

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> Oxford Brookes University
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 29 - English Language and Literature
<b>Title of case study:</b> Henry VIII's Court and its Spatial Politics: Using drama to enhance visitor experience and inform policy at Hampton Court Palace
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The impact detailed here demonstrates how, through his work with Historic Royal Palaces and Goat and Monkey and Schtanhaus theatre companies, Professor Tom Betteridge has helped to inform and influence the relationship between historical, literary and performance-based research with visitor experience at a major heritage site. Through the research-led collaboration between Oxford Brookes and Edinburgh Universities, Betteridge has enhanced public interaction with Tudor dramatic culture, developed visitors' imaginative appreciation of Tudor cultural history and produced new modes of visitor and audience engagement. This work has enriched visitor numbers at Hampton Court Palace and also contributed to Historic Royal Palaces' research policies and public engagement strategy.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Professor Thomas Betteridge's (Professor of Early Modern English Literature and Drama, Oxford Brookes University 2007 -2013) research expertise in English Reformation literature has provided vital insights for the projects detailed here, in particular in the field of English Reformation drama (especially the dramatist John Heywood),<sup>1</sup> the Tudor court<sup>2</sup> and performance as research.<sup>3,5,6</sup> His research has provided crucial insights which underpin the investigation-through-performance of Henry VIII's court and its spatial politics in three collaborative undertakings.</p> <p>The first collaborative undertaking was the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded project 'Henrician Court Drama' (2007)<sup>3</sup> which produced original research on the use of performance in a heritage context using principally Heywood's <i>The Play of the Weather</i>, a neglected but highly significant text in relation to the Henrician Reformation. It was almost certainly produced and performed at Henry VIII's court in the winter of 1532/33. Betteridge's research on religious debates in the English Reformation informed the understanding of the key religious context of Heywood's drama.<sup>4</sup> 'Henrician Court Drama' used a small cast to perform key scenes from the play in alternative ways, addressing the potential for either subversion or promotion of Henrician royal authority through different performance styles, modes of audience interaction and uses of the performance space. The research insights from this project informed the basis for further AHRC-funding for a second collaborative undertaking, 'Staging the Henrician Court', a full production of <i>The Play of the Weather</i> at Hampton Court Palace.</p> <p>'Staging the Henrician Court' (2008)<sup>5</sup> produced the first performance of a Henrician interlude in the Great Hall and was used by Historic Royal Palaces to pilot the use of performance research as part of their curatorial and interpretative work. The project was an interdisciplinary collaboration between Betteridge, Professor Greg Walker (Edinburgh University), Historic Royal Palaces (the charity that manages Hampton Court), and employed a postdoctoral research assistant (Dr Eleanor Rycroft) and a Research Community Developer (Dr Dan Goren) who were both based at Oxford Brookes University. Research outcomes generated through 'Henrician Court Drama', in particular those relating to the management of court space through drama, were tested in performance. Rehearsals for the <i>Play of the Weather</i> were made part of the visitor experience at Hampton Court Palace; signage and guides' commentary pointed out that such performances were part of the cultural life of the royal palace in order to enhance visitors' appreciation and understanding of Henrician court culture and its material heritage. Further research by all collaborators was published on the project website: <a href="https://stagingthehenriciancourt.brookes.ac.uk/">https://stagingthehenriciancourt.brookes.ac.uk/</a></p> <p>Betteridge's work on Tudor drama, and in particular John Heywood, formed the backbone of the third undertaking, a Wellcome Trust funded research project, 'Medicine, Birth and Death at the Tudor Court', (2009),<sup>6</sup> in collaboration with Greg Walker, the leading international expert on Henrician Literature. The research from 'Medicine, Birth and Death at the Tudor Court' underpinned Goat and Monkey's immersive drama production, <i>A Little Neck</i>, which was staged at Hampton Court Palace in 2009. <i>A Little Neck</i> was an innovative theatrical production which ran for three weeks in September 2009. It demonstrated the potential for immersive and original drama</p>

simultaneously to create new knowledge on how Hampton Court worked as a Tudor palace and innovate in terms of public engagement. *A Little Neck* took place throughout the Tudor part of Hampton Court Palace. After the opening scene the audience was divided into four groups following specific Tudor characters including Dr William Butts. Drawing on original history of medicine research the production staged the miasma of medical rumours and misogynistic fantasies that surrounded the fall of Anne Boleyn. This performance-as-research undertaking produced specific understandings about the experiential politics of women's bodies within the physical and ideological spaces of the Tudor Court.

