

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Worcester</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 35 - Music, Drama, Dance &amp; Performing Arts</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> The centenary of Birmingham Rep: developing public and professional recognition of the Rep's distinctive history and role within the national culture of contemporary British theatre</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The case study describes impact associated with Prof Claire Cochrane's twenty years' research into the history of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, one of the UK's largest and most historically important regional producing theatres. Impact derived primarily from her advisory work from 2011-13 with the theatre's senior management and project leaders on realisation of their <i>REP100</i> centenary celebrations. Cochrane provided support for the development of wider local, regional and national public recognition and understanding of the Rep's distinctive history and current role and influence within the evolving ecology of contemporary British theatre, at a time of extreme economic challenge for the Rep and for regional theatres throughout England.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Cochrane's published research into the Birmingham Repertory Theatre – one of the UK's most important regional producing theatres – has spanned the last twenty years and has all been conducted during her period of academic employment at the University of Worcester. Her 1993 monograph, drawn from her doctoral research in the 1980s, was the first detailed analysis of the early development of Birmingham Rep's radical innovations in Shakespeare production which led, in the 1920s, to the highly influential productions of Shakespeare in modern dress. Her subsequent research into the history of the company from 1962 until 2002 produced arguably the most comprehensive and in-depth exploration of the artistic, managerial and financial history of a major regional theatre to be published in recent years. In addition to her analysis of the means by which Birmingham Rep became a leading regional centre for the nurturing of new playwriting, there was a parallel focus on the theatre's promotion of the work of Black British and British Asian actors and playwrights. Cochrane subsequently expanded this area of her research into developments in Birmingham as a whole since the 1970s, and then undertook comparative studies of similar initiatives at Nottingham Playhouse and Leicester Haymarket Theatre.</p> <p>Cochrane's research into Birmingham Rep has covered a complete century and thereby provided a basis for the wide-ranging knowledge of changing economic and social trends in British theatre which led to her most recent monograph. Informed by her growing interest in cultural geography and social economics, this mapped the history of theatre as artistic and industrial practice across all four nations of the United Kingdom throughout the twentieth century. A significant strand of the book, which explores the effect of demographic change brought about as a result of migration from countries once part of the British empire, was stimulated by her research into Birmingham Rep's response to the growth of an increasingly diverse local population within its immediate urban context. An understanding of third sector status – which requires subsidised theatre managements constantly to manoeuvre between not-for-profit idealism and commercial imperatives – is another strand, grounded in Cochrane's study of Birmingham Rep's financial history; this has opened up a new area of economic enquiry which is proving increasingly influential within the academy. As a regional theatre historian Cochrane's work interrogates the unequal cultural and economic relations between the metropolitan core and the regional periphery. Her most recent research into the work of the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, and the consequences of its history as part of post-war urban regeneration, is further evidence of her continuing preoccupation with the importance of the regional experience for both theatre-makers and theatre-goers.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b></p> <p><b>Monographs</b></p> <p>Claire Cochrane, <i>Shakespeare and the Birmingham Repertory Theatre: 1913-1929</i>, The Society</p>

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for Theatre Research, 1993.

Claire Cochrane, *The Birmingham Rep: A City's Theatre 1962-2002*, Sir Barry Jackson Trust, 2003.

Claire Cochrane, *Twentieth Century British Theatre Industry, Art and Empire*, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

**Contributions to edited collections**

Claire Cochrane, "'A Local Habitation and a Name": Developments in Black and Asian Theatre in Birmingham since the 1970s' in Dimple Godiwala (ed.) *Alternatives Within the Mainstream: British Black and Asian Theatres*, Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006.

Claire Cochrane, 'Engaging the Audience: A Comparative Analysis of Developmental Strategies at Birmingham Rep and Leicester Haymarket Theatre since the 1990s' in G.Ley and S.Dadswell (eds), *Critical Essays on British South Asian Theatre*, University of Exeter Press, 2012.

**Journal article**

'Theatre and Urban Space: The Case of Birmingham Rep', *New Theatre Quarterly*, XVI, Part 2 (NTQ 62), May 2000, pp.137-147.

**Research Grant**

2006-7 AHRC Research Leave award, £25,000.

**4. Details of the impact**

Cochrane's contribution to public knowledge of the importance of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre dates back as far as the 1980s. (Her doctoral research initiated the move of the theatre's archive to Birmingham Central Library, where it has been conserved and made publicly accessible. Throughout the 1990s she led annual public day schools as part of Birmingham's annual city-wide *Towards the Millennium* Festival. Core elements of her published histories of the Rep featured in season programmes from 1994-9 and, most recently, were included in programmes launching the centenary celebrations). When the Rep closed in 2011 for a multi-million pound redevelopment as part of Birmingham's new Central Library, Cochrane provided a century-long time-line for display on hoardings around the building. Since 2008, she has regularly given invited talks about the Rep's history to locally-based groups such as the Birmingham National Trust Association, Central Birmingham Soroptimist International Club, University of the Third Age, the Shakespeare Club of Stratford-upon-Avon and to the Friends of Dymock Poets Society. The theatre now regularly directs requests for talks to her.

