

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Liverpool
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 30 - History
<b>Title of case study:</b> Youth Gangs and Street Violence in Late Victorian Manchester
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> <p>The impact of Dr Andrew Davies' research into youth gangs and violence in Manchester is unusually wide-ranging. Since the publication of his book <i>The Gangs of Manchester</i> in 2008, Davies has made a substantial contribution to public discourse, raising awareness through the media - nationally and locally - of the historical antecedents of current problems posed by gang conflict and knife-crime. He has made a series of presentations of his core findings to practitioners in education and the criminal justice system. His research has also inspired new forms of artistic and literary expression, notably in the play <i>Angels with Manky Faces</i> (2009). Based closely on Davies' book, this was written and performed by a community theatre company in 2009, and has subsequently been performed in local secondary schools. Davies' work continues to generate interest among poets and musicians, as well as documentary film-makers, while his collaboration with a Manchester tour guide has contributed to the development of tourist provision in the city.</p>
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> <p>The research was conducted by Davies (lecturer/senior lecturer in history at the University of Liverpool) between 1994 and 2008. Davies explored the nature and extent of gang formation and conflict in Manchester between 1870 and 1900. His research revealed that territorial youth gangs were formed throughout the predominantly working-class districts of the city and the adjacent borough of Salford. Conflicts between rival gangs were characterised by the widespread use of weapons and caused persistent concern among civic leaders, judicial authorities, medical practitioners, social reformers and journalists. Gang members, or 'scuttlers', tended to be aged in their mid-to late teens and employed in semi-skilled or unskilled manual occupations. Few were apprentices, which suggests that the prospect of relative economic security offered by learning a trade provided a powerful disincentive to gang membership. For youths in low status, irregular employment, gangs offered an alternative source of peer recognition. Gang members adopted distinctive modes of dress, rendering themselves highly conspicuous. Considerable prestige was at stake in confrontations between rival gangs, not least since newspaper coverage ensured that both collective and individual reputations for fighting prowess spanned the conurbation. Most gang members were male, but young women were prominent in witness intimidation and collective assaults on the police, in breach of Victorian expectations of feminine decorum.</p> <p>Four key findings from the research were articulated in the activities detailed in Section 4, below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Current concerns with gangs and 'knife-crime' are not new. To portray these phenomena as unprecedented - symptoms of 'Broken Britain' - is misleading, and fosters shallow explanations of their causes. In the late nineteenth century, as today, gangs were clustered in districts characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment and ill health. Gangs must be understood in the contexts of economic deprivation and social exclusion.</li><li>• Contrary to much recent media and political debate, gangs are not a by-product of the growth of black communities in Britain's cities; nor can they be attributed to the influence of 'gangsta rap'. Traditions of gang formation and conflict are more deeply-rooted than these racialised discourses imply.</li><li>• Mass imprisonment failed to curb the spread of gangs or the use of weapons by young people during the late nineteenth century. Many Victorian gang members served repeated terms of imprisonment.</li><li>• The growth of the Working Lads' Club movement in Manchester during the 1890s proved more successful than penal sanctions in tackling gang formation. The provision of new opportunities for sport, education and training for youths in the city's poorest districts resulted in a widely reported diminution of violence around 1900.</li></ul>

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**3. References to the research**

Research grant:

'Youth Gangs and Urban Violence: Manchester, Salford and Glasgow, 1860-1939', ESRC Interdisciplinary Research Programme on 'Crime and Social Order' (1994-6). Total award: £60,040. This project was graded 'Outstanding: High quality research making an important contribution to the development of the subject' by the ESRC.

Publications:

Initial findings were published as:

1. 'Youth gangs, masculinity and violence in late Victorian Manchester and Salford', *Journal of Social History*, 32, 2 (1998), pp. 349-69
2. "These viragoes are no less cruel than the lads": young women, gangs and violence in Manchester and Salford, 1870-1900', *British Journal of Criminology*, 39, 1 (1999), pp. 72-89.

