

<b>Institution: University College London</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 29 – English Language and Literature</b>
<b>Title of case study: The Bloomsbury Project: enriching public understanding of a vibrant centre of intellectual life</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The Bloomsbury Project, which gathers the results of archival research into the geographical, cultural, and social development of Bloomsbury, London, in the 19th century, has assisted and enriched the investigations of local historians and organisations into the area. The Bloomsbury Project website receives over 3,000 hits each month (and often closer to 5,000), Professor Rosemary Ashton's monograph <i>Victorian Bloomsbury</i> (2012) has been widely reviewed, and a series of well-attended public events has brought together members of the community working on Bloomsbury-related projects.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The Bloomsbury Project was funded by a Leverhulme Large Project Research Grant, and was undertaken from 1 October 2007 to 30 April 2011. It was led by Professor Rosemary Ashton (Quain Professor of English Language &amp; Literature at UCL until October 2012) and employed Dr Deborah Colville as a Leverhulme-funded researcher (1 October 2007 to 30 April 2011, including a nine month break for maternity leave). The Leverhulme also funded two PhD students to work on the project: Matt Ingleby (UCL English Language &amp; Literature) and Tom Quick (Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at UCL), who were both employed on the project from 1 October 2007 to 1 October 2010. A further researcher, Dr Juliette Atkinson (then a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, and now Lecturer in UCL English Language &amp; Literature), was employed for two months in the summer of 2008. The Bloomsbury blog was created and maintained by Dr Carole Reeves, Outreach Librarian of the Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at UCL.</p> <p>The Project's main aim was to investigate 19th-century Bloomsbury's development from a swampy rubbish dump into a vibrant centre of intellectual life. Working in cooperation with Bloomsbury's institutions, societies and local residents, Ashton and her team researched the origins and significance of the numerous progressive and reforming institutions founded in the area during this period; the archives of more than 300 of these institutions were identified and investigated, from the large and well-known like the University of London (founded in 1828, and later renamed University College London), to smaller ventures such as the Alexandra Hospital for Children with Hip Disease (opened in a house in Queen Square in 1867). The archives examined cover a wide range of fields: 19th-century innovations in art, law, education, science and medicine are all well represented in the material Ashton and her researchers uncovered.</p> <p>The Project also explored the activities of the various religious dissenters, millenarians, Jews, agnostics and Swedenborgians who founded educational establishments in 19th-century Bloomsbury. Of particular importance is the Project's research into the work of pioneers in the education of women, children and the working class, in institutions such as the Ladies' College (founded in Bedford Square in 1849), the Working Men's College (established in Red Lion Square in 1854) and the Passmore Edwards Settlement (which, founded in 1890, offered classes to local working-class people and their children). In addition, the Project undertook a detailed examination of the physical growth of the area; it explored the architectural history of both its large public buildings and its impressive domestic residences, and defined the social character of each street and square at different periods of the century.</p> <p>A further strand of the research concerned the representation of Bloomsbury in the work of various important 19th-century writers who lived there: these include Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Mary Ward, George Gissing, Robert Louis Stevenson and J. M. Barrie, all of whose writings were influenced by and contributed to the spirit of Bloomsbury.</p> <p>The Bloomsbury Project website [a], one of the key outputs, is an online archive containing detailed information on Bloomsbury institutions (232 entries) and streets, squares and buildings</p>

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(427 entries). In addition, it includes a number of articles on particular aspects of 19th-century Bloomsbury, from novels about lawyers' wives to homes for abandoned women and spiritualist societies, from German exiles to the influx of Scots (especially medical men) into the area, from fringe religious societies to scientific discoveries, from the first women students at UCL to the first female landscape gardener. The site as a whole offers a web of information about 19th-century Bloomsbury: its people, institutions, streets and buildings.

As a result of the Bloomsbury Project, an area long associated in the popular imagination only with Virginia Woolf and her circle has recovered its full intellectual and cultural history.

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

[a] 'The Bloomsbury Project', <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project>. Launched April 2011.

[b] Ashton, Rosemary, *Victorian Bloomsbury* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 380pp. Available on request.

Both research outputs were the outcomes of the following external peer-reviewed grant:

PI: Rosemary Ashton, Leverhulme Major Research Grant, The Leverhulme Trust, 1/10/2007–30/4/2011, Value: £226,712.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

Two days before the Bloomsbury Project website was launched on 15 April 2011, an article of 1,100 words by Kieran Long appeared in the *Evening Standard* [1], which has a circulation of roughly 600,000 readers in London and beyond. This article eloquently described the nature of the website's impact: 'It enriches,' Long observed, 'our understanding of this small, vital area of London, helps us to understand how institutions, from small charities to international universities, can influence its neighbourhood in ways at first unimaginable. It also shows how individuals, brought together by contrasting motivations, create the city between them.'