In 2011, Cochrane took part in informal consultations on how best to develop community participation in the Rep's *Rep100* celebrations and to suggest ways in which the Rep's often radical, but historically 'top-down' contribution to British theatre could stimulate public engagement and the interest of community volunteers. Cochrane proposed key individuals and events to be highlighted within the chronologies of the four distinctive themes that shaped the Rep's successful £175,000 Heritage Lottery Fund bid to create a digital archive which would conserve the theatre's heritage and permit wider access and understanding ([www.birmingham-rep.co.uk](http://www.birmingham-rep.co.uk)). Her support provided accurate historical information to *REP100* project leader, Jenny Smith and exhibition curator, Gwendolen Whittaker which proved essential to successful creation of the *REP100* touring exhibition and accompanying catalogue. Cochrane assisted Whittaker in identifying the provenance of artefacts for exhibition and clarified the origins of original material held by Birmingham City Museum & Art Gallery, including the context for a series of paintings by Dame Laura Knight of Rep performances from the 1930s to 1950s. She brokered an invitation from the Bristol Theatre Collection for Whittaker to access the Manders and Mitcheson archive, which contains additional artefacts. She then wrote brief introductions to each of the four themes illustrated in the exhibition catalogue - 'Station Street to Stratford via Malvern'; 'Drama Queens'; 'The Detail's in the Design'; and 'Hidden Histories' – and edited and contributed to extended

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captions accompanying illustrations. From January 2013, Cochrane was credited formally as *REP100's* Historical Advisor. The exhibition launched at the Old Birmingham Repertory theatre in February 2013 and was then mounted at Birmingham's Grosvenor G Casino (*REP100's* sponsors), the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Malvern Library (as part of the Malvern Festival) and a further 16 local Birmingham libraries. To date the total number of people accessing Old Rep-related activities is 1,504. 5000 copies of the catalogue were printed and Cochrane continues to provide advice for the expanded exhibition to be mounted in September 2013 in the new public space shared between the refurbished theatre and the new Library of Birmingham. Anticipated total visitor numbers to the exhibition by November 2013 is estimated at 10,000.

At the request of the Rep, Cochrane took part in a BBC1 *Inside Out West Midlands* feature broadcast in time for its actual 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. On discovery of an apparently handwritten script belonging to Laurence Olivier dating from 1927, she was interviewed for *The Times*.

The two-day *REP100 Weekender* event held in March 2013 at the 'Old' Birmingham Repertory Theatre was designed to appeal to diverse publics, from local people wishing to recover memories of the theatre and its legacy to academic and non-academic theatre specialists. Cochrane worked closely with the project leaders to create a lively accessible programme, acting as co-ordinating Chair throughout. The first day focused on the theatre's history and heritage; the second, taking Cochrane's theme of 'Drama Queens,' concentrated on women's contribution to contemporary theatre and began with Cochrane interviewing actor and writer Meera Syal. There then followed a series of panels: the first comprised well-known women playwrights including Bryony Lavery and Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti; the second brought together actor and director Dame Janet Suzman with designer Pamela Howard and actors Shelley King and Lorna Laidlaw; the third comprised key executives and directors including Kate Horton, Deputy Executive Director of the National Theatre and Vikki Heywood, former Executive Director of the RSC. In all, the *Weekender* attracted an audience of some 165.

*Rep 100* celebrations attracted extensive national media coverage including features and/or interviews in the Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Independent, The Stage, BBC News, BBC Inside Out and Whatsonstage.com. Additionally, there has been widespread regional coverage including coverage on BBC Midlands Today and BBC Radio WM, and in the Birmingham Post, the Birmingham Mail, the Birmingham Post & Mail, the Shropshire Star, Edge Magazine and Birmingham Life.

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

*The REP100 A Century of Dramatic History* 129pp. 115 illustrations, pub. Birmingham Rep, printed in an edition of 5000.

<http://theshakespeareblog.com/2013/03/looking-back-and-forward-the-birmingham-rep-at-100/>  
Review of one day of the *REP100 Weekender* in the Shakespeare Blog written by speaker Sylvia Morris.

*The Times*, 15 February 2013, 'Memory notes that helped a teenage actor named Olivier' by Jack Malvern, Arts Correspondent.

'Inside Out West Midlands', BBC1 West Midlands, 11 February 2013.

Roxana Silbert, Artistic Director, Birmingham Rep (value of Cochrane's research to the Rep's own, institutional understanding of its history, development and contribution to regional theatre in the UK)

Stuart Rogers, Executive Director, Birmingham Rep (value of Cochrane's role in supporting public engagement with the Birmingham Rep and its history and supporting the Rep's community programmes)

Jenny Smith, *REP100* project manager (Cochrane's role in the development and realisation of *REP100* celebrations and in achieving the Rep's successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid)

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Gwendolen Whittaker, *REP100* exhibition curator (Cochrane's role in development and realisation of the *REP100* exhibition and the role of the exhibition in supporting 21<sup>st</sup> century public involvement in the Rep and its work)

David Edgar, playwright and cultural commentator (Cochrane's role in developing public and professional understanding of the evolution and cultural, social and political impact of regional theatre in the UK)