

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Portsmouth</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature</p>
<p>Title of case study: Victorian Literary Heritage: Promoting Public Engagement with Dickens and Tennyson</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact Focusing on the lives and works of Dickens and Tennyson, this case study demonstrates how a team of literary researchers at the University of Portsmouth has promoted public re-engagement with Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight’s literary heritage. Their research on questions of celebrity and social marginality has been adapted and exploited to interpret and disseminate the region’s cultural capital through public events, websites, and publications. Encouraging a fresh look at Dickens, Tennyson, and Victorian life, the impact of this research has increased public understanding of Victorian issues, and prompted local stakeholders to re-evaluate existing knowledge, policy and commercial practice.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research The research listed below focuses on Victorian literature and the emerging field of Neo-Victorian studies. Each work cited centres on the reassessment of Victorian topics and authors. Adapted and applied to Dickens and Tennyson, this research has facilitated and underpinned the team’s collective investment in revision and reclamation, aimed at changing traditional perceptions of Dickens, Tennyson and Victorian society. The Tennyson research has also unearthed new perspectives that have formed the basis of continuing collaborations with the Julia Margaret Cameron Trust.</p> <p>(i) Patricia Pulham, Reader in Victorian Literature, University of Portsmouth (2004-present): research carried out from 2004-2010. Pulham’s research on the marginalised woman writer Vernon Lee (2008) informed the Dickens strand of the project. Concerned with gender and sexuality and the complex negotiations of identity required in a patriarchal culture, Pulham’s research underpinned the focus on women at the public events arranged to mark the Dickens 2012 bicentenary. In addition, her work on Neo-Victorianism (2010), including tropes of haunting and re-imaginings of the Victorian city shaped the promotion of Dickens’s contemporary relevance.</p> <p>(ii) Elodie Rousselot, Senior Lecturer in English Literature, University of Portsmouth (2006-present): research carried out 2009-present. Rousselot’s monograph <i>Re-Writing Women into Canadian History</i> (2013) focuses on re-appropriations of the Victorian past in contemporary Canadian neo-historical fiction and underpinned the project’s focus on contemporary adaptations of Dickens’s life and works. This focus also informed her co-edited special issue, ‘The Other Dickens’ (<i>Neo-Victorian Studies</i>, 2012). Her article in this collection examined the appropriation of Dickensian economic models in recent discussions of the global financial crisis and her research influenced the decision to screen <i>Scrooge</i>, a film which helped raise awareness of the plight of the marginalised and resulted in a charity donation.</p> <p>(iii) Charlotte Boyce, Senior Lecturer in English Literature, University of Portsmouth (2007-present): research carried out 2007-present. Boyce’s co-authored research on <i>Tennyson’s Celebrity Circle</i> (Tricorn, 2011) and <i>Victorian Celebrity Culture</i> (2013) examines the networks, technologies and media supporting Victorian celebrity, and underpinned the Tennyson strand of the VLH project. Her articles on dramatic reimaginings of Dickens (<i>Neo-Victorian Studies</i>, 2012) and Victorian representations of hunger (<i>Victorian Literature and Culture</i>, 2012) informed the Dickens strand of the project, which focused on contemporary adaptations and appropriations, and emphasised the theme of economic marginalisation in Dickens’s work.</p> <p>(iv) Páraic Finnerty, Senior Lecturer in English Literature, University of Portsmouth (2004-present): research carried out 2004-2011. In co-authoring the Tennyson-related resources with Boyce, Finnerty drew on his monograph (2006) that examined the ways in which literary tourism and notions of fame affected the cultural reception of Shakespeare in nineteenth-century America and</p>

how the American poet Emily Dickinson read and responded to his works. Finnerty's activities were also informed by his work on Tennyson's reception in America (*The Emily Dickinson Journal*, 2011) and Britain (*Victorian Celebrity Culture*, 2013) in the nineteenth century, when this most famous of poets influenced transatlantic conceptions and understandings of cultural heritage and celebrity.