Long's article for a mass-circulating London paper indicates the extent to which the Bloomsbury Project has succeeded in translating the research of Ashton and her team into a resource of lasting value to the world beyond academia. The project has enhanced understanding of 19th-century Bloomsbury and made easily available to the public a wealth of information about numerous significant institutions and historic buildings in an area of London with a contribution to intellectual and social history which extends far beyond its borders.

The chief beneficiaries of the Project include those with an interest in the history and influence of London, as well as organisations seeking to investigate and conserve the past in this area. As Long's article suggests, it has also made a significant contribution to the interpretation of the cultural and historical capital of this area, and in doing so, enriched the lives and understanding of the public in London and beyond.

This was achieved through the release of the immensely popular Bloomsbury Project website, which has brought the research to a global audience and attracted over 3,000 visits per month. Ashton's monograph *Victorian Bloomsbury* was reviewed positively in mass circulating papers such as the *Telegraph* ('That Ashton has managed to tame "Bloomsbury", and present it in such a coherent, digestible fashion, is triumph indeed'), the *Guardian* ('absorbing, researched from the ground up'), and *Independent* (a 'fascinating account of 19th-century reforming bodies and personalities that shaped the other, institutional Bloomsbury') – newspapers with a combined daily circulation exceeding 900,000 readers [2].

**Reaching a global public through the Bloomsbury Project website**

In the month following its launch the website received 9,777 hits, and since then it has attracted an average of 3,000–5,000 hits a month [3]. In total, between April 2011 and 31 July 2013, the website has received 117,135 hits. Feedback and enquiries from users suggest that the Project has been successful in reaching its target beneficiaries, namely individuals who live in and/or work on Bloomsbury. A five-minute film outlining the Project, available on YouTube, has been viewed 6,074 times to date.

Although disaggregated Google Analytics visit data is only available for one month (May 2013) [3],

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it demonstrates the global reach of this resource. While most site visits came from the United Kingdom, a substantial proportion also originated in other English-speaking and European countries. Indeed, visitors from France and the United States spent the longest time on the site, at over 7 and 4 minutes on average.

The significance of its value as a reusable learning resource is demonstrated by the fact that the Bloomsbury Project website was nominated for inclusion as a permanent resource 'of long term research value' by the Wellcome Library, and was archived and made available through the British Library [4].

As the number of hits recorded and the many emails to the Project testify, the website has proved a valuable resource for the general public. One television producer 'found a treasure trove of information in your Bloomsbury Project' for a forthcoming BBC documentary.

Local historians and amateur local historical associations, made extensive use of the findings of the Bloomsbury Project, whose website has developed into an important resource for the memorialisation of the area's history. The Bloomsbury Association has declared this website 'very useful as it provides the definitive story of the area's development'. The Camden Local History Society, a charitable organisation of about 300 local historians, which publishes street histories of the borough, consults the Project website for information in order to revise and update its publication, *Streets of Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia*. The editors, David Hayes and Peter Woodford, called the Bloomsbury Project website 'an invaluable source both of facts and of inspiration for further lines of research' [5]. The Marchmont Association, a residents' association based around one of the area's historic streets, also drew upon the website to add to the fourth edition of the book *The Story of Marchmont Street* [6], and the organisation has 'found the site very useful as a source of information for former residents of other streets... for whom we may consider installing commemorative plaques'. During the impact period, this included gathering information to put the case for a Blue Plaque for J. M. Barrie in Grenville Street [7].

An important aspect of the Project's impact derived from its active solicitation of public engagement in the research process itself. For example, a blog run by Carole Reeves during the lifetime of the Project (2008–2011) reached out to descendants of people living in Bloomsbury. This blog attracted dozens of family stories reaching from Bloomsbury to Canada and South Africa. An indicative example is that of Bishop Andrew McLagen whose life and relationship with Bloomsbury (as well as South Africa and even, via his son, Hollywood) was traced through a series of emails from correspondents [8].

### Engaging the public through walks, talks and exhibitions

A deeper engagement with research was achieved through a series of events open to the public which used diverse, innovative means to engage the public with the findings of the research. These proved to be immensely popular, and collaborators in the organisation of these events attest to the significance of their impact on public understanding.

