

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Swansea University
Unit of Assessment: 29 - English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Mapping Medieval Chester: driving heritage policy, expanding heritage audiences and creating new cultural and economic opportunities.
1. Summary of the impact

'Mapping Medieval Chester' (MMC) investigated the relationship between identity and place in this multi-lingual, multi-cultural frontier city. The research interested local museums, the County Council, residents and visitors to the city, and the wider public via online resources. A formal partnership with a museum and collaboration with the council led to an AHRC Knowledge Transfer Fellowship (£173,000) to fund new impact activities, including a major exhibition and new digital resources. A permanent art installation involving community input was created with £63,000 match funding from local sources. Hence MMC research has informed heritage policy, created new art from research, engendered new understanding of cultural artefacts and spaces, and contributed to public discourse and economic regeneration.

2. Underpinning research

[References to research outputs and grants in Section 3 are given in square brackets below]

Chester has primarily been represented as a Roman city; its medieval literary and built heritage was under-researched or fragmented. Old maps of Chester survive, but none showing the medieval city. The AHRC-funded project, 'Mapping Medieval Chester' (2008-2009), led by Swansea's Clarke, teamed literary specialists from Swansea University with a geographer and digital experts from partner institutions to create the first comprehensive atlas of medieval Chester and to explore questions of identity and place [R1, R2, R3, R4].

Scholarly digital editions of a number of medieval texts which describe the ideological, economic and political importance of this borderland city were produced [R2]. The edited texts were linked to the digital atlas, to investigate how different cultural communities imagined the built environment and to understand how cartographic and textual 'mappings' of medieval Chester relate to each other. For instance, Lucian's representation of Chester as an important Christian city describes it built around the shape of a cross, formed by two perfectly straight, intersecting thoroughfares. The new digital map showed that this did not reflect reality; Lucian's straightening of Chester's streets reveals the allegorical and metaphorical nature of his reading of the city's layout and is an important exemplar of the ways in which urban landscapes were seen, experienced and understood in the Middle Ages through both their material and imagined symbolic forms.

Chester was a major centre in the colonial domination of Wales. The different cultural and ethnic perspectives of the medieval frontier city (encapsulated in the various names given to the city by different populations) were at the heart of the project. The edited texts were in the three main languages of this border city: Welsh, Middle English and Latin. MMC investigated issues of liminality, hybridity and multi-lingualism to understand the formation of local identities in the city in the later medieval period. These issues also resonate strongly today, and the links between place and identity, and the multi-cultural voices of the medieval city, were the focus of knowledge exchange activities and collaborations (outlined in section 4, below).

The digital resource developed by the team [R2] made new primary sources available and created innovative strategies for connecting GIS mapping (i.e. geographical information systems – the generic term for digital mapping tools) with TEI XML text editions (i.e. the standardised scholarly encoding of text for use in digital editions) [R5]. Interpretative materials situating this work on Chester within the wider context of work on place, identity and frontier cultures in the Middle Ages were created. The interface (website) was designed to enable different audiences to encounter and use the materials in varying ways. The website developed by the team received international praise from researchers, but has also been used to generate impact amongst the general public, for instance with a flickr layer of photographs submitted by the public.

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The Team:

At Swansea, Clarke was PI and Director of the AHRC funded research project (2008-09), with Fulton (Co-I, Professor) and Faulkner, a Post-doctoral researcher (1 Sept 2008-31 Aug 2009). Core academic collaborators at other institutions were Co-I: Keith Lilley, Queen's University, Belfast (GIS mapping) and Technical Director, Paul Vetch, Kings College, London. Since the end of the research project and after the award of the AHRC Knowledge Transfer Fellowship, Clarke has moved to Southampton (February 2012). Fulton moved to York in 2011.

3. References to the research

(Swansea staff are in **bold**).