3. References to the research

1. Charlotte Boyce, Páraic Finnerty and Anne-Marie Millim, *Victorian Celebrity Culture and Tennyson's Circle* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): ISBN-13: 978-1137007933. Peer-reviewed. One of its peer-reviewers (Professor Eric Eisner, George Mason University, US) has referred to it as 'A fascinating and valuable contribution to the study of celebrity and fandom in the nineteenth century', a quotation that has been used by Palgrave Macmillan for promotional purposes. REF2 output: 29-CBO-004
2. Charlotte Boyce and Elodie Rousselot, eds., 'The Other Dickens: Neo-Victorian Appropriation and Adaptation', *Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies* 5.2 (2012): ISSN 1757-9481. Peer-reviewed, as indicated on the journal's website: 'All submissions that pass editorial screening and are considered for publication will undergo a rigorous peer review process, on an anonymous basis, by two academic readers' (http://www.neovictorianstudies.com/aims_scope.htm). REF 2 output: 29-CBO-003
3. Páraic Finnerty, *Emily Dickinson's Shakespeare* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006): ISBN-13: 978-1558496705. Peer-reviewed. This has been very well received: in his review, Prof. Steven Gould Axelrod (University of California, Riverside) calls it 'one of the most intensely researched and thought provoking books on Dickinson in recent years' and claims that it 'now stands as the best and most comprehensive study of the topic' (*The Emily Dickinson Journal*, 15.2 (2006)). In an article surveying recent work on 'Whitman and Dickinson', William Pannacker and Paul Crumbley refer to Finnerty's monograph as an 'impressive, extensively researched study' (*American Literary Scholarship*, 2006). Available on request.
4. ---- "Dreamed of your meeting Tennyson in Ticknor and Fields --": A Transatlantic Encounter with Britain's Poet Laureate' (*The Emily Dickinson Journal* 20.1, 2011, 56-77). DOI: [10.1353/edj.2011.0008](https://doi.org/10.1353/edj.2011.0008) ISSN: 1096-858X and ISSN: 1059-6879. Peer-Reviewed. Finnerty's article has been referred to as one of the indicative texts for 'further reading' on the topic of Dickinson's response to the Romantics and Victorians (*Emily Dickinson in Context*, Cambridge 2013).
5. Patricia Pulham, *Haunting and Spectrality in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Possessing the Past* (co-edited with Rosario Arias), (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): ISBN-13: 978-0230205574. Peer-reviewed. This collection has been very well received: in her review of the collection (*Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies* 2:2, Winter 2009), Dr Marie-Luise Kohlke (Swansea University) states that the collection 'sets an important cornerstone for further theoretical work' on the topic, while Dr Maria del Pilar Royo (University of Zaragoza) notes that it 'undoubtedly makes a significant contribution to this field of research' (*Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies*, 44, 2011) REF 2 output: 29-PP-002
6. ----. *Art and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee's Supernatural Tales* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2008): ISBN-13: 978-0754650966. Peer-reviewed. This monograph has been very well received: in her review of the book (*English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 53.2, 2010), Dr Sondeep Kandola (Liverpool John Moores University), calls it a 'powerful and evocative interdisciplinary study', a work that suggests 'new directions' for New Woman studies, and 'a major contribution' to Vernon Lee scholarship; Dr Nicole Fluhr (Southern Connecticut State University), has described the book as 'insightful', 'illuminating' 'persuasive' and 'intriguing' (*Victorian Studies*, 51:4, Summer 2009); and Professor Martha Vicinus (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor), has considered it 'provocative' and 'illuminating' (*Review of English Studies*, October 2008). REF 2 output: 29-PP-001

4. Details of the impact

Dickens

In 2012 Pulham, Boyce and Rousselot adapted their research to exploit the cultural capital of the Dickens bicentenary, expanding the region's awareness of Portsmouth's significance in his life and writings. Drawing on Dickens's work and their own research, they prompted recognition of marginalised groups (both Victorian and contemporary) using accessible publications and websites, as well as a series of public talks and events to promote public engagement:

Pulham (with historian Brad Beaven) used local archives to produce:

- *Dickens and the Victorian City* (2012), a booklet sold in the museum shop and other outlets including Amazon.co.uk.
- An online interactive map of Portsmouth: <http://www.dickens.port.ac.uk/>. Launched in July 2012 (1892 unique visitors from Dec 31 2011 – July 31 2013).

Pulham, Boyce, and Rousselot arranged a series of public events which included:

- 'Literature Café (Dickens talks at a local venue: March, April and May 2012 respectively)
- 'Afterlives: Mrs Dickens in Fact and Fiction' (6 July 2012), an 'in conversation' event with authors Lillian Nayder and Gaynor Arnold [90 attendees]
- A performance of *Dickens' Women* by Miriam Margolyes (8 July 2012), in collaboration with the Portsmouth Grammar School [300 attendees].
- Introductions to a series of Dickens adaptations screened at a local cinema (2 May, 16 May, 13 June, 30 Nov. 2012), in association with the Portsmouth Film Society; final screening: *Scrooge* (1951) held to raise funds for the CRISIS Christmas appeal, resulting in a donation of £96.32 [overall number of attendees at screenings: 187].

