

<p>Institution: University of Leicester</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UoA 29 English Language and Literature</p>
<p>Title of case study: Charles Dickens: Sexuality, Gender and Modernity</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The impact of Furneaux’s research on Dickens is two-fold: she has enhanced public understanding of a major cultural icon, but also of the ways in which an earlier period may shape or challenge pressing social issues in our own time. Her work on gender, sexuality and domesticity has encouraged popular re-evaluations of Dickens’s legacy, particularly his reputation as the eminent author of conservative ‘family values’, and has informed audiences’ perceptions of what constitutes a family both in Dickens’s work and in the early 21st century.</p> <p>During the 2012 Dickens bi-centenary alone, Furneaux engaged in dialogue with 25,000+ Dickens enthusiasts through projects including a Facebook reading group, a blog, a schools’ resource, workshops and talks, and she presented new perspectives on Dickens in various media. Furneaux and her AHRC-funded CDA student, Catherine Malcolmson, have also worked closely with the Charles Dickens Museum (CDM) in generating income for the Museum and shaping its engagement with new audiences.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The major research project underpinning this impact case is Furneaux’s monograph, <i>Queer Dickens</i> (1) which contends that Dickens presents a distinctly queer corpus, everywhere fascinated by the diversity of gender roles, the expandability of notions of the family, and the complex multiplicity of sexual desire. Exploring Dickens’s work across genres within their social and literary context, it focuses on the long overlooked figures of bachelor fathers, maritally resistant men, and male nurses to make a case for a new understanding of Dickens and for a more affirmative queer theory. This research also proposed new methods for reading Dickens’s serialised fiction alongside his journalism.</p> <p>Furneaux co-edited (2009-11), with Professor Sally Ledger (Hildred Carlile Chair at Royal Holloway at the time of her death in 2009), <i>Dickens in Context</i> (3), a collection of 45 short essays by leading Dickens experts, aimed at a general as well as an academic readership. The book presents a detailed treatment of Dickens in his professional roles as novelist, journalist, editor, public reader, and passionate advocate of social reform. It explores the central features of Dickens’s age, work and legacy, and uncovers surprising faces of the man and of the range of Dickens industries. Furneaux contributed essays on ‘Childhood’ and ‘Sexuality’ which further develop the findings of her <i>Queer Dickens</i> research.</p> <p>Also in this period Furneaux was invited to edit an abridged edition of the first biography of Dickens, written by his great friend John Forster (4). This project brings Forster’s <i>Life</i> back into print, making it more widely accessible to a general readership, and includes a foreword by Jane Smiley and over 200 colour images, selected by Furneaux from the Charles Dickens Museum collection. In the introduction to this book she develops her scholarly approach to male intimacy, presenting, for a general audience, research into the friendship between Dickens and Forster, which she has published in a special issue of the journal <i>Life Writing</i> (5).</p> <p>In addition, Furneaux co-edited and introduced, with Dr Ben Winyard (Birkbeck), a special issue of the open access journal <i>19</i> on ‘Dickens and Science’ (2), commissioned after a successful annual Dickens Day conference on this subject. 7 essays approach the topic from a variety of disciplinary perspectives for a general as well as specialist readership.</p> <p>Furneaux’s work in this field and with the CDM was recognised in an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award, with the Museum (2008–2011). The project student Catherine Malcolmson (now Dr) explored non-academic engagements with Dickens in the first decades of the twentieth century,</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

including the foundation of the CDM, the Dickens Fellowship and the holdings of collectors. Her findings emphasise the significance of Dickens fandom, reflecting on Dickens's role in both a national and an international cultural and literary heritage.

3. References to the research

1. Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford University Press, 2009) 282pp.
2. *Dickens and Science*, ed. and introduced by Holly Furneaux and Ben Winyard, special issue of *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 10 (2010).
3. *Dickens in Context*, ed. by Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge University Press, 2011) xxi + 405pp.
4. *John Forster's Life of Charles Dickens*, edited by Holly Furneaux (Sterling, 2011), 512pp.
5. Holly Furneaux, 'Inscribing Friendship: Forster's Life of Dickens and the Writing of Male Intimacy in the Victorian Period' for the 'Lives in Relation' special issue of *Life Writing*, ed. Amy Culley and Rebecca Styler (2011), pp. 243-256.
6. 'What I Call Home: Using Dickens in the Classroom to think about Forms of Family', *The Use of English*, 64.1, Autumn 2012, pp. 13-22.

Grants

AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award with the Charles Dickens Museum, 'Constructing Charles Dickens, 1900-1940'. 2008-11.

4. Details of the impact

Furneaux's research on Charles Dickens has reshaped perceptions of the author and his age for modern audiences in a period of burgeoning interest in the nineteenth century and its legacy. Her work has specific impacts upon the public perception of Dickens and the Victorian period, and wider impacts for the ways we think about reading, and approach and experience, queer lives. The reach of this research is evidenced in Furneaux's resulting work as consultant (for BBC2, the Dickens 2012 steering group, the Charles Dickens Museum, and CityRead), a series of popular public events, and a schools' project and learning resource.

Rethinking Victorian Sexuality, Gender and Domesticity

A *THE* review recognised the wider impact of *Queer Dickens* for modern experiences of sexuality, in 'mak[ing] a political intervention into the way we live now' and in providing 'an alternative, optimistic line of genealogy for queer parents and children' (June 2010). It has contributed to re-thinking concepts of the normative and has provided, according to the *TLS*, 'a demonstration of how things can be done differently' (August 2010).

