

Institution: University of Exeter
Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Exeter Centre for Literatures of Identity, Place, and Sustainability: Informing and Influencing Public Debates on Regional and National Identity
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>As long-running debates on what it means to be British, English, Scottish or Cornish grow more urgent, researchers at the University of Exeter have engaged different publics in new perspectives on identity and citizenship, encouraging them to reconsider their own identities in the context of regional and national cultural heritage. This research has influenced media narratives, public policy debate, and a diverse range of discussions relating to regional or national identity. Its main impacts have been to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inform and influence policy debate and practice • inform the content of associations between people and groups to illuminate and challenge cultural values • extend the range of evidence to enhance public understanding of major social issues
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The environmental humanities are a key research theme for Exeter English, building on the interdisciplinary strengths of its second campus in Penryn: an Environment and Sustainability Institute has recently been opened at Penryn, part-funded by £23m from the European Regional Development Fund, and a Centre for Environmental Arts and Humanities (CEAH) has been established in tandem. English's work in the area of Environmental Humanities is channelled through Exeter Centre for Literatures of Identity, Place, and Sustainability (ECLIPSE), which was founded in 2008 and is directed by Groom. With a mission to work with CEAH in contributing to a new public discourse of 'cultural environmentalism', one main strand of ECLIPSE's research has been the relationship of narrative and symbolic discourses of myth, memory, and history to particular environments, and how those discourses represent notions of identity and place in different ways. This latter strand of the Centre's research has been led by Nick Groom and Marion Gibson.</p> <p>Groom, the Director of ECLIPSE since its foundation, was Lecturer in English at Exeter from 1992-2000 and then returned as Professor of English based at the Penryn campus in 2007. His extensive, well-known work on authenticity and forgery in Romantic and later literature, which was supported by the Leverhulme Trust, evolved into an interest in the repeated reinventions of English and British identities in literary and historical forgeries (3.1; 3.7). He continues to pursue the relationship between Romantic writers and regional identity in on-going research (3.2). His wider interest in questions of identity and place in the British Isles led to a 2006 monograph on the Union Jack and subsequent work which offers more general theoretical reflection on the relationship between flags and nationhood (3.3). Groom used the example of flags, in particular the Union Jack, to explore how the cultural heritage of a symbol determines ideas of national identity, controversially arguing in the case of the Union Jack that a flag has wrongly been allowed to become a sign of conflict rather than of cohesion. Within ECLIPSE sits the Atlantic Archipelagos Research Project, a partnership led by Groom with the National University of Ireland's Moore Institute and also involving the Solway Centre for Environment and Culture, University of Glasgow, and the Willson Center, University of Georgia, USA. The Project has organized, with British Academy support, academic and public events in England and Ireland exploring how old ideas of the British Isles relate to regional identities after devolution, using Ireland's own experience of partition and self-rule as a comparison (3.8). Groom has subsequently developed a further environmental perspective on questions of British regional identities by exploring their relationship with climate in his new monograph <i>The Seasons</i> (3.4).</p>

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Gibson, appointed as Lecturer in English at the University of Exeter in 1999 and currently Associate Professor at the Penryn campus and deputy Director of ECLIPSE, has published a series of books exploring how stories of supernatural events, specifically witchcraft, are shaped by local, regional and national contexts. This research developed into a specific interest in literary and oral narratives of Cornish identity as they have been influenced by 'Celtic' ideas of myth and mysticism. With a colleague in the Institute of Cornish Studies at Penryn, Gibson was awarded in 2008 a major AHRC grant for a three-year project investigating how Cornwall's mythologized past influences perceptions of Cornish identity as 'Celtic' and 'un-English' (3.9). Such perceptions are accentuated both to attract tourists and to fuel nationalistic sentiment. The project has resulted in a collection of fifteen essays on the cultural heritage of Celtic identity and Gibson's monograph on representations of the pagan past in literature, film, and popular culture (3.5; 3.6).

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

Evidence of the quality of the research: peer-reviewed collections of essays and monographs with major publishers, essays in influential collections with major publishers, and peer-reviewed grant awards from major external funding bodies.

1. **Groom**, *The Making of Percy's 'Reliques'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
 2. **Groom**, "AI Under the Wyllowe Tree": Chatterton and the Ecology of the West Country', in *Romanticism and the West Country*, ed. Nicholas Roe (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), pp. 37-61.
 3. **Groom**, 'Union Jacks and Union Jills', in *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*, ed. Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Richard Jenkins (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 68-87.
 4. **Groom**, *The Seasons: An Elegy for the Passing of the Year* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013).
 5. **Gibson**, GH Tregidga, SJ Trower (eds.), *Mysticism, Myth and Celtic Identity* (London: Routledge, 2012).
 6. **Gibson**, *Imagining the Pagan Past* (London: Routledge, 2013).
- Grants:
7. **Groom**, Leverhulme Fellowship (10.5K), 1998-9, to work on the cultural history of authenticity.
 8. **Groom**, British Academy conference grant (£7.5k), 2011, for 'Atlantic Archipelagos Research Project case study: Perspectives on Tim Robinson'.
 9. **Gibson**, with G. Tregidga (CI), AHRC research grant (£252k), 2008-11, for 'Mysticism, Myth, and "Celtic" Nationalism: A Case Study of Cornwall'.

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

Increased immigration, the rising influence of far-right groups, the success of UKIP in local elections, Cornish nationalism, and the forthcoming Scottish Independence Referendum have thrust questions about Britishness to the forefront of public discourse. Research at ECLIPSE has engaged different publics in the cultural and historical contexts of these highly charged social and political debates.

