

Institution: King's College London
Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Strandlines: Building Community on the Strand
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Strandlines was designed to create a community, digital and real, for an area of central London (the Strand) where there was none. Using life writing to bring together local residents, workers, students and visitors, Strandlines has provided a website, www.strandlines.org, and activities by which people explore the meaning of place, discover its histories and exchange experiences and impressions locally, nationally and internationally. Strandlines has brought together academics, the homeless, the elderly, low income residents, local people, archivists, writers, artists and the public to foster community through a common interest in their locality, and to understand better its significance for the world.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Strandlines developed out of Professor Clare Brant's interest in the meaning of urban encounters in the eighteenth century. Brant has worked at King's since 1991. In 2007, she published an edition of John Gay's poem <i>Trivia</i> (1716) alongside an edited collection of essays on the poem which took for their theme 'walking the streets of 18th-century London' (3.1). Much of Gay's poem takes place on or near the Strand. Brant wondered what form Gay's enterprise would take were he to embark upon it today. This led her to consider not only how the area had changed physically but also how the very idea of community had been transformed in the intervening period. The Strand had long been marked by acute social inequality but the pattern of that inequality had changed enormously over time. She invited Professor David Green of King's Geography Department, an expert on the history of the urban poor of London (3.2), to help answer these questions. Green has been at King's since 1984. The third major research contribution to Strandlines was made by Dr Hope Wolf, a postdoctoral research fellow based in the department. Wolf's PhD (2010), which was researched and written at King's, was a study of an archive of memories of the First World War collected for the BBC television series, <i>The Great War</i>, first broadcast in 1964 (3.3). In the course of writing her thesis, Wolf was struck by the centrality of place in these memories. In her PhD, Wolf used this testimony to articulate a theoretical distinction between life writing and oral history which was to prove critical to Strandlines: essentially, oral history aims to establish an archive, while life writing is more experimental, gives greater scope to immediacy, and allows for collective practice in the presentation of social experience. This distinction was developed further in an article that appeared in an international peer reviewed journal (3.4).</p> <p>During the academic year, 2010-11, Brant applied for and received £100,000 in funding from JISC to create a digital community of the Strand today. The application was made with Green, King's College Archives and the Department of Digital Humanities at King's, and with external partners Age UK, The Connection at St Martin-in-the-Fields (a charity for homeless people) and the Westminster Archives. Wolf became full-time postdoctoral researcher attached to the project. The aim was to understand the ways in which the creation of a digital community might help to enhance a living community among the inhabitants of the Strand area. Strandlines then participated in an AHRC funded network, SPICE (Stimulating Participation In the Creative Economy), involving community exchanges and workshops in Teesside, Sheffield, Oxford Jericho and the Strand, for which it received £30,000 (Brant as Co-I; AHRC 2010-11). It received a further £30,000 for Genealogies of Place (PI Professor Hamish Fyfe, University of Glamorgan; Brant as Co-I; AHRC 2010-11).</p> <p>The research outputs identified above became the basic building blocks for an ambitious multi-faceted project that took five forms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A highly interactive website (3.5), in which local community groups could upload stories, interviews, videos, recollections and comment on life around the Strand as they have known it. Some of this is historical and some is contemporary. The researchers on

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Strandlines have also contributed to the website, e.g. historic videos or scholarly accounts of some aspect of Strand life. In this way, the research content responds to, and attempts to stimulate, local people's contributions.

- An associated blog, to advertise new items on the main site and public events.
- 'Rags & Riches', a digital walking tour created by homeless clients of The Connection in consultation with **Green** and **Wolf** (2010-11), drawing on **3.2** and **3.3**. This tour can be taken virtually, over the internet, but it was also given many times in person by the clients of the Connection.
- Weekly creative writing sessions on Strand themes with the elderly at Odhams Walk and a Peabody group, drawing on **3.3** and **3.4**.
- Large-scale public events on Strand-related themes such as Eighteenth-Century Strandlines, the Strand Cabinet of Artists, and the *Dickensfest!*, which centred on the Strand Workhouse, building on the research of English Department Senior Visiting Research Fellow, Ruth Richardson (**3.1**, **3.2**, **3.3**, **3.4**, **3.5**).

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

3.1 Clare **Brant**, *Walking the Streets of Eighteenth-Century London: John's Gay's Trivia (1716)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007) an edition and an essay collection co-edited by **Brant**; edition of poem solely by **Brant**. Literature, urban walking, poverty, gender and class, history [underpins the 'Rags and Riches' tour]. **Peer review**.

3.2 David R. **Green**, *Pauper Capital: London and the Poor Law, 1790-1870*, (Farnham: Ashgate 2010) Urban poverty, history [underpins 'Rags & Riches' digital walking tour]. **Peer review**.

