

Institution: University of Sussex
Unit of Assessment: UoA 29 English
Title of case study: Increasing public appreciation of the cultural significance of <i>The Book of Common Prayer</i>
1. Summary of the impact <p>This case study shows how the research of Brian Cummings, his edition of <i>The Book of Common Prayer</i> and subsequent co-curated exhibition at Lambeth Palace, 'Monarchy and <i>The Book of Common Prayer</i>', have enriched cultural life and public discourse through increasing public appreciation of <i>The Book of Common Prayer</i>. The work has informed the understanding of the history and nature of Christian worship for two overlapping groups of the public: members of Christian churches; and those interested in religious history and culture. The work has also had an impact on general public understanding of the history and development of the English language.</p>
2. Underpinning research <p>The research for this project was carried out by Brian Cummings in his career at Sussex from 1990 to 2012. Cummings' work, especially his monograph, <i>The Literary Culture of the English Reformation: Grammar and Grace</i> [see Section 3, R2], thought through the implications of the transition from the Medieval to the early-modern world in religion, Renaissance humanist thought and literary practice. By showing that religion was the central preoccupation of mainstream cultural and educational concerns, and so could not be avoided and circumscribed as a specialist field aside from the Renaissance, Cummings' monograph rethinks Reformation Studies and the religious literary culture of early-modern England. This research was further developed in Cummings' extensive collection of essays edited with James Simpson, <i>Cultural Reformations: Medieval to Renaissance in Literary History</i> [R3]. An overview of Cummings' investigations, 'Reformed literature and literature reformed', appears in Wallace's important literary history [R4].</p> <p>In 2011 Cummings produced a parallel text edition of <i>The Book Of Common Prayer</i> [R1] as a direct result of his earlier research and his long-standing interest in the relationship between the Reformation and a wider literary culture. This edition produced the texts of <i>The Book of Common Prayer's</i> three early editions: 1549, 1559 and 1662, outlined the major changes from one edition to the next, and explained why these changes were both a response to religious transformations and significant in furthering wider cultural change. Cummings' edition has a substantial introduction which explains the central role that <i>The Book Of Common Prayer</i> has played in the development of English religious practices, conceptions of English identity, and the development of the English language – its style, rhythm and idiomatic nature. His introduction further illuminates a symbiotic relationship between worship and style – a literary relationship, which means that religion cannot be separated from modes of imaginative expression – and explains the global and historical impact of probably the most influential book ever written in English, arguably a work that has had a greater impact than English translations of the Bible.</p>
3. References to the research <p>R1 Cummings, B. (2011) <i>The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662</i>. Oxford University Press.</p> <p>R2 Cummings, B. (2002) <i>The Literary Culture of The Reformation: Grammar and Grace</i>. Oxford University Press.</p> <p>R3 Cummings, B. ed. with Simpson, J. (2010) <i>Cultural Reformations: Medieval to Renaissance in Literary History</i>. Oxford University Press.</p> <p>R4 Cummings, B. (1999) 'Reformed literature and literature reformed', in Wallace, D. (ed.) <i>The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature</i>. Cambridge University Press, 821–851.</p>

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4. Details of the impact

Increasing public appreciation of *The Book of Common Prayer*

Cummings work has enriched the quality of life by increasing appreciation of *The Book of Common Prayer*. He has turned his academic research on *The Book of Common Prayer* into publicly accessible cultural experiences (an exhibition and popular version of the book) which, with the aid of interpretation and appreciation by the media, have enhanced the cultural life of those who experienced it.

As a result, Cummings was invited to curate a major exhibition in Lambeth Palace – ‘Lambeth Palace Royal Devotion: Monarchy and *The Book of Common Prayer*’ – 1 May–14 July 2012. This brought together the 350th birthday of *The Book Of Common Prayer* and the Queen’s 60th Jubilee. Cummings’ work for the edition led directly to the exhibition, which both disseminated its research to a wider audience and made available to the general public a series of significant books and objects that charted *The Book of Common Prayer*’s wide cultural impact and significance for the monarchy. The exhibition was launched at the Queen’s first public celebration of the Jubilee at an inter-faith event at Lambeth Palace, and the exhibition itself was opened by Prince Charles (see Section 5, C1 and C2).

Public impact is evidenced by the number of visitors and their reactions – 4,456 people visited the exhibition over its 11-week run. Approximately 300 people also attended the four lectures that accompanied the exhibition (C2). The Guest Book from the exhibition (R3) records universally enthusiastic comments from visitors, many commenting on the quality of the objects on display, with a number recognising that they had learned a great deal about the history of *The Book Of Common Prayer* from the exhibition, and others commenting on the quality of the guidance given. Visitors came from, among others, the UK, the USA, Australia, France, Japan, South Africa, Nigeria, Malawi, the Netherlands and Egypt. Comments included ‘Inspiring’, ‘Fascinating history lesson’, ‘Will stay in the memory’, ‘Beautiful and edifying presentation’ and ‘Awe-inspiring’ (C2).

