpin the methodologies used to frame each of the following group workshops. Informed by her research on Caryl Churchill's plays that comprise oral testimony – particularly *Fen* (1983), a play about rural working-class labour – **Adiseshiah** offered community groups drama workshops focused on facilitating the emergence of individual and community stories through practical role-play, and the writing of monologue and dialogue at two Open Days in 2012. This formed part of the 'Looking Back for the Future' project (2012), that was geared towards enabling community groups to bid for Heritage Lottery research grants to write their stories. Subsequent to this, in May 2013 **Culley** led a workshop for successful grantees at Caistor Arts and Heritage Centre as part of the 'Telling Our Stories' AHRC project (2013). The workshop focused on exploring ways in which writing of biographical sketches and collective histories can create a sense of community, solidarity and voice. Discussing past stories of life and work in rural communities, and exploring the relationship among labour, identity and self-representation enabled the group to consider the value of preserving everyday experiences and to reflect on different methods of life narration. Participants commented in their written feedback that they found the session 'very empowering' in encouraging them to value stories 'from anyone' (Susan Nicholson) and suggested that it provided 'new ideas' (Sue Neowe) on how to use and present the material generated by the project. In June 2013, **Adiseshiah** and **Culley** ran three workshops (entitled 'My Stuff') for 30 school children (aged 8) involved in the Chain Bridge Forge project at the University of Lincoln. The workshops encouraged the children to write monologues inspired by their personal objects, as a creative way of opening up ideas about how to represent memory and personal narrative, and of improving writing and communication skills.

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

1) 'Telling Our Stories' AHRC project website: <http://tellingourstories.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/>.

Local project websites:

2) Chain Bridge Forge: <http://chainbridgeforge.sholland.org/>.

3) Chain Bridge Forge: <http://chainbridgeforge.sholland.org/history/local-history/recollections/>.

4) Caistor stories - <http://www.28ploughhill.co.uk/> (Click on the 'Caistor stories' header, top right, to see a short introductory clip).

5) My Ancestors Were French

<http://myancestorswerefrench.com/> click on 'a film' for their video story.

6) 21st Century Research group website - <http://21cresearchgroup.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/>.