- R1. **Clarke, Catherine A. M. (PI)** 'Mapping Medieval Chester: place and identity in an English borderland city c. 1200-1500' AHRC Research Grant (£154,000 FEC, 1 September 2008 – 31 August 2009; AH/F009356/1).
- R2. Vetch, **Clarke**, Lilley, **Fulton** & **Faulkner** 'Mapping Medieval Chester' website (www.medievalchester.ac.uk; launched 2009), including fully annotated editions of Bradshaw, *Life of St Werburge* (**Clarke**), Lucian, *De Laude Cestrie* (**Faulkner**), an edition of Welsh poems relating to Chester (**Fulton**), and scholarly articles by **Clarke**, **Fulton**, **Faulkner** and Lilley.
- R3. **Clarke, Catherine A.M.**, ed., *Mapping the Medieval City: Space, Place and Identity in Chester c.1200-1600* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press 2011) ISBN 9780708323928 pp. 304; including the contributions 'Medieval Chester: Views from the Walls' and 'Remembering Anglo-Saxon Mercia in late medieval and early modern Chester' (**Clarke**); 'The Spatial Hermeneutics of Lucian's *De Laude Cestrie*' (**Faulkner**); 'The Outside Within: Medieval Chester and North Wales as a Social Space' (**Fulton**). [Peer reviewed]
- R4. **Clarke, Catherine A.M.**, 'Edges and Otherworlds: imagining tidal spaces in early medieval Britain', in *The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture*, ed. Sebastian Sobocki (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011) ISBN 9781843842767, pp. 81-102. [Peer-reviewed]
- R5. Paul Vetch, **Catherine A.M. Clarke** and Keith Lilley, 'Between text and image: digital renderings of a late medieval city' in *Digitizing Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Brent Nelson and Melissa Terras ('New Technologies in Medieval and Renaissance Studies' Series, Tucson: Iter / Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012) ISBN 9780866984744. [Peer reviewed]

4. Details of the impact

[Corroborating sources in Section 5 are indicated in square brackets below.]

MMC research has driven **heritage policy**, created **new art from research**, engendered **new understanding** of cultural artefacts and spaces, and contributed to **public knowledge** and **economic regeneration**. Beneficiaries include the **museum** and **council**, which have been able to make better use of medieval collections and sites, and the **public**, who understand more about medieval Chester and who have been inspired by the events and artwork.

How the impact unfolded: A public workshop was included in the original MMC project, but the interest of the local museum and the public led to a rapid expansion. The workshop became the 'Mapping Medieval Chester Festival' (August 2009), organised in partnership with the Grosvenor Museum, Chester – a full day of concurrent events related to the project across the city, including living history activities, workshops, tours and presentations all based on the 'Mapping Medieval Chester' research – which attracted nearly 1,200 people, and generated media coverage. The unexpected level of public interest within Chester (and beyond) also led to the creation of additional resources attached to the digital atlas of the medieval city [C1, C2]. An interactive, developmental layer provided an opportunity for the public to upload their own photographs of medieval sites in modern-day Chester [C1], making a genuine contribution to the project resources

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whilst also engaging with the research in active and accessible ways. The www.medievalchester.ac.uk website has received over 2.7m hits from web users to date (excluding automated search engine requests).

The project captured the interest of local planners, and MMC research was incorporated in Chester's '**Public Realm Strategy**' (2009) [C3], as a model for heritage interpretation. The MMC project directly informed policy on which civic enhancements and tourist / arts attractions should be developed, including St John's and the City Walls. An AHRC Knowledge Transfer Fellowship [C4] extended the initial impact of the research and built on links with the Council, the interest of local history groups and the public, and the partnership with the Grosvenor Museum, producing:

Hryre (ruin): a Public Art Project, commissioned by Cheshire West and Chester Council and 'Chester Renaissance' with a grant of £63,000, plus funding from the AHRC. The permanent light installation was the work of Nayan Kalkarni, in collaboration with Clarke. It involved considerable public engagement (200 people, and a core of 20-25 with sustained involvement) which fed into the final installation. The project has also reinvigorated a regeneration area as a destination for cultural tourism. Interpretation leaflets [C5] are available in Chester from outlets including the Tourist Information Centre. The artwork was commended in the Chester Civic Trust Honours, 2012, [C6] and featured in Chester's bid for City of Culture Status, 2017. A full project report including positive public feedback is available [C7].

A **major exhibition** with 50 associated events, '*Discover a Medieval City: Places, Voices, Journeys Chester*' (4 May-22 Sept 2013), curated by the local museum, Clarke and her MMC team. The exhibition arises from MMC research, and provided an opportunity for the Museum to assess and display its medieval collection (previously mostly in storage), thus enhancing the use of archives. The exhibition will transfer to Wrexham Museum and then become a smaller permanent exhibition in Chester. Attendance at the Chester exhibition is forecast to be c.31,700 people (11% local, 89% visitors from outside Chester, based on previous Visitrac records; actual visitor numbers to 31 July 2013 were 26,205, plus over 2,030 people attended associated events at other locations) bringing a significant contribution to the local economy. The economic impact of visitors attracted to the city's medieval heritage is valued at £51.12 per head [C8].

