

Institution: University of Kent
Unit of Assessment: D30 History
Title of case study: Public understandings of the history of Christmas
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study relates to cultural life. Mark Connelly's research into the development of the modern Christmas has been accessed by a wide range of users for an equally wide range of purposes. Of particular importance are his contributions to the heritage sector and media designed to enhance, nuance and challenge public understandings of Christmas. This has been achieved through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museum/gallery exhibitions, online-catalogues, and staff development as a consultant for the Geffrye Museum's annual 'Christmas Past' exhibition (2010) and a podcast for the National Gallery, London (2010) • Articles in popular, large-circulation history magazines: <i>BBC History</i>; <i>BBC Knowledge</i> (aimed at US and Far East market); <i>BBC Who Do You Think You Are?</i> • Television and radio programmes. Examples include acting as script consultant for <i>Toys That Made Christmas</i> (BBC2 2011) and <i>Ade's Christmas Crackers</i> (ITV1 2012) <p>During Connelly's association with the Geffrye Museum, total visitor numbers have exceeded 35,000 and the online catalogue entries have received over 550,000 hits. Viewing and listening figures for the radio and television broadcasts totalled more than 3.5 million, and the total circulation of the magazines was over 110,000. Positive reviews and responses to these outputs have indicated the significance of the impact.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The research (conducted 1996-2010) by Connelly (Lecturer, 1999; Senior Lecturer 2001; Reader 2005; Professor 2008 -) provided the first extensive survey of the development of Christmas in Britain, particularly England, and its export to the British Empire from c. 1780. It was based on the exploration of a wide-range of sources including published documents, sheet music, newspapers, journals, trade journals, magazines, novels, shopping guides and advertisements, pantomime scripts and playbills, films, cinema, television and radio programmes. Archives included British Library and British Newspaper Library, British Film Institute, BBC, Royal Commonwealth Society, English Folk Dance and Song Society, Victoria and Albert Museum, National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery, Selfridges and the John Lewis Partnership.</p> <p>The key findings were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the emphasis on Christmas as an invented tradition often missed the subtlety of the process particularly during the Victorian period. The obsessive historical research into the supposedly ancient roots of Christmas undertaken by many Victorian scholars could not be dismissed as simply inventing a past, as this failed to appreciate the emotional and intellectual attachment to the methods of historical validation undertaken by the champions of Christmas. The emphasis on the invented tradition approach also tended to underplay the degree of continuity in the observation of Christmas carried over from the eighteenth century. • That Christmas came to be understood as a peculiarly English, as opposed to British, cultural phenomenon based on perceptions of an underpinning Anglo-Saxon mentality. • That the celebration of Christmas played a key role in the 'English musical renaissance' which commenced in the late nineteenth century and that the search for the folk carol was highly influential on figures such as Cecil Sharp, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst. • That the rise of department store culture and a more complex consumer society from the late 1860s was extremely important in the development of Christmas as it helped promote the concept of lavish spending, ritualised the concept of Christmas shopping, and turned the art of Christmas window dressing into a highly significant platform for the delivery of a range of historical and patriotic messages well beyond simple commercial advertisement.

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- That Christmas became a highly effective form of social bonding for the British Empire. It was used to promote the concept of one, huge, inter-dependent family unit which concentrated its thoughts on shared values on a particular day each year.
- That, in the twentieth century, modern technology in the form of broadcasting and film enhanced the profile of Christmas and in particular added great weight to the idea that it was a peculiarly Anglo-Saxon phenomenon, a concept which found equal favour in the USA. This was taken up by Hollywood and resulted in a stream of highly successful films, which have been given an enduring afterlife through television (including video/DVD formats), that often promote the concept of a festival dominated by Anglo-Saxon traditions.

The research was published in monographs (1999 [new edition, 2012]; 2000) and three articles in wide-circulation popular magazines and as notes on the Geffrye Museum's 'Search the Catalogue' webpage sections, which form examples of impact in their own right. (See section 4 below for details.)

Of key interest to users outside academia has been the issue of challenging popular conceptions of Christmas through greater contextualisation and the exploration of continuities/discontinuities in the domestic celebration of the festival.

