

Institution: University of Liverpool
Unit of Assessment: 30 - History
Title of case study: Liverpool: Identity, History and Heritage
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Professor John Belchem's research has explored Liverpool's historic 'exceptionalism' and apartness within the UK, its cosmopolitanism, and its transition from 'second city of empire' to 'shock city' of post-colonial, post-industrial Britain. Insights from his research have provided important starting points for Liverpool's culture-led regeneration, helping to shape the city's successful bid to become European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2008, which in turn provided a major economic boost to Liverpool. Belchem's research resulted in distinct and material contributions to impact in a number of areas including civil society (e.g. through frequent media commentaries during the ECoC year, making a substantial contribution to a civic campaign to dispel negative external perceptions of the city and its people). Impacts have also occurred in public services/policy making, cultural life and public discourse: since 2008, Belchem's research has continued to shape cultural initiatives in the city, informing permanent galleries at the new Museum of Liverpool (2011) along with the centenary celebration 'Liverpool: City of Radicals' (2011) and generating the online urban bibliography 'Liverpool in Print' (now incorporated into the online catalogue of Liverpool Record Office), which promotes further study of the city's past among amateur as well as professional historians.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research was conducted between 1994 and 2011 by John Belchem (Reader, and from 1996-2012, Professor, in History at the University of Liverpool). Belchem's research examined Liverpool's remarkable roller-coaster ride from its heyday as 'second city of empire' through its precipitous collapse and its descent into European Union Objective One status (1993), followed by its reinvention as 'Liverpool', UNESCO World Heritage Site (2004) and European Capital of Culture (2008).</p> <p>Belchem's analysis of Liverpool's historic exceptionalism was set out in his collection of essays, <i>Merseypride</i> (2000). Belchem argued that Liverpool's 'apartness' was crucial to its identity: defining itself against industrial Manchester, the city turned its back on Lancashire and looked outwards, especially to America. Long-distance in-migration (mainly, but not exclusively, Celtic) transformed Liverpool, setting it apart from its environs. 'Scouse' culture co-existed with a seafaring cosmopolitanism, which made Liverpool particularly receptive to 'unEnglish' ideas – from syndicalism to American popular music. Reflecting on the city's current difficulties in the light of its former glories, Belchem concluded: "Packaged as heritage, history itself has become Liverpool's main 'trade' and source of attraction, the last hope of regeneration for a city blighted by post-industrial collapse and now ill-placed geographically ... for trade with European partners."</p> <p>With the financial support of the City Council and the University, Belchem edited <i>Liverpool 800: Culture, Character and History</i> (2006), a new history to mark the 800th anniversary in 2007 of the granting of letters patent to Liverpool. In his own single-authored contribution, 'Celebrating Liverpool', Belchem showed how the city had rebranded itself during the 1920s and again during the 1950s, drawing on its history to inspire forward-looking 'civic boosterism'. In a second, jointly-authored, contribution to <i>Liverpool 800</i>, Belchem argued that cosmopolitanism is a critical feature of Liverpool's distinctive culture. The complexity of Liverpool's demographic mosaic, which includes long-established black and Chinese communities, had previously been largely obscured. Belchem asserted that during its heyday as a great seaport – the 'New York of Europe' – Liverpool's cosmopolitanism placed it "apart and in advance of other British provincial cities."</p> <p>Belchem's monograph, <i>Irish, Catholic and Scouse</i> (2007), offered a fresh analysis of the history of Liverpool's Irish-Catholic community. Whereas social, political and labour historians had long</p>

dwelled on the costs of Liverpool's history of religious sectarianism, Belchem sought to explain why sectarianism had persisted in the city for so long. He concluded that ethno-religious affiliation underpinned systems of collective mutuality and welfare, along with recreational possibilities, which transcended occupational and gender divisions. Confessional allegiance, linked to national identity, had tangible benefits.

In his contribution to *Liverpool: City of Radicals* (2011), Belchem examined the achievements of, and tensions within, the second city of empire in 1911. Still defining itself as a commercial rather than industrial city, Liverpool was determined to wrap commerce in 'culture': hence works by Picasso and Matisse were shown in Liverpool before anywhere else in the UK outside London, while the construction of the iconic Liver Building heralded the arrival of 'Chicago' architecture on the Mersey. Still confident of its status as second city, Liverpool was in many ways well placed to be a cultural 'first' due to the inflow of ideas as well as people through this global port.

3. References to the research

Major Research Grants:

- Liverpool City Council and University of Liverpool, £134k (2003-6) awarded to John Belchem to produce a new history to mark the 800th anniversary in 2007 of the granting of letters patent to Liverpool.
- Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship, £102k (2004-7), awarded to John Belchem for research leading to a monograph on the Liverpool Irish, the urban biography of Liverpool for 2007, and exploration of the interface between academic history, public history and heritage.
- AHRC Resource Enhancement Scheme, £335k (2006-9): awarded to John Belchem for Liverpool in Print: an online urban bibliography

Key Publications (copies can be made available to the panel on request):

John Belchem, *Merseypride: Essays in Liverpool Exceptionalism* (Liverpool University Press, 2000), xviii + 228 pp. "... a lively and perceptive account ... a useful introduction to and analysis of ... Merseyside culture", *Economic History Review*, 56, 1 (2003), pp. 188-9. A second edition was published in 2006 with a new introduction, 'The new Livercool.'