3.3 Hope **Wolf**, "Something yet unpublished": anecdotes in the Imperial War Museum's archive of the 1964 BBC series, *The Great War*, (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, King's College London, 2010) Examined by Trudi Tate and Robert Eaglestone.

3.4 Hope **Wolf**, 'Mediating War: Hot Diaries, Liquid Letters and Vivid Remembrances', *Life Writing*, (2012) 9:3, 327-336, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2012.689950> [underpinning the distinction between oral history and life writing]. **Peer review**.

3.5 Ruth **Richardson**, *Dickens and the Workhouse: Oliver Twist and the London Poor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012) [underpins campaign to save the Strand Union Workhouse, and *Dickensfest!*].

3.6 www.strandlines.org

Grants

JISC (2009-10) £100,000 for Strandlines Digital Community; held by CeRCH; **Brant** as Project Director, **Wolf** as RA.

AHRC (2010-11) £30,000 for SPICE: Stimulating Participation in the Creative Economy) **Brant** as Co-I; PI Steve Thompson, Teesside University; **Wolf** as Community Liaison.

AHRC (2010-11): £30,000 for Genealogies of Place: PI Professor Hamish Fyfe, University of Glamorgan; **Brant** as Co-I for Place Studies.

King's Business Fund (2010-11): £12,500 for Strandlines Business Community Engagement; **Brant** as PI, **Wolf** as Community Liaison Officer.

Annual Fund, King's College London (2011-12) £9,700 for Strand Lives lecture series and Strand Lives Day (**Saunders**, **Brant** and **Wolf**).

LCACE - London Centre for Arts and Cultural Exchange – (2010-11) £5,000 to **Brant** for Cabinet of Artists to produce original Strand-related artworks [presented 8 May 2011].

Details of the Impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Because it is interactive, the Strandlines website is an archive of its own impact (**5.1**). The website was set up in 2010 and has served as a growing point for community development. It has focused its activities above all on disadvantaged community groups which are often largely invisible and without a voice in an area that appears superficially to be the preserve and domain of business, tourism and leisure. The main beneficiaries of this research project have thus been the elderly, low-income and homeless residents of the Strand who have participated in the website's still ongoing development.

Existing community groups – the Peabody Trust, Age UK (a charity formed of Age Concern and

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Help the Aged) and The Connection at St Martins (a local homeless charity) – are focused on serving single constituencies with practical needs. Strandlines has devised activities which speak to all these groups and has brought them together through a new digital community which allows these often neglected communities to negotiate their place and identity in the local neighbourhood as part of the trajectory of other Strand lives, past and present. For example, the creation of a digital ‘Rags & Riches’ walking tour enthused homeless clients of The Connection who also took individuals on the tour in person, having advertised it on the website; weekly creative writing sessions on Strand themes have proved popular with the elderly at an Age Concern Day Centre on Odham’s Walk in Covent Garden; and creative writing sessions have inspired a Peabody group to produce a pamphlet of their work and perform it at an Arts Cellar evening. Much of the Peabody group’s work is published on the Strandlines website (5.2).

This inventive conjunction of community engagement with creative arts has been at the heart of Strandlines activity. For example, **Brant** built a web-based Cabinet of Artists (5.6), a group of six artists in different media who helped lead community engagement at creative events such as Strand Creative Day (2011). A distinctive achievement has been to integrate history with creativity through events like Westminster Archives Day, King’s College London Archives Day and 18th Century Strand Day, in which members of the Strand community were welcomed to local archives and encouraged to use them imaginatively. For instance, the homeless clients used the Westminster archives to develop the ‘Rags to Riches’ tour. One of the local artists in the cabinet of artists wrote and performed original settings of two ballads in the King’s archives (5.10). All local groups were encouraged to come back and use all sets of archives again.

The major beneficiaries – disadvantaged groups living around the Strand - have given a sense of the ways in which the Strandlines digital community has resonated with them. A large box of publicity materials, feedback forms and other comments by non-academic users on all of the events and activities organised by Strandlines is available for inspection (5.3). It includes creative writing by Peabody residents and the documents used to create the ‘Rags to Riches’ digital tour. These include large numbers of notes by clients of the Connection and Age Concern UK which explain the significance for them of particular places on or near the Strand. There are also interviews with people living and working on the Strand obtained as part of Strandlines’ oral history work. We single out a few comments from this stock of data. A staff member of Age UK said this (on video): ‘Strandlines has been a wonderful opportunity for people to tell their story, share their stories, also be a little more personal about some of their histories. It’s actually given people also the opportunity to open up about things that have happened that maybe they wouldn’t have shared if we hadn’t had this opportunity. But also it’s helped people to think about being a bit more open about new projects. Sometimes people get stuck in the same kind of activities but this has given people something new in how to get involved in new activities.’ A member of the Peabody writing groups said: ‘Strandlines offers ways of now seeing the Strand area through new eyes. Old monuments are reenergized with 21st century gifts & energy from sources not always considered as experts in the art of creativity and reporting, although clearly they are -- at last! Thank you.’ And a client at The Connection homeless charity described Strandlines/Westminster archives day as a ‘really fascinating, inspiring day. Loved handling the objects and reading the diary’s (sic) / letters.’