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

1. Mark Connelly, *Christmas: a social history* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999; paperback edition with new introduction, 2012)
2. Mark Connelly (ed.), *Christmas at the movies: representations of Christmas in American, British and European Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000)
3. Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the memory of the Second World War* (London: Pearson/Longman, 2004) [For perceptions of wartime Christmases, especially that of 1940 as seen through the film, *Christmas under Fire*]
4. Mark Connelly, *Steady the Buffs! A regiment, a region and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) [For perceptions of the 1914 Christmas Truce]

The influence of the work on subsequent historians of Christmas can be seen in works such as Neil Armstrong, 'England and German Christmas Festlichkeit c. 1800 – 1914', *German History*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2008, pp. 486 – 503. It was also reviewed in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1, Autumn 2001, pp. 124-126.

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

The widespread interest in the history of Christmas and its observation has led many agencies (including organisations such as BBC radio and television, ITV, Channel 4, ARTE, English Heritage, *The Guardian*, and [Universal Studios UK](#)) to Connelly's research, and their reliance on it reveals its significance as a primary point of reference. The body of work has resulted in a large and diverse range of requests for assistance from an equally broad range of organisations and its impact commenced before the start date of the current census (consultant and participant in BBC documentaries in 2003 and 2007) and has continued.

Impact activitiesMuseum/Gallery collaborationsConsultancy and staff training work with the Geffrye Museum, London

The museum adopted the theme of cross-cultural influences in domestic culture ('Stories of the World: London') for its role in the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. To assist with this Connelly was appointed consultant in March 2010 to advise on the Germanic influence on the English Christmas, and on the re-cataloguing and classifying of Christmas items for the 'Search the Collections' pages of its website. Geffrye Museum curator, Alexandra Goddard, stated: 'Mark's interest in the collections and profound expertise in the social and economic history of that period meant that he immediately sprang to mind as a suitable expert upon whom to call.' [5.1] To enhance the visitor experience to the museum's annual Christmas Past exhibition and staff familiarity with material and context, Connelly was engaged to provide a staff training session, which was conducted on Wednesday 17 November 2010 in the presence of the museum's director and twenty-seven staff. His contribution was designed to help shape the way museum

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guides enhance the visitor experience.

National Gallery, London

In December 2010 the National Gallery recorded Connelly for a [podcast](#) on the extravagant nature of shop window dressing to promote Christmas. Connelly was recorded at Fortnum and Mason's Piccadilly store analysing its Christmas display and contextualising it by discussing the history of this particular form of advertising.

Examples of broadcast media impact

ARTE *La Père Noël et ses ancêtres*, broadcast 25 December 2011

The reach of Connelly's work was revealed when he was contacted by the Franco-German arts channel, ARTE, for expert input on a documentary exploring the changing representation of Father Christmas. Connelly was interviewed for the production which was broadcast on ARTE on 25 December 2011. The documentary explored differing European traditions and how they developed in a colonial context.

BBC2 *The Toys That Made Christmas*, broadcast 25 December 2011 (repeated 27 December 2011; 22 December 2012; 26 December 2012)

Connelly was appointed as consultant to the research team and advised on themes to be investigated as well as appearing as a 'talking head'.

ITV1, *Ade's Christmas Crackers*, broadcast 23 December 2012

Connelly was approached by the executive producer, Jeremy Phillips, to advise on the planned content of the programme and act as Script Consultant. The programme explored the changing nature of festive television offerings.

BBC Radio 4Extra, *4 O'Clock Show*, broadcast 25 December 2012

Connelly was commissioned to provide a short feature on the changing nature of Christmas celebrations in Britain. He provided an initial outline for the producer suggesting themes for exploration. Connelly then wrote the script and presented it.

Popular history publications

Connelly's relationship with the BBC was further strengthened through invitations to contribute articles on aspects of the history of Christmas for various BBC magazines. Connelly discussed the nature of the topics with each editor, developed the main themes, suggested material for the additional information boxes, as well as identifying suitable illustrations and pieces of evidence. In the case of 'Shop till you drop', Connelly was also recorded for a supporting [podcast](#). Three pieces were written (details below) based upon material collected for the original works and fresh primary source research in order to tailor the articles to the precise needs of each title.

'Shop till you drop: Christmas and Consumerism', *BBC History Magazine*, Vol. 9, No. 12, December 2008, pp. 31-35.

'Ghosts of Christmas Past', *BBC Knowledge Magazine*, November-December 2009, pp. 36-43 (BBC Worldwide Production aimed mainly at US and Far East market).

'Season of Goodwill', *BBC Who Do You Think You Are Magazine*, Issue No. 29, December 2009, pp. 68-73.