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

1. 'John Heywood and Court Drama', in *The Oxford Handbook to Tudor literature, 1485 – 1603*, ed Cathy Shrank. Mike Pincombe, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp.170-86, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199205882.013.0011, ISBN 9780199205882.
2. 'The Tudor Court: Dust and Desire' in *Tudor Court Culture*, ed. Tom Betteridge and Anna Riehl, Susquehanna University Press, 2010, pp.59-74 ISBN 1575911183.
3. AH/E002323/1 'Henrician Court Drama', Arts & Humanities Research Council, Principal Investigator: Thomas Betteridge, £43,567, 2007. <http://gtr.rcuk.ac.uk/project/87663FA8-ECC1-4C85-B30A-5C498A8D427A> Final grant report available from Oxford Brookes University Research Support Office on request.
4. 'William Tyndale and Religious Debate', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40.3 (Fall 2010), 439-461. DOI 10.1215/10829636-2010-002
5. AH/F018290/1 'Staging the Henrician Court', Arts & Humanities Research Council, Principal Investigator: Thomas Betteridge, £382,288, 2008 - 2011. <http://gtr.rcuk.ac.uk/project/0D894244-D3E6-4400-A0EB-36A409D90EA3> Final grant report available from Oxford Brookes University Research Support Office on request.
6. 'Medicine, Birth and Death at the Tudor Court', Wellcome Trust Public Engagement project, Principal Applicant: Thomas Betteridge, £59,400, 2009. [http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/stellent/groups/corporatesite/@msh\\_publishing\\_group/documents/web\\_document/WTVM051825.pdf](http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/stellent/groups/corporatesite/@msh_publishing_group/documents/web_document/WTVM051825.pdf) Final grant report available from Oxford Brookes University Research Support Office on request.

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

The application of historical, literary and performance research initiated by 'Henrician Court Drama' has led to both cultural life and practice benefits. This is evidenced through the improved visitor experience and visitor numbers at Hampton Court Palace, as well as the contribution to Historic Research Palaces' research policies and public engagement strategy.

'Staging the Henrician Court' and 'Medicine, Birth and Death at the Tudor Court' (through *A Little Neck*) have had a lasting impact on the practices of Historic Royal Palaces, who benefited through collaboration in research-led performances that both embodied research and piloted new modes of audience and visitor engagement through performance.<sup>7,8</sup> Through the public rehearsals, curators gained insights into how interpretative staff might inform their own research practice, and how their work might both be informed by and enable performance research. Historic Royal Palaces' commitment to the projects was reflected by their in-kind contribution of £104,441 to 'Staging the Henrician Court'.

The Chief Executive of Historic Royal Palaces comments that, "'Staging the Henrician Court' had an important impact upon Historic Royal Palaces' research into the Great Hall at Hampton Court Palace and more generally the court of Henry VIII. Within Historic Royal Palaces it demonstrated the value of performance as research as a methodology for investigating public spaces, particularly where there are limited textual and archival records."<sup>7</sup> He identifies three distinct areas of impact arising from 'Staging the Henrician Court' 'research, research management and visitor experience'

## Impact case study (REF3b)

and states that 'it is no exaggeration to say that *Staging the Henrician Court* has had a pivotal role in helping to motivate and inform H[istoric] R[oyal] P[alaces]'s development of a New Research Strategy'.<sup>7</sup>