John Belchem, ed., *Liverpool 800: Culture, Character, and History* (Liverpool University Press, 2006), 532 pp. "Teaching us a great deal about Liverpool specifically and the writing of city histories and the nature of urban history more widely, this is an important work that demands the widest readership", *Journal of British Studies*, 46, 4 (2007), pp. 981-2.

John Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool-Irish, 1800-1939*, (Liverpool University Press, 2007), xii + 364 pp. "... a vital contribution to the historiography of the Irish in Britain", *Economic History Review*, 61, 4 (2008), pp. 1011-1012.

John Belchem and Bryan Biggs, eds, *Liverpool: City of Radicals* (Liverpool University Press, 2011), xii + 207 pp. "The reader will come away from this book with a rich understanding of 'Mersey pride' and a wish to visit this remarkable city", *Historian*, 74, 3 (2012), pp. 606-7.

4. Details of the impact

Insights from Belchem's research into Liverpool's culture, identity and historic exceptionalism have provided important starting points for its culture-led regeneration, which received a crucial boost in 2008 during Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture.

Civil society: Civic leaders were particularly keen to use the Capital of Culture bid to challenge negative external perceptions of the city. As a member of one of the key working groups which helped to prepare the bid, Belchem was able to foreground Liverpool's historic importance as a global seaport, its rich history of culture as well as commerce, and its cosmopolitanism, as central elements in the city's claim for recognition. The importance of Belchem's input is reflected in the

[‘Executive Summary of Liverpool's Bid for European Capital of Culture 2008’](#), which - echoing a series of Belchem’s arguments in *Merseypride* - began by characterising the city as unconventional and pioneering, reflecting its geographical location “on the edge” (p.101); emphasised its “800 years of history ... much of it on a world scale” (p. 301); highlighted the importance of its architectural heritage (p. 901) and concluded by stressing the city’s historic cosmopolitanism (p. 1102).

Belchem’s research made a significant contribution to the wider civic effort to secure Liverpool’s nomination. The impact of this civic endeavour was manifested during 2008. The economic impact of Liverpool’s year as European Capital of Culture was [estimated by the City Council at £800m, with a total audience for the year-long programme of events of 15 million](#) (statistics cited drawn from pp. 6, 9).

Public discourse: As the national media focused its attention on Liverpool throughout 2008, Belchem was frequently called upon to comment on the city’s historic identity and the cultural legacy of its exceptionalism. He used these invitations to raise public awareness and understanding of Liverpool’s rich cultural heritage, thus contributing directly to the broader campaign to use 2008 to dispel negative external perceptions of the city and its people.

To this end, Belchem made a series of appearances on BBC Radio 4, including ‘You and Yours’ (discussion of the Liverpool Irish, 13 February 2008); ‘Archive Hour’ (‘Liverpool: Sinner and Saint’, 20 August 2008); and ‘The Trouble with Scousers’ (17 September 2008). He also contributed to a television film which explored Liverpool’s ‘apartness’. ‘Passport to Liverpool’, which took as its central premise Belchem’s observation in *Merseypride* that Liverpool was *in* England but not *of* it, was broadcast on BBC4 (18 August 2008; repeated 9 May 2010), having been premiered at the Philharmonic Hall in Liverpool on 20 April 2008 as part of the Capital of Culture programme. While it is not possible to measure the influence of specific programmes, the wider campaign to change external perceptions of Liverpool during 2008 to which Belchem made a substantial contribution - through his succession of media appearances - met with demonstrable success. The Impacts 08 study, [Creating an Impact: Liverpool’s Experience as European Capital of Culture](#), found that British national newspapers carried 71% more positive stories about Liverpool during 2008 than they had done during 2007, while surveys of impressions of Liverpool among the broader UK population (outside North-West England) found that the proportion of positive impressions rose from 53% to 60% between 2005 and 2008 (statistics cited drawn from pp. 40, 46).

Public services/policy making: Belchem’s contribution to the success of Liverpool’s year as European Capital of Culture was reflected in an invitation to provide expert testimony at a workshop held in Lublin, Poland (2010) organised as part of the [HerO](#) (Heritage as Opportunity) project, funded under the EU’s flagship Urbact II initiative. (This trans-european programme, involving 29 countries and over 700 cities, was designed to foster the sharing of best practice, with the goal of working together to solve major urban challenges). Belchem was also invited as an internationally recognised expert to the ‘After the Cultural City Conference’ held in Pecs, Hungary (2010) for representatives from cities bidding for future ECoC status. Belchem’s [presentation](#) outlined insights from his research into Liverpool’s history, and reflected on the subsequent delivery of its Capital of Culture programme. Audiences at these events were primarily non-academic: civic officials, heritage professionals, architects and town planners.