Strandlines has created an active relationship between real and digital communities. A good example of this is provided by the campaign for the preservation of the site of the Union workhouse on Cleveland Street, which in 2011 was under threat of demolition. Located on the street close to the Strand on which Dickens lived as a child, the workhouse has been seen as inspiring the workhouse in *Oliver Twist*. The Strandlines website explained the history of the workhouse and the rationale for saving the site, and provided a platform for information related to the preservation campaign (5.7). Ruth **Richardson** (Senior Research Fellow in the English Department 2011-) who led that campaign spoke prominently at two events hosted by Strandlines and posted information on the website. The conservation success was in part facilitated by Strandline’s digital community. Richardson also spoke about the Union workhouse at *Dickensfest!*, a day of talks, readings and films about Dickens in 2012, hosted by Strandlines in partnership with Westminster Archives, to celebrate Dicken’s anniversary (5.8). This attracted 200 people, from Newham to New Zealand;

96% of 176 evaluators said they found the talks informative and entertaining (5.4).

Strandlines has deepened the community's awareness of the histories of the Strand. Strand Lives, a public lecture series held at King's (2011-12), disseminated research by academics and independent biographers about lives on the Strand: eminent speakers gave talks on architects, journalists, impresarios, painters, inventors and elephants (5.9). Strand Lives Day, like 18th century Strand Day, provided talks and activities spanning the Strand from medieval times to the Cold War, with the National Trust-owned 'Roman' baths providing new scholarship relating to recent Somerset House excavations, diffusing knowledge and biographical stories to a diverse public audience brought together by Strandlines.

While Strandlines' most significant impacts have been among the local community, it is important to point out that the project has had international reach. Google Analytics shows visits to www.strandlines.org from UK, USA, Australia, Canada, Germany, France, India, Brazil, New Zealand and Spain. Between 1 January 2011 and 31 July 2013, some 31,035 visits were made to the site by 23,756 unique visitors. Strandlines' Twitter account has 181 followers. Through its contributions to current research about place, community well-being, urban walking and city-centric literature, Strandlines has exported community far beyond its immediate beneficiaries on the Strand to create a lively crossroads between academic life writing, history, the arts and community building. It has brought stories about the Strand and its past and present lives to the attention of readers throughout the world. It is notable that as a result Strandlines has benefited the business community seeking to regenerate the area. The Northbank (www.thenorthbank.org) - a not-for-profit partnership set up to promote the development of businesses, visitors and residents in an area which (unlike the thriving Southbank) has lacked a core identity - ran a feature on Strandlines in its magazine in 2012 (5.3). Strandlines has thus made an important contribution to the cultural life of the area and to deepening public awareness of a thoroughfare which millions pass through with often little regard for those who live nearby.

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

5.1 www.strandlines.org website (for evidence of user engagement); see eg the Digital Walk devised by members of The Connection here:

http://strandlines.org/sites/default/files/final_rags_and_riches_leaflet.pdf

5.2 www.strandlines.org/stories

5.3 www.thenorthbank.org

5.4 The Strandlines archive of user comments.

5.5 Google Analytics: complete and latest information about visitors to the website.

5.6 <http://artistcabinet.wordpress.com/>

5.7 <http://strandlines.org/story/strand-union-workhouse-unique-set-workhouse-buildings-under-threat-demolition>

5.8 http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/ahri/centres/life_writing/evarch/dickensfest.aspx and <http://strandlines.org/blog/dickensfest>

5.9 http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/ahri/centres/life_writing/evarch/strandlives.aspx

5.10 <http://www.juliemckee.com/news.php?pid=news> (for evidence of the use of ballads in King's archives which were set and performed to original music).

The following individuals have agreed to be contacted for audit purposes to testify to Strandlines' impact.

Archives Manager, Westminster City Council [to corroborate Strand Archives Day and Dickensfest]
 Peabody Trust Manager, Arts Cellar, Covent Garden, London [to corroborate activities with Peabody residents]

The Chief Executive of The Connection at St Martin's, London [to corroborate activities with homeless]

The Keeper of the Wildgoose Memorial Library and Keyholder, Cabinet of Artists, Strandlines [to corroborate of the Strand Cabinet of Artists impact and Strand/Oxford exchanges in SPICE]

The Verger of St Mary-le-Strand [to corroborate oral history and parts of Strand Lives Day]