These events engaged the public and promoted understanding of important Victorian issues such as patriarchy and poverty. Feedback obtained at the *Dickens' Women* event indicates that the performance encouraged the audience to revisit the writer's work. Comments include: 'Inspired to read more Dickens', 'inspired me to see Dickens' writing in a new light'. Feedback collected at the *Scrooge* screening showed that many audience members had also attended other Dickens events we organised, and showed a similar reconsideration of the author, as the following comments demonstrate: 'I have learnt a lot of things I didn't know about Dickens', 'greater enjoyment of Dickens', 'very inspired' and 'it's made me want to find out more on the Victorian period'.

Tennyson

Exploiting their research on Victorian celebrity culture and its transatlantic reach, Boyce and Finnerty have rebranded Freshwater as a hub of nineteenth-century cultural activity, inhabited by figures such as Tennyson, Julia Margaret Cameron and Lewis Carroll. Boyce and Finnerty collaborated with Farringford House, the Julia Margaret Cameron Trust (JMCT) and Dimbola Lodge Museum, the Tennyson Society and the Local Studies Library, Isle of Wight to promote the region's cultural heritage and produce artefacts to develop regional, national, and international public engagement including:

- *Tennyson's Celebrity Circle* (2011), an accessible guide aimed at a general readership, sold online, at Dimbola Lodge Museum, Freshwater Post Office, the Watts Gallery, Surrey, and the Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln.
- An online multimedia interactive map of Freshwater launched June 2012 (www.tennysonsccelebritycircle.port.ac.uk) (2518 unique visitors from Dec 31 2011 – July 31 2013).

On the basis of their research Boyce and Finnerty were asked to become advisers to the JMCT and the West Wight Partnership, resulting in the following changes and initiatives:

Impact case study (REF3b)

- Consultation on the conversion of their interactive map into a new tourist trail and associated leaflet, sponsored by the West Wight Partnership.
- The Dimbola Lodge café has been renamed 'The Mad Hatter at Julia's Tearoom', exploiting the connection with Lewis Carroll;
- A two-part exhibition, 'The Wonderland of Alice' (2013) has been mounted, aimed at enhancing the museum's appeal to families;
- A board member of the JMCT writes a regular blog in which the impact of Finnerty and Boyce's research has been discussed, and she has published a book inspired by the research: Gail Middleton, *The Freshwater Circle Through the Looking Glass* (Tricorn Books, 2013);
- The celebrity angle has inspired a contemporary exhibition, e.g. 'She Bop-a-Lula' (June-Sept 2013, portraits of contemporary female celebrities);
- Special events such as the 'Celebrity Circle Walk and Tour' (22 June 2013), at which Boyce and Finnerty gave a lecture, have been organised.

Boyce and Finnerty's research has been instrumental in encouraging the region's re-engagement with its Victorian Literary Heritage and has enhanced the area's touristic value. Publicly available resources (such as the booklet, website, and map) have been vital in raising awareness of the Isle of Wight's cultural significance, and in sustaining public involvement. In addition their research has influenced the JMCT's activities, prompting them to expand the focus of Dimbola Lodge Museum's events, helping them to exploit the commercial value of Tennyson's celebrity circle, and to adapt its significance for contemporary visitors.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Website unique visitors for the internet resources related to Dickens and the Victorian City and Tennyson's Celebrity Circle maps.
2. Audience feedback forms for all events (Tennyson & Dickens).
3. Thank you letter from CRISIS confirming the sum collected at Scrooge screening.
4. Letter confirming collaboration with the Portsmouth Film Society.
5. Invitation to give a public lecture on Tennyson and Celebrity at Dimbola Lodge Museum in June 2013, and at the Royal Southern Yacht Club, Hamble in October 2013.
6. Invitation to join a steering group on the future of Dimbola Lodge Museum and to organise a conference to coincide with the bicentenary of Julia Margaret Cameron's birth.
7. Letter from the West Wight Partnership confirming research impact on new initiatives.
8. West Wight Partnership tourist map and leaflet.
9. Letter from the Tennyson Society Chairperson confirming research impact on the society's perceptions of Tennyson's life and work, on their events programme, and on the Chair's own lectures.
10. Link to Gail Middleton book and blog: <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Freshwater-Circle-Through-Looking-Glass/dp/1909660027>;
<http://mrsmiddletonstalesfromthebookrom.blogspot.co.uk/2013/06/more-than-six-impossible-things-before.html>