Queer Dickens received international media coverage (e.g. *Telegraph*, *The Times in India*, *THE*) and has been widely discussed on discussion boards and blogs. It has generated a turnover of £25,000 for OUP, and has been central to a number of public events. In summer 2012, Furneaux was part of a lively public discussion of the book in panel on the book at the Dickens Universe, California -- the leading international group on Dickens, and one that encompasses Dickens enthusiasts, high school teachers and academics. In October 2010 she received a Writers and Critics award from Drake University, Iowa, where *Queer Dickens* is a set text, and was invited to give a public lecture and produce online material for a wider audience. Furneaux has also given a range of talks for historical and literary societies and at events to mark Gay and Lesbian History month.

Furneaux's edition of Forster's *Life of Dickens* has also reached a wide audience. It was a top-

selling title internationally for Sterling in 2012 (10,000 copies, with a turnover of £300,000), and was recommended in *The Times* and *Independent's* 'Best Books on Dickens' lists. The project also promotes and had a financial impact for the CDM, with whom Furneaux worked to select illustrations, generating £18,000 in copyright fees, a significant sum for a small museum.

Queer Dickens for New Audiences

Furneaux has engaged with large, varied audiences on the history of sexuality, gender, and ideas of family. She acted as an advisor, promoting a more complex view of Dickens's treatment of women, for BBC2's 'Mrs Dickens's Christmas Dinner', presented by Sue Perkins (December 2011). The challenging of preconceptions of Dickens's work continued in CityRead 2012 (focussed on *Oliver Twist*, for which Furneaux ran a FaceBook reading group, accessed by over 12,000 readers www.facebook.com/cityreadlondon). Discussion topics included Dickens's treatment of adoptive parenting with many readers commenting on how their perceptions of Dickens had been changed by the reading group.

One blogger said 'As Dr Holly Furneaux points out [. . .] most contemporary adaptations, including the famous musical, turn Brownlow into Oliver's grandfather. This gives the story a conventional twist that puts Oliver back with his blood relations. It seems in the 20th and 21st century, we have not let go of Victorian ideals of what the family should be [. . .] Mr Brownlow truly loves Oliver as his son and this makes him the perfect father regardless of biology or society. An idea that even in 2012 is radical and challenging'.

Furneaux developed this work, together with Nicky Gale, the Head of English at Limehurst High School, Loughborough, for year 7 classes, using Dickens's writing to think through different ideas of parenting and home. Gale reported that the project had effectively engaged students both in reading more Dickens and in rethinking ideas of normative homes and families. Furneaux has published the resource in the leading journal for secondary English teachers (6, above). Pupil learning summaries included: 'CD is an amazing author and there's more than one way of doing a family tree', "everyone has a different idea of home", "family is more than just blood and it's more than what I thought it was'.

Shaping the Bicentenary Celebrations, and the Future of the Charles Dickens Museum

Furneaux was on the central committee for events to mark Dickens's bi-centenary in 2012, and, together with CDM and other partners she organised the international travelling conference 'A Tale of Four Cities', leading the closing event at the Museum of London (200 participants). This event was the CDM's first conference, and since its success the Museum has incorporated joint public/academic conferences into their programme. Museum Director, Dr Florian Schweizer, has commented that the CDA, and bi-centenary conference, have given the museum a more active role in scholarly work, and have demonstrated the benefits of bringing different Dickens constituencies together. He adds: 'Dr Furneaux's academic and audience engagement work was one of the most significant components of the Dickens 2012 bicentennial celebrations in the United Kingdom. Her engaging, diverse and creative activities were a major achievement in the commemoration of Dickens, and she has created exemplary models for forging partnership between academic and non-academic organisations. The objectives and targets set by Dr Furneaux were met through all of her activities, and it is no exaggeration to say that she has, through her untiring efforts, reshaped the way in which many people in the United Kingdom can appreciate, engage in and enjoy Dickens's works and heritage.'

Furneaux's commitment to extending the reach of Dickens for modern readers beyond the academy also saw her help to establish the 'Friends' of the CDM in 2005, which now has over 500 members and has generated significant revenue for the Museum. Together with Malcolmson, she has organised public events for the Friends and has been involved in planning and delivering the Museum's reopening, after its Heritage Lottery Fund redevelopment.

Furneaux successfully applied for AHRC cultural engagement funding (£20,000) to help the museum reach new audiences in 2013. Furneaux continues (since 2006) to be lead organiser of Dickens Day, the annual UK meeting of Dickens academics and enthusiasts, which has audiences

Impact case study (REF3b)

of over 150. Through these on-going activities, initiatives arising from Malcolmson's and Furneaux's research will continue to have long term impacts for the CDM, and the broader Dickens community.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

(1) *The Telegraph*: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/7128710/Charles-Dickens-gave-characters-a-secret-queer-side.html>

(2) *The Dickensian*:
<http://www.dickensfellowship.org/sites/default/files/publications/dickensian/Dickensian-volume-106.pdf>

(3) *The Times of India*: http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-01-31/book-mark/28120658_1_renovation-work-charles-dickens-stories

(4) A Tale of Two Cities blog project: <http://dickensataleoftwocities.wordpress.com/>

(5) Cityread London (blog), guest post 1: <http://blog.cityreadlondon.org.uk/2012/04/first-instalment-from-guest-blogger-dr-holly-furneaux-who-is-leading-the-online-reading-group/>

(6) Goodreads, user reviews: <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/11525893-the-life-of-charles-dickens>

(7) Letter of support from Dr Florian Schweizer (Director of the Charles Dickens Museum), reviews, details of public events, blogs and discussion boards see:
<https://swww2.le.ac.uk/departments/english/ref-impact-data/ref-impact-data-page-3>