There were 46 references to the exhibition in the media – the most extensive being in *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *History Today*, which argued that ‘Anyone interested in English history should make their way there’ – 37 in on-line publications; and one on BBC London 94.9fm.

Cumming’s edition also generated extensive media attention and press coverage, which noted the importance of *The Book Of Common Prayer* in English history and tradition, its significance highlighted by Diamaid McCulloch in the *London Review of Books* (C13), as well as reviewers in *The New Statesman*, *The Atlantic*, *Anglican Way*, *The Churchman*, *The Heythrop Journal* and *Books and Culture: A Christian Review*. Commentators noted that the book had a vital role in shaping the nature of English daily life, the forms of worship adopted in the national church at a time when church-going was compulsory, the customs and practices of religion adopted by the English-speaking world, and the language itself (C3). The *TLS* blog (C7) demonstrates the benefit of the work for readers beyond the Christian communion, whose interest is as much cultural and historical as theological and ecclesiological because ‘More people heard Morning . . . and Evening Prayer in weekly services in the words of this book than listened to the soliloquies of Shakespeare’.

The parallel text of *The Book Of Common Prayer*’s three versions has sold strongly in the UK, the US and other countries. Total sales of the hardback edition are 7,974 copies, 3,960 in the UK and 3,074 in the US (to July 2013). A paperback edition appeared with the Worlds’ Classics imprint in July 2013, which sold 1,604 copies in a month (C4). *The Book of Common Prayer* was a runner-up in *The Atlantic* books of the year, 2012 (C5).

Impact within the Christian church

A one-day event hosted at the British Academy, 'An Uncommon Legacy? The 350th. Anniversary of the 1662 Prayer Book' (28 May 2012), was organised jointly by the Academy and the Church of England, the latter recognising the importance of Cummings' work for their communion (C12). Individual discussion groups have made use of the edition, notably the 'White Horse Inn' group (C8) which adopts the edition to inform their study, as well as particular churches such as St Paul's Episcopal Church, Bellingham, Washington State, USA (C9), which refers to the edition to identify 'the basics of our faith clearly and succinctly spelled out for all to see and understand. It is our Catechism; our FAQ'. There have been references in a number of lectures delivered throughout the world, posted on the web (C10). A blog, 'Why Should Presbyterians Read *The Book of Common Prayer*?' (C6), indicates that the significance of Cummings' research goes beyond that of one denomination. Andrew Hawes ('The future of *The Book of Common Prayer*', *The Prayer Book Society Journal*, 2012: 7), argues that what is required for a renewal of faith in the church today is 'something akin to the description Cummings made of the "conscious cultural retrieval" of the Prayer book at the Reformation'.

Impact on understanding of development of the English language

Cummings' edition has prompted wide discussion of the impact of *The Book Of Common Prayer* on the English language, notably in *The Atlantic*, the *LRB* (C5 and C13), and James Wood's article in *The New Yorker*, where he argues that, without an appreciation of the words of the liturgy, we cannot understand the significance of the range and vitality of English, as *The Book Of Common Prayer*'s cadences 'comfort, disappoint, haunt, irritate, disappear, linger' (C11).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (all links accessed 24 May 13)

- C1** <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2469/>
- C2** <http://www.lambethpalacelibrary.org/content/royaldevotion>
- C3** Lambeth Palace Royal Devotion: Monarchy and *The Book of Common Prayer* Media Coverage and Evaluation Report.
- C4** Authorised e-mail from Oxford University Press detailing sales figures.
- C5** <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/11/books-of-the-year-2012-the-top-5-and-the-runners-up/265460/>
- C6** <http://johnstuartross.wordpress.com/why-should-presbyterians-read-the-book-of-common-prayer/>
- C7** <http://timescolumns.typepad.com/stothard/2012/05/monarchy-and-the-book-of-common-prayer.html>
- C8** <http://www.whitehorseinn.org/study/whi1093questions.pdf>;
<http://www.whitehorseinn.org/blog/2012/03/18/whi-1093-the-lords-prayer-part-1/>
- C9** <http://www.stpaulsbellingham.org/newcomers/>
- C10** <http://www.prayerbooksocietynsw.org.au/pdf/2012/St%20Pauls%20College%20Symposium.pdf>.
http://www.elycathedral.org/pdf/education/Ely_Cathedral_Lecture_230912.pdf
- C11** http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/atlarge/2012/10/22/121022crat_atlarge_wood
- C12** http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2012/350th_Anniversary_Book_of_Common_Prayer.cfm
- C13** McCulloch, D. (2012) 'Mumpsimus, Sumpsimus', *London Review of Books*, May.
<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n10/diarmaid-macculloch/mumpsimus-sumpsimus>