For example, on 12 March 2010, the Department hosted a celebration of Bloomsbury Past and Present. This was free and open to the public, and included a series of talks given by Ashton and members of her team, and by invited speakers such as David Lodge and Lynne Truss. The audience of over 300 included attendees from a wide range of local institutions, namely librarians, museum curators and archivists from Senate House, the British Museum, the Foundling Museum, the Swedenborg Society, and Camden Libraries, together with representatives of the Royal Historical Society and the Royal Commission on Historical Documents, local residents, blue badge guides, and local architects and publishers. A similarly diverse audience attended an event to commemorate the launch of the website by local novelist Ian McEwan on 15 April 2011. Both events played a significant role in bringing the Bloomsbury Project to the attention of a diverse non-academic audience, as the attendance figures and subsequent emails show [9].

Members of the Bloomsbury Project team have given numerous talks on research findings at a range of public venues, including historical societies, further education centres, churches and libraries. These include the Institute of Historical Research (5 November 2008), Camden History Society (20 November 2008), the Mary Ward Centre (12 May 2009), the Bright Club (15 September 2009), St. George's Bloomsbury (23 November 2011), Paddington Library (25 April

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2012), the Bishopsgate Institute (18 October, 2012) and Waterstones Gower Street (4 October, 2012). They have also led guided walks around Bloomsbury (5 July 2008, 24 October 2010). In 2008, Ashton and Colville published an online leaflet of historic buildings of Bloomsbury as part of the London Festival of Architecture. From January to June 2010, UCL Library hosted an exhibition entitled 'Innovators and Educators: UCL and Bloomsbury in the 19th Century'.

An important example of public engagement involved the participation of the Project team in the Bloomsbury Festival. This is a free annual festival which attracts 50,000 people to Bloomsbury to attend talks, concerts and other cultural events. The significance of the impact on public understanding here is demonstrated by the close, ongoing relationship formed between the Project and the organisers of the Bloomsbury Festival, which led to repeat appearances every year: on 23–24 October, 2010, 22 October 2011, and 20 October 2012, during which project researchers led guided walks, delivered talks and introduced audiences to the Project's research.

The organiser of the event summarised the enthusiasm of beneficiaries thus: 'Professor Rosemary Ashton's walks and appearances on Festival panels have been a highlight of the Festival for a number of years. Her walks are always fully booked, and receive brilliant feedback. They have acquired such a reputation that we often have enquiries about them well before the Festival programme is announced.' The organiser stressed the opportunities created by the Project for public engagement, noting that 'it is brilliant for members of the public to have access to the kind of expertise that Rosemary brings, which is often otherwise found only in an academic context' [10].

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] Kieron Long, 'The Blossoming of Bloomsbury', *Evening Standard*, 13 April 2011 [average circulation 600,000, data from ABCs] <http://bit.ly/16Eq5p5>.

[2] Reviews of *Victorian Bloomsbury*. *Telegraph*, 19 September 2012 [monthly web+print readership: 10.5m] <http://bit.ly/1eDMjQe>; *Guardian*, 14 December 2012 [monthly web+print readership: 12.3m] <http://bit.ly/15oStvh>; *Independent*, 5 December 2012 [monthly web+print readership: 6.5m] <http://ind.pn/1eatHog>. Readership figures: National Readership Survey (NRS-PADD) Adults 15+ monthly readers July 2012–June 2013 <http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-data-tables/>.

[3] Google analytics report generated 31 July 2013, including May 2013 detailed report showing dwell time and visitor origin. Available on request.

[4] British Library web archive selection (including note on nomination by the Wellcome Library): <http://bit.ly/1q1RsmH>. Criteria for inclusion: <http://bit.ly/19BNr4M> (see item 8).

[5] Use in publications by Camden History Society confirmed by editor, *Camden History Review*.

[6] Use by Marchmont Association in publications, confirmed by member, Marchmont Association.

[7] Use to advocate for J. M. Barrie blue plaque, confirmed by member, Marchmont Association.

[8] Blog with public contributions on Bloomsbury history <http://bloomsburypeople.blogspot.co.uk/>. See e.g. the story of Bishop Andrew McLagen's inclusion into the blog: <http://bit.ly/17ZdSOE>.

[9] Event emails and Public Engagement report, available on request.

[10] Reception at Bloomsbury Festival confirmed by the former organiser.