Much fuller findings were published in Davies' book:

3. *The Gangs of Manchester: The Story of the Scuttlers, Britain's First Youth Cult* (Preston: Milo Books, 2008) [REF2 output]

Reviewers have praised the book both for the depth of its scholarship and its timeliness: "a refreshing, in-depth study ... which places a particular youth movement within its broader social, economic and spatial contexts, and which also has much to contribute to current debates and concerns" ([Reviews in History, December 2009](#)); "the unpicking of inter-personal and community dynamics ... enables Davies to engage with the nuances of working-class and 'slum' culture" (*Journal of Victorian Culture*, 15, 2 [2010], p. 268).

**4. Details of the impact**

Davies' contribution to public understanding of gang conflict and knife-crime has been achieved in part through frequent coverage by national media. *The Gangs of Manchester* was widely reviewed in the national press and the *Daily Mail* ran an abridged extract (2009). BBC television coverage includes features for *Inside Out* (2009) and *The One Show* (2012). BBC radio coverage includes a dedicated special edition of *Thinking Allowed* (Radio 4, 2008), a contribution on the history of gangs to *Whatever Happened to the Working Class?* (Radio 4, 2009) and a 'thought piece' for *The World This Weekend* (Radio 4), commissioned in response to the Prime Minister's call for an "all-out war on gangs and gang culture" in the wake of the riots of August 2011. Listeners described the latter as "refreshing" and "thought provoking" (emails to Davies, 21 August 2011). A fuller version of this piece was published in the *Guardian*, sparking a debate on the *Guardian* website, where it attracted 87 comments and was shared by 1,586 people via Facebook and 120 via Twitter. At the invitation of the History & Policy network Davies gave a presentation of his core findings (as summarised in Section 2, above) to civil servants in the Department for Education in January 2012. This was described by one of the civil servants in attendance as "wonderful and insightful" (email to Davies, 1 February 2012).

By 31 July 2013, more than 15,000 copies of *The Gangs of Manchester* had been sold, and the [companion blog](#) had attracted 92,896 viewings. Feedback from readers confirms that the appeal of Davies' work extends far beyond the established audience for non-fiction. As one reader observed in an email to Davies (18 January 2009): "a cousin of mine who's never bought a book in his life bought the scuttlers [book] ... an he's struggled to read it (last book before that woulda bin in school an he's 45) but he really enjoyed it ... rang me up one night to discuss it." Another reader posted on Davies' blog on 19 June 2009: "As i am from manchester and my mam grew up in ancoats. I realy found this book amazing i could not put it down. i am not a big reader. But i finished it in two and a half days."

The local impact of Davies' work is further demonstrated by invitations to give public talks based on his book. He gave twenty-five between September 2008 and July 2013, in venues ranging from

libraries to lads' clubs and an EBD school. Librarians have reported that Davies' talks have attracted record audiences for such events, including unusually large proportions of men and new visitors. Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre has hosted two of Davies' talks, and arranged a third at a community centre on the Hattersley 'overspill' estate in association with the 'Mancunian Reunion' project run by Tameside Libraries and Hattersley Neighbourhood Partnership.

A further batch of invited talks have been delivered to magistrates and probation officers and to probation hostel residents and prisoners in HM Prison Manchester, Strangeways. Presentations to professionals have stressed the second of the key findings outlined in Section 2, above: gangs are not a product of postwar growth of Manchester's black community. Feedback has been highly enthusiastic, with one member of staff at a probation hostel reporting: "The feedback that we have had from staff and residents has been positive and this has generated further interest in historical crime and punishment, within our area. This will include a number of Museum Visits and City Walks, to stimulate interest and discussion" (email to Davies, 11 June 2010).

A major - and unanticipated - beneficiary of Davies' research has been MaD, a community theatre company. During a period of study leave in 2008-9, Davies collaborated with MaD on an original, multi-media stage play. MaD's script-writers and film-maker used characters and episodes from *The Gangs of Manchester* as the basis for *Angels with Manky Faces*, a 'gangland' drama set in 1894. They saw the collaboration as an opportunity to write a 'message' play. The harrowing final scene, based on cases documented in Davies' book, spelled out the tragic consequences of gang violence. Davies worked closely with MaD on all aspects of the production from script-editing to costume and set design. Grants towards production costs included £4,990 from the Arts Council and £2,000 from the Economic History Society. Extensive publicity included BBC television coverage of a rehearsal for *North-West Tonight* (2009).

