

UoA 29 – The Great War and the British Home Front Summary of the impact (100)

With the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War approaching, there is increased national and international interest in this conflict. The 'home front' in Britain during that conflict is one that is relatively under-researched. At Sunderland, Smith's research into this social context has led to her being asked to help a local museum develop teaching materials for schools and the wider community as part of preparations for the centenary events. Her research has also influenced the production of genealogy programmes on television.

Underpinning research (500)

Sunderland University has developed a national and international reputation as a civic university with close links with the wider community within the region. As part of this commitment to promoting a civic university, the English department at Sunderland has a strong record of research with the North East Irish Culture Network's (NEICN) reputation growing since its establishment in 2002. The Sociolinguistics team have developed a considerable reputation for placing language in its social context, particularly in the North East, and also within the late 19th and early 20th century context that forms the core of NEICN's literary and cultural studies. The team has made use of the North East Centre for Life Long Learning (NECLL). Although part of Sunderland University, NECLL provided a range of short courses in Newcastle upon Tyne and other venues across Tyneside and the North East of England. English staff contributed to this through the Explore subscription scheme which allowed subscribers to attend as many sessions and events as they wished.

Smith's research for her PhD thesis (awarded 2007) developed a model of linguistic analysis to deal with a large corpus of historical documentation, in particular looking at the discursive construction of British widows of men who died as a result of the First World War. This has resulted in one monograph (2012), three journal articles (2002, 2009, 2010) and several invited papers, both in academia (Swansea, 2007, North East Centre for Lifelong Learning (NECLL) Newcastle 2012, Strathclyde 2012, Northumbria 2013) and at a Women's Institute branch (Houghton-le-Spring 2013). She has also delivered three conference papers (Swansea 2007, Newcastle 2011 and Newcastle 2013). The focus on children and the family in the period also links with Smith's MA and undergraduate teaching of children's fictions, especially in relation to representations of war.

Smith's invited paper at the Houghton-le-Spring's Gilpin WI offered an insight into the social context, but also enhanced understanding of how social welfare in the 21st century, particularly the widows' pension, has been influenced by the specific system under discussion during the presentation. In addition to Contact 3 (below), many women commented that the talk had given them insights into the social context that they had not previously been aware of, particularly the 'surveillance' element.

With international interest in the commemoration of the First World War in 2014 gathering pace, Smith's work on the social context for this period, particularly the 'home front', is attracting an increasing amount of attention. This is seen particularly in the collaboration between Smith and the local Beamish Museum, which is engaging in extensive outreach with the local community in the run-up to this commemoration. Whilst there is a great deal of local research into the military context, it is Smith's understanding of the home front in this period that is being drawn upon for much of the engagement with local schools.

Key researcher: Angela Smith: research carried out 2002 to present, Reader in Language and Culture, University of Sunderland 2001-present.

References to the research (max 6)

1. Smith, Angela . ““The girl behind the man behind the gun””: women as carers in recruitment posters of the First World War’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 2009, 1: 3 (223-241) DOI: 10.1386/jwcs.1.3.223/1 Peer reviewed journal article.
2. Smith, Angela. ‘Discourses of morality and truth in social welfare: the surveillance of British widows of the First World War’, *Social Semiotics* (Vol 20, no. 5, November 2010, pp519-536) DOI: 10.1080/10350330.2010.513187 Peer reviewed journal article. Leading to: Smith, Angela. ‘Confidential enquiries: the surveillance of British widows of the First World War.’ NECLL Newcastle (January, 2012)
3. Smith, Angela (2012) *Discourses Surrounding British Widows of the First World War*. London: Bloomsbury. Monograph, peer reviewed. Leading to: Smith, Angela. ‘Victory Babies: the child and the state in the First World War’, Approaching War: Europe conference, Newcastle, March 2013.
4. Smith, Angela and Claire Nally (2013) ‘The New Suffragettes.’ Posting on I.B. Tauris blog. <http://theibtaurisblog.com/2013/06/04/the-new-suffragettes/>

Details of the impact (750)

This study concerns the public understanding of the ‘home front’ during the First World War. The forthcoming centenary of the start of this war is of international interest. Since 2010, Smith has acted as an advisor for the BBC family history series, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, where recent shows have linked with growing interest in the First World War and family life on the home front (Contact 4 below). Smith's published research (items 2 and 3 above) has shed light on family myths being investigated by the programme's researchers and has led to the content of several programmes being altered to clarify the experiences of the families of men who died during the war, particularly their relationship with the State. The programme is screened on BBC1 and attracts a regular audience of

about six million viewers. It is repeated at various times on BBC1 and also on the Freeview channel, Yesterday.