Cultural life: While continuing to work on the Steering Group for Liverpool’s World Heritage Site, Belchem has also worked closely with National Museums Liverpool (NML), especially during the transformation of the Museum of Liverpool Life into the new Museum of Liverpool, which opened in 2011. Belchem served on the Museum’s Advisory Group from 2006, and his body of work on Liverpool identity, in-migration, Irishness, radicalism and cultural capital has directly and substantially informed the content of the new Museum’s permanent galleries. According to the Museum’s Director: “the team working on the museum were influenced by [Belchem’s] ideas of ‘Merseypride’ and [his] Irish diaspora research” (email dated 04/03/2013). In its first eighteen months, the Museum had 1.7 million visitors. Huge public interest helped NML to achieve record-breaking visitor figures in 2011-12 ([Annual Report](#), p. 7) and again in 2012-13 ([Annual Report](#), p.

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8). In April 2013, the Museum of Liverpool was awarded the [Council of Europe Museum Prize for 2013](#) in recognition of its exceptional contribution to the understanding of European cultural heritage. In 2011, Belchem's research on Edwardian Liverpool provided the historical context for '[City of Radicals](#)', a year-long centenary programme of exhibitions, events and publications exploring events in Liverpool in 1911, and their legacy. Highlights included '[Art in Revolution: Liverpool 1911](#)', an [acclaimed](#) restaging at the Walker Art Gallery of the 1911 Post-Impressionist exhibition, when Picasso, Matisse, Cézanne and others exhibited at the city's Bluecoat gallery. 'Art in Revolution' attracted 58,000 visitors (estimate from NML).

Another impact derived from Belchem's work is the 'Liverpool in Print' project. The research for *Liverpool 800*, and the surge of interest in public history that this project generated, led to a realisation that the very rich holdings of Liverpool Record Office needed to be made accessible to researchers on a much more systematic basis. The 'Liverpool in Print' project saw the creation of a digitised version of the former local studies sheaf catalogue (a resource collected over decades by specialist librarians, which had fallen into a state of decay by 2006). This is now integrated with the [general online catalogue of Liverpool Record Office](#). Between August 2009 and March 2013 the 'Liverpool in Print' online urban bibliography was hosted separately on a server at the University of Liverpool. During that time, it attracted more than 13,000 unique visitors and 146,000 page views (Google Analytics Report). One lay user (a former librarian) commented: "This is such an advance on what was previously available – a single copy of an old fashioned, scruffy, sheaf catalogue, which could only be consulted in person, in Liverpool Record Office. It is now possible to search remotely for material on all aspects of Liverpool and the surrounding area. I am presently writing a book on Liverpool history and find it an invaluable resource" (email dated 17/04/2013). *Liverpool 800* has been adopted as a model for other urban anniversary histories, including *Belfast 400: People, Place and History* (Liverpool University Press, 2012).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. The importance of Belchem's input to Liverpool's campaign to become European Capital of Culture for 2008 is demonstrated in the '[Executive Summary](#)' of the bid, especially at pp. 101, 301, 901 and 1102.
2. The former leader of Liverpool City Council can be contacted to corroborate the claim that the civic leaders utilised Belchem's historical research both to inform the Capital of Culture bid and as part of the wider campaign to challenge negative perceptions of the city.
3. The economic impacts of Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture are detailed in the [LIVERPOOL '08](#) report at pp. 6, 9.
4. Belchem's use of the media to raise public awareness and understanding of Liverpool's rich cultural heritage by disseminating key findings from his historical research is demonstrated by an [article on the BBC website](#).
5. For the positive shift in external perceptions of Liverpool during 2008, following the campaign to which Belchem contributed by relaying key findings from his research, see the Impacts 08 study, [Creating an Impact: Liverpool's Experience as European Capital of Culture](#), pp. 40, 46.
6. A statement from the Director of the Museum of Liverpool, dated 4 March 2013, corroborates the claim that "the team working on the museum were influenced by [Belchem's] ideas of 'Merseypride' and [his] Irish diaspora research," and confirms that the museum had 1.7 million visitors in its first 18 months.
7. The Artistic Director of the Bluecoat Gallery can be contacted to corroborate the claim that Belchem's research provided the historical context for the 'City of Radicals' programme (2011).
8. The Marketing Manager of National Museums Liverpool has provided a statement corroborating visitor figures for 'Art in Revolution: Liverpool in 1911'.
9. A [Google Analytics Report](#) on use of the 'Liverpool in Print' online catalogue between 1 August 2009 and 27 March 2013 provides evidence of the number of visitors and page views for the online catalogue during that period.
10. A statement from a user, dated 17 April 2013, corroborates the claim that the 'Liverpool in Print' online catalogue represented a significant improvement on the old sheaf catalogue in Liverpool Record Office.