Reach

The Geffrye Museum's 'Search the Collections' webpage received 80,000 page views between February 2011 and February 2012. [5.1] The highlight of the museum's calendar is its annual 'Christmas Past' exhibition which illustrates domestic Christmas rituals since 1600, and is responsible for a significant spike in visitor numbers each year. ('Media interest in the Christmas Past exhibition was very high', Annual Report, 2011-12). [5.2] Visitor numbers to the exhibition: 2010, 12,392; 2011, 14,657; 2012, 13,715. [5.3]

Broadcast media: viewing figures for *The Toys That Made Christmas*, 1.53 million [5.7]; *Ade's Christmas Crackers*, 2.6 million [5.8]; listening figures for *4 O'Clock Show*, approx. 5,321 [5.9]

Magazine circulation figures: *BBC History Magazine*: (Circulation July-December 2008: 64,712) [5.10]

BBC Knowledge Magazine (Far East circulation 2009: 40,000) [5.10]

BBC Who Do You Think You Are Magazine (Circulation July-December 2009: 20,226) [5.10]

Significance

Alexandra Goddard, Assistant Keeper (Interpretations and Exhibitions) at the Geffrye Museum, stated that Connelly's 'expertise has been invaluable to us', and that the staff training session 'helped considerably in briefing new staff, and expanding and refreshing the knowledge of longer-serving members, contributing to their continuing professional development'. She stated that Connelly had applied his academic knowledge 'to material culture and historic objects...in a way which enhances and enriches the Geffrye's understanding of its collections and its ability to communicate that to the general public.' [5.1] Media comments on the exhibitions from 2010-12 included: 'It wouldn't be Christmas without the Geffrye's "Christmas Past"', *Time Out* magazine; 'For some Londoners, visiting the annual Christmas Past exhibition at the Geffrye Museum is as much a part of Christmas as carol singing and scoffing mince pies', *Daily Telegraph*. [5.4; 5.5] Visitor comments include: 'an absolute delight and not to be missed if you love Christmas traditions'; 'Their annual Christmas past exhibition is a delight'; 'Take your time, absorb each room, read the story cards and imagine the scene as though the people have just popped out for a moment. It becomes rather moving really'. [5.6]

The 'Ideas Man' blog referred to *The Toys That Made Christmas* as a programme 'examining how toys have influenced gift-giving and our lives in general. The show was made by the talented BBC team'. [5.11] *Radio Times* selected *Ade's Christmas Crackers* among its pick of the day. [5.12] Jeremy Phillips, the Executive Producer, stated that Connelly played an 'important' role in the research for the programme and was 'crucial to...the accuracy of the historical aspects of the programme'. He stated that Connelly provided the production team with 'insights into the mindset of the British nation and guided us through the festive archives. He helped us understand viewers' attitudes to Christmas, what its origins are and why we celebrate it in the way we do.' [5.8]

Connelly has, therefore, contributed to a range of outputs that have enhanced understandings of a high profile aspect of modern British life to an equally wide range of people.

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

Information relating to Connelly's involvement with the Christmas Past exhibition at the Geffrye Museum:

1. Statement from Alexandra Goddard, Geffrye Museum, describing Connelly's role in shaping the Christmas Past exhibition and delivering staff training, March 2013
2. The Geffrye Museum [Annual Report](#) March 2012
3. [Museum and Gallery Visit Figures, 2004-2012/13](#), published in '[English museum and gallery visitors – which place was most popular in 2012?](#)', *The Guardian Datablog*, 1 October 2012
4. '[Christmas Past 2011](#)', *Time Out*, 11 October 2011
5. John O' Ceallaigh, '[This week's best things to do in London, from Christmas Past to Santacon](#)', *The Telegraph*, 10 December 2012
6. Reviews from visitors to the museum on the Tripadvisor website, [November 2011](#), [June 2012](#), [December 2012](#)

Information relating to broadcast media and magazines:

7. '[EastEnders beats Downton Abbey in Christmas ratings clash](#)', *Broadcast*, 26 December 2011
8. Email from Jeremy Philips, Producer of *Ade's Christmas Crackers*, November 2013
9. Email regarding 4 O'Clock Show listening figures from Steven George, BBC, October 2013
10. Figures on magazine circulation can be found on the [BBC](#) and [Regent Media](#) websites.
11. '[BBC The Toys That Made Christmas](#)', *Ideas Man*, c. December 2011
12. [Radio Times](#), 22 December 2012 - 4 January 2013