At the talk given to the Gilpin WI, about 80 women (and one man!) were present and many were able to gain an insight into their own family histories, with several women pointing out that their grandmothers had been war widows so this talk had enhanced understanding of their lives. The talk also highlighted that the widows' pension scheme, on which several of the women present draw, was based on the war widows' pension, and, by pointing out the similarities but also the differences between the two schemes, audience gained a greater understanding of their own situations.

To engage school children with this historical context, a regional museum sought to develop events that would enhance understanding of and interest for the children and wider community. Smith's long-term academic research underpins this project (items 1, 2, 3 and 4 above). One invited paper delivered at the NECLL in January 2012 gave rise to Smith's details being passed to the community learning coordinator at Beamish Museum (Contact 1 below). She contacted Smith in August 2012 to discuss developing their research into the home front in Sunderland with Smith's wider understanding of the national perspective.

The Beamish project involved schools from North Sunderland:

Five primary schools: Town End Academy, Bexhill, Hastings Hill, Grange Park and St Benet's (total 193 pupils);

Two secondary schools: Redhouse Academy and Monkwearmouth (total 240 pupils).

Pupils from these schools took part in a pilot of the Beamish project in November/December 2012 in preparation for the wider-reaching project to run in 2014. This involved a community event held at Southwick and Monkwearmouth libraries (168 members of the community attended), which was open to the wider public, as well as school field trips to the Beamish Museum site. In the case of the secondary schools, one of the project's aims was to develop literacy levels amongst the pupils through the use of key vocabulary terms and concepts to create newspaper articles reflecting the experience of the home front and the trenches. This aim was recorded as being successful when students' levels were assessed after the project, and, more generally, the project introduced the students to different modes of communication. Steve Newman, Head of History at Redhouse Academy, commented that 'The project has enhanced the learning and literacy of my students. The top class produced written work better than hitherto – on average one sub-level higher per student, which is remarkable.' The Southwick event was reported by local press:

<http://www.sunderlandecho.com/what-s-on/sunderland-children-research-history-of-first-world-war-soldiers-1-5435315> and on the museum's web site: <http://www.beamish.org.uk/sunderland-library-project/>. The Museum also used information from this pilot project in its activities later in the year: http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/10682651.Consett_to_mark_World_War_One_centenary/

The 'home front' element of this project is built around Smith's research (items 1, 2, 3 and 4 above), as well as her donation of several artifacts to engage pupils in activities during their contact with the museum (particularly bound copies of *Boy's Own* magazine from this period). Mr Newman at Redhouse Academy commented that this project 'engaged students and deepened their knowledge'. Further details of the project appeared in the Beamish Magazine (print run of 2,500 copies), which is distributed to Friends of Beamish, people on the Museum's mailing list (including MPs, councils, other museums and related bodies nationally and internationally, local and national media), and is sold in the Museum's gift shop.

As a registered charity, Beamish seeks additional funding from a variety of bodies and uses such outreach events to appeal directly to the local council and members of parliament for further funding, as well as reinforcing their case for the long-standing funding from Arts Council England and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Sources to corroborate the impact (max 10)

1. Former community engagement officer, Beamish Museum: REDACTED
2. Education Officer, Beamish Museum: email education@beamish.org.uk
REDACTED
3. Chair of Gilpin Women's Institute REDACTED
4. Researcher, Wall To Wall Media for BBC tv *Who Do You Think You Are?*
REDACTED
5. *Beamish Magazine*