Informing and influencing policy debate and practice

Groom's research on the symbolism of flags has informed discussions about national identity in the British media and the work of political pressure groups. His published papers led to an invitation to speak at a Fabian Society seminar on citizenship at the 2008 Labour Party Conference and the TUC's Equality Summit in the same year. The significance of Groom's work is evident in its

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citation in the successful campaign to allow the permanent flying of the Union Jack over the Houses of Parliament on the grounds that the flag was a vital component of British cultural heritage. The 2010 decision marked an end to a 150-year rule that the flag only flies when Parliament is sitting. The MP who chaired Parliament's All Party Flags and Heraldry Committee, and who led a nine-campaign on the issue, declared that 'Prof. Groom's research and publications have contributed to the campaign to gain formal recognition for the national flag . . . (Groom) has played a noteworthy role in this process' (5.1). The President of the Flag Institute, an advisor to the All Party Flags and Heraldry Committee, noted that Groom 'has contributed significantly to the better understanding of what a national flag means to people and its unique importance to the nation' (5.2).

Informing the content of associations between people and groups to illuminate and challenge cultural values; extending the range of evidence to enhance public understanding of major social issues

The 'Mysticism, Myth, and "Celtic" Nationalism' project resulted in a number of events which engaged publics at both regional and national level with issues of Cornish heritage and identity. **Gibson** organized a public exhibition on myth and the supernatural in Cornish culture in 2010 in collaboration with regional artists, photographers, and cultural industries. The exhibition was initially held at the University's Penryn campus and then moved to Cornwall Council's Cornish Centre in Redruth, accompanied by an oral history archive of 60 interviews with locals and tourists. One of the 20 comments in the visitor's book at Penryn commended the 'clear link between [public] lectures and exhibition'. A Cornish independent publisher reported that the exhibition 'felt like an appropriate and happy meeting between the University and a local cultural industry' (5.3). The event drew national media interest and Gibson was interviewed about Cornish ghost stories in popular culture on BBC Radio Five Live 'Drive', BBC1 Spotlight, and BBC Radio Cornwall. Her research subsequently led to appearances as an academic expert in Tony Robinson's 2011 Channel 4 series about supernatural belief in Britain, *Gods and Monsters*, including overseeing what the producer calls a 'key episode' in the series involving recreation of an exorcism, and on Radio 4's 'Open Book' feature on 'Literary Landscapes - Cornwall' (18 August 2013) (5.4).

Groom has been a prominent commentator on issues of national identity in diverse forms of regional, national, and international media. The reach of his research is indicated by the fact that his 5000-word podcast, 'Conflict and Cohesion in Britain, 2005-10', broadcast on Scholarcast, a digital humanities project run by University College Dublin, was downloaded on average 100 times a day in June 2011 by visitors from around the world (5.5). He has written on the topic of identity for national newspapers and magazines including *The Sunday Times*, *The Sun*, *Total Politics*, and *Prospect* (5.6). He has been interviewed by the BBC about Britishness in relation to a range of topics, including the Olympics on Radio 4's 'Today' programme (4 June 2012), when he argued that the Union Jack is 'a symbol of inclusivity and diversity' and that it is 'the people's flag' (5.7). Groom was also a key academic contributor to BBC 4's *Citizen Smith* (2010), about the search for a modern-day definition of English nationality. An example of the diversity of these media contributions is an interview in *The Guardian* discussing the use of the Union Jack in fashion (5.8). During the Jubilee, Groom provided expert testimony to international media outlets, including CNN and France's TF1 (5.9). These media contributions have influenced online debate among an extraordinarily wide range of interest groups: from lobbyists arguing for and against Scottish independence, to gay rights activists observing that the BNP's emblem was designed by a homosexual king, to members of the Scout Movement stressing the cultural importance of the St George flag. Groom's publications are often cited as authoritative sources to settle disagreements (5.10). The Wikipedia entry for 'the Union Flag' refers readers to Groom's 2007 essay 'Union Jacks and Union Jills'.

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

1. Email from Chair of the Parliamentary All Party Flags and Heraldry Committee (28 Jul 2011).

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2. Email from the President of the Flag Institute and Advisor to the All Party Flags and Heraldry Committee (1 July 2011).
3. Email from head of Fal Publications, Cornwall (29 June 2011).
4. Corroboration can be obtained from the producer / director of *Tony Robinson: Gods and Monsters*.
5. Emails from the academic director of Scholarcast (21 June 2011; 22 Aug 2011).
6. 'The UK Shouldn't Change its Flag', *Prospectmagazine.co.uk*. Prospect Magazine, 25 Jan 2012 <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/the-uk-shouldn%E2%80%99t-change-its-flag-scotland-independence-union-flag-jack-saltire/> (accessed 8 Nov. 2013).
7. Interview. 'Today', BBC Radio 4, 4 June 2012. http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9725000/9725973.stm (accessed 8 Nov. 2013).
8. 'How the Union Flag went Posh', *Guardian.co.uk*. *The Guardian*, 8 July 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2009/oct/28/union-flag-designs> (accessed 8 Nov. 2013).
9. 'Union Jack Brings Boom for British Business'. *cnn.com*. CNN, 6 June 2012. <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/06/01/business/union-jack-business-boom/index.html> (accessed 8 Nov. 2013).
10. See e.g. 'Britain's Flag was Introduced by a Gay or Bisexual King', *greatersurbiton.wordpress.com*. Greater Surbiton, September, 2010. Web. 21 June 2012. <http://greatersurbiton.wordpress.com/category/bnp/> (accessed 8 Nov. 2013).