An extensive **new digital resource** was produced (<http://discover.medievalchester.ac.uk/>, C2) with handheld/mobile compatibility. It uses MMC research in new ways, including customizable tours, games, photographs and maps to enhance public understanding of medieval Chester and to support the artwork and exhibition. It is aimed at a wide audience of local communities and tourists. The website has received 382,275 hits from web users to date (excluding automated search engine requests).

Other **events (talks, workshops, literary tours) and media coverage** [C9, C10] have expanded public understanding of medieval Chester, including a talk to Chester Archaeological Society (2009), Diocese of Chester / St John's Church (2011) and events at the Chester Literature Festival (over 60 at talk, fully booked workshop of 30; C11). Media coverage includes regular articles on project events in the local press (see section 5 below); the Welsh-language magazine programme, Heno (S4C) covered the exhibition and ran a piece on the Welsh communities in Chester (July 2013).

Outcomes from the project have begun to **influence KE/KT practice** and the **impact agenda nationally**, and the Chester project was the central focus of a two-day Knowledge Exchange conference at Southampton University in 2013, which involved delegates from HEIs and the heritage / local government / commercial sectors. The MMC project has shared its models for academic partnerships with heritage bodies (e.g. Cadw, RCAHMW and the Church of England Cathedrals and Church Buildings Division). MMC research has also contributed to the English Heritage Urban Archaeological Database project for Chester.

User **testimonials** show that the public have gained new **insights and understanding** of the medieval heritage and culture of Chester:

- “Although I’ve lived in Chester for 40 years, I knew very little about medieval Chester. The whole project therefore, has really informed me and my family.”
- “...bringing out the richness of the Medieval heritage imbues the city with even more depth and interest. Certainly it has raised questions in my mind. I have read around the subject and have enjoyed finding out about it especially when the artefacts, maps and archaeology have been available to make tangible links with the time. I hope to continue to develop my knowledge of this area of Chester’s past.”
- “The writing workshop with its focus on “Borders” was hugely enjoyable and thought provoking. It was wonderful to see our group reading the resulting poems on video at the exhibition.” (Comments collected by Grosvenor Museum).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1. ‘Mapping Medieval Chester’ Blog at www.medievalchester.ac.uk (archive of event photographs and reports, media releases, press coverage etc.) and Flickr layer
- C2. New website at <http://discover.medievalchester.ac.uk/>.
- C3. *Public Realm Strategy, Four: Arts, Lighting and Wayfaring Strategy* (Cheshire West and Chester Council, 2009), esp. pp. 59, 61, 64.
- C4. ‘Discover Medieval Chester: place, heritage and identity’ AHRC Knowledge Transfer Fellowship (£172,000 FEC, 1 February 2012 – 31 July 2013; AH/I021698/1; PI / KT Fellow Catherine Clarke, with Keith Lilley (Queen’s University, Belfast) and Paul Vetch (King’s College, London) as Co-Investigators and the Grosvenor Museum as primary non-HEI partner.
- C5. ‘Hryre (ruin)’, St John’s public art project interpretation leaflet at <http://discover.medievalchester.ac.uk/st-johns-artwork/>.
- C6. Chester Civic Trust newsletter, March 2012 (“commendation” for Hryre, St John’s artwork, p. 5), <http://www.chestercivictrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Chester-Civic-Trust-Newsletter-March-2012.pdf>
- C7. Murray, Carolyn, *Development and public response to Hryre (ruin), an artwork by Nayan Kulkarni: the permanent illumination of the eastern ruins of St John the Baptist Church, Chester: Project report*, (March 2012).
- C8. *Chester’s City Walls and Towers Competitiveness Study* (October 2009) a report by Jura Consultants for Cheshire West and Chester Council.
- C9. Press coverage: e.g. double-page spread on ‘Mapping Medieval Chester Festival’ in *Chester Standard*, 20 August 2009; *Chester Chronicle*, 1 February 2008; *Chester Standard*, 4 March 2008; two page colour feature on research in *The Past Uncovered*, October 2008; full page colour feature on artwork in *Chester Standard*, 27 October 2011; *Chester Chronicle*, 15 September, 2011.
- C10. TV coverage: Heno, S4C, 23 July 2013.
- C11. Chester Lit Fest unsolicited blog write-up at <http://keeperofthesnails.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/chester-literature-festival-2012-simon.html>