Betteridge has informed and influenced Historic Royal Palaces' policies through an improved understanding of the relationship between research and visitor experience. Prior to 'Staging the Henrician Court', Historic Royal Palaces felt that engaging in large scale research projects in public space would be detrimental to the visitor experience; however the project demonstrated that this was not the case, in fact day visitors responded positively to public rehearsals. Furthermore, subsequent projects within Historic Royal Palaces have adopted the research and public engagement strategy of 'Staging the Henrician Court/A Little Neck' e.g. 'The Rover', by Aphra Behn, 2012 for which Betteridge was dramaturge. Following the success of 'Staging the Henrician Court' Betteridge (with Rawlinson) produced a strategy paper for the Historic Royal Palaces' board, 'Theatre and the Performance of History at Historic Royal Palaces'. Historic Royal Palaces are now applying for Independent Research Organization status.

Betteridge's status as an international expert in the field of Tudor studies was reflected in 2009 when he became joint chair of the research advisory panel established by Historic Royal Palaces to provide support and advice on the representation of Hampton Court Palace for the commemoration of the succession of Henry VIII. The research advisory panel had a key role in helping develop new visitor's attractions, in particular the restoration of the Henry's council chamber and the decision to focus the interpretative offering on the wedding of Katherine Parr. The Research Advisory Panel also had an important role in staging a major international conference on Henry VIII at Hampton Court Palace and in the design of a series of public lectures given at Hampton Court Palace.<sup>9</sup>

Audiences of 140 Historic Royal Palace professionals and public attended the productions of *The Play of the Weather* in The Great Hall during 2009/2010. The total audience for *A Little Neck* was 2,100 and was sold out for its entire run. Historic Royal Palace's target for increased visitor numbers in 2009 was 50,000 (10%) and the actual increase was 115,287 (43%).<sup>7</sup> The project's impact has been further extended via successful transfer into other media, including films of the performances on the project website,<sup>8</sup> interviews with researchers and participants, and a wiki.

AHRC Assessors of 'Staging the Henrician Court' noted that these additional resources 'give [the project] lasting value as a teaching and research tool...I am not aware of any other similar academic website that currently offers this kind of interactivity' and 'The website and wiki will be the main lasting outcome. Websites with a performance element embedded are rare, so this is an innovative suggestion which could set a standard for comparable projects in future.'<sup>15</sup> The project is highlighted in the AHRC's Summer 2009 newsletter,<sup>12</sup> and offered in the AHRC's Annual Report and Accounts for 2010-11 as a case study of good practice in 'Supporting the Cultural Sector'<sup>10</sup> and in the Research Councils UK publication *What's in it for Me?: the Benefits of Public Engagement for Researchers*.<sup>14</sup>

Through the historical, literary and performance research outlined in this case study Historic Royal Palaces are better informed to understand the court of Henry VIII and its spatial politics. Furthermore, this research-led approach has demonstrated the increasing value of interpretive practices and performance research to the policies and strategies of major heritage sites.

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

7. Corroborative statement author 1. Letter from Chief Executive, Historic Royal Palaces.
8. <https://stagingthehenriciancourt.brookes.ac.uk/>
9. <http://www.hrp.org.uk/NewsAndMedia/hcpresources/TheHenryVIIItalks>
10. AHRC Annual Report and Accounts, 2010-11, p.10. <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/Publications/Documents/Annual-Report-2010-11.pdf>

11. <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/case-studies/staging-henrician-court>
12. Henry VIII at Hampton Court : <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/News-and-Events/Publications/Publications-archive/Documents/Podium/Podium-12-Summer-2009.pdf>
13. 'A Little Neck: Staging Immersive theatre at Hampton Court Palace'  
[http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/stellent/groups/corporatesite/@msh\\_publishing\\_group/documents/web\\_document/wtvm056126.pdf](http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/stellent/groups/corporatesite/@msh_publishing_group/documents/web_document/wtvm056126.pdf)
14. *What's in it for Me?: the Benefits of Public Engagement for Researchers* (RCUK, 2010), p.22 <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/scisoc/RCUKBenefitsofPE.pdf>