Thirteen performances of *Angels* were staged in Manchester and Liverpool during 2009-10. The total audience of 3,970 is by far the highest to date for a MaD production. MaD aims to produce plays "for people who don't normally go to the theatre" and *Angels* was notably successful in this respect. MaD's artistic director confirmed that audiences for *Angels* included groups from public-houses and community centres in areas of Manchester characterised by high levels of socio-economic deprivation. Enthusiastic audience responses to the play are captured on Davies' blog. In July 2013, productions of *Angels with Manky Faces* were staged by pupils at two secondary schools (Manchester Communication Academy and Manchester Creative and Media Academy) in association with MaD.

Theatre critic Kevin Bourke described *Angels* as a significant departure for MaD in terms of artistic ambition as well as box office success. MaD currently uses film sequences from *Angels* to showcase its work in schools across Greater Manchester, while members of MaD's youth groups review the films as part of their work towards their Arts Awards (a scheme in association with Arts Council England). In 2010, MaD won an 'Inspiring Voices' award (worth £500) from the Media Trust for its use of digital media in producing and publicising *Angels*. Other literary and musical works inspired by *The Gangs of Manchester* include poems by two published Manchester poets, Mike Garry and Mike Duff (featured on Davies' blog), and a song - based on one of the chapters in Davies' book - recorded by the pop group, Bye Bye Johnny (2009).

Another unanticipated beneficiary of Davies' research is a Manchester tour guide who devised a 'Gangs of Manchester' walk in 2009. She takes groups of 25-30 people - including tourists as well as local residents - around districts that feature prominently in Davies' book and her commentary is closely based on his research findings. She has reported that the 'Gangs of Manchester' is by far the most popular of her walks and attracts a distinctive clientele, many of whom have not previously taken part in tours of this kind (email to Davies, 14 November 2011).

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

1. [The Gangs of Manchester blog](#) charts the development of *Angels with Manky Faces*, showcases the poems and song inspired by Davies' book, provides links to television and radio coverage plus reviews, and provides examples of reader/audience feedback.
2. [Manchester's original gangsters](#) is a 1,565-word feature by Andrew Davies published in the *Guardian*, 21 August 2011, and reproduced on the newspaper's website. The online version, including readers' responses, demonstrates Davies' contribution to public debate and understanding through the media.
3. [Times Higher Education feature](#) from 1 October 2009 on knowledge transfer in the arts and humanities which includes an interview with the Artistic Director of MaD Theatre Company, who describes how Davies' book *The Gangs of Manchester* inspired MaD's production *Angels with Manky Faces*.
4. This [feature in the 'Victorians Beyond the Academy' forum](#) of the *Journal of Victorian Culture* (online edition) includes an interview with the Artistic Director of MaD Theatre Company in which he further describes how Davies' book *The Gangs of Manchester* inspired MaD's production *Angels with Manky Faces*.
5. Link to Davies' [presentation to the Children, Young People and Families Directorate of the Department for Education](#), January 2012, as part of a series of seminar briefings organised by History & Policy and the AHRC on issues of concern to policy makers. This confirms the claim that Davies' research has informed policy-makers' discussions of youth, gangs and violence.
6. The Artistic Director of MaD Theatre Company can be contacted to corroborate: that Davies' research inspired MaD's production *Angels with Manky Faces*; that the audiences for *Angels* were the largest for the company's performances to date; that these audiences included large numbers of people who are not regular theatre-goers; that productions of *Angels* were staged at two secondary schools in July 2013.
7. A statement via email from a reader (dated 18 January 2009, and cited in section 4, above) confirms the claim that the readership for Davies' book, *The Gangs of Manchester*, extends far beyond the established readership for non-fiction.
8. The Archivist at Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre can be contacted to corroborate the claim that Davies' talks on his research at public libraries have attracted record audiences for such events, including unusually large proportions of men and new visitors.
9. A Bury magistrate can be contacted to corroborate the claim that Davies' research has informed discussions of youth, crime and violence among practitioners in the criminal justice system.
10. A statement via email from a Manchester tour guide (dated 14 November 2011, and cited in section 4, above) describes the popularity of the 'Gangs of Manchester' walking tour and the distinctive clientele that it attracts.