

Institution: Queen's University Belfast
Unit of Assessment: 29 - English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Bringing Dickens to Ireland: the 2012 Festival
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Dickens scholarship, and has impacted upon culture and leisure services; schools, colleges and lifelong learning; charities; community organisations; and the media. The delivery mechanism was a year-long festival, known as Dickens 2012 NI (Registered charity no. XT33252), which attracted thirty thousand of people of all ages. It organised events covering literature, theatre, music, the visual arts, museums, and education. The project achieved the following impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an increased level of understanding among all participants of Dickens's multiple literary and personal connections with Ireland • the provision of professional expertise on Dickens and Ireland, drawn upon frequently by the arts sector and the media, which allowed them to provide informed, authoritative pronouncements on this subject, particularly during the Dickens bicentenary year • the conception and delivery of public exhibitions with demonstrable benefit for culture and leisure services, through enhanced access to events which had a positive effect on well-being • the provision of work-placement opportunities in arts management for Queen's postgraduate students, thus enhancing their employment prospects • a set of formal links with the young people's charity Barnardo's, particularly for delivering outreach work on literacy, which excited young people in disadvantaged areas about reading, and enhanced their engagement with the arts in a suitable accessible form
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>2.1 The impact derives from research by Leon Litvack (Reader in Victorian Studies), which forms the first significant study of Dickens's writings about Ireland and the Irish throughout his career; his associations with prominent Irish figures; and his activities while in Ireland, in the course of his three reading tours, in 1858, 1867, and 1869. He travelled to Ireland primarily for the purpose of performing his professional public readings; but his attitudes towards the island were the product of careful thought, reflection, and publication from the 1830s onward. His areas of interest included the theatre (particularly the tradition of the stage Irishman); poetry (especially the balladry of Thomas Moore); Irish emigration (especially to the United States); political movements (including the O'Connellites and the Fenians), and the 'Irish Question' in Britain. The most evident and celebrated aspect of Dickens's influence on Ireland was manifested during his reading tours, in the course of which he cemented his position as the premier author of his day, and ensured that his works continued to resonate with his Irish public down to the present day. He developed friendships with three influential Irishmen: the newspaper publisher Francis Dalziel Finlay, the politician James Emerson Tennent, and the diplomat Frederick Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, 1st Marquess of Dufferin.</p> <p>2.2 The research makes use of a diverse set of resources: Dickens's published work; contextual sources on general English attitudes towards Ireland and the Irish; Dickens's letters (both published and newly discovered); the reflections, correspondence and memoirs of his contemporaries; publications in the journals over which Dickens exercised editorial control; and comments in the larger periodical press of the day, to develop a picture of a writer whose comments on the 'other island' emerged partly from stereotypical pronouncements circulating in wider society, but also from informed personal observation. Overall the research demonstrates that in many ways Dickens subscribed to pre-existing conceptions about Ireland and the Irish; but it also reveals that in a select number of areas (such as his perceptive observations on the responses by Irish people to theatre culture, and his personal researches into Fenian insurrection)</p>

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he provided insight that was missed by many of his English contemporaries into key aspects of Irish history and culture.

2.3 Litvack's impact is informed by his academic interest in the use of primary materials (particularly Dickens's correspondence, but also photography and painting) to develop a broad historical context in which the writer's life and pronouncements may be understood. His expertise in this area is substantiated by his serving as an editor of Dickens's letters (included in REF 2). This multi-faceted contextual approach broadens the appeal of literature by drawing on materials and approaches which may be readily understood by a generalist audience, who not only read texts, but who also attend lectures, exhibitions, and other public events designed specifically to introduce 'Dickens and Ireland' to the widest possible demographic base.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)**Key outputs:****3.1 RAE-returned items:**

Litvack, Leon. 'Dickens, Ireland and the Irish Part I'. *Dickensian* 99.1 (2003): 34-59. (journal article)
 Litvack, Leon. 'Dickens, Ireland and the Irish Part II'. *Dickensian* 99.2 (2003): 6-22. (journal article)
 (reprinted, with additions, as 'The Politics of Perception: Dickens, Ireland and the Irish', in
Exploding Canons: Writing Irishness in Nineteenth-Century Culture, ed. N. McCaw
 [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004], 34-80 [book chapter])

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

4.1 The delivery of the impact through the mechanism of a carefully organised, high-profile, culture and arts festival ensured that the largest possible number of potential users and beneficiaries was reached. The programme contributed to the well-being of target groups by enhancing understanding of arts and culture, particularly through public exhibitions; live performance; public lectures; popular print publication; as well as newspaper, radio, and television output. The programme was also able to establish creative apprenticeships for a select number of postgraduate students, thus enhancing promoting skills development to enhance employability. The literacy project, undertaken in cooperation with Barnardo's, provided opportunities for underprivileged children to engage creatively with reading. The project was made possible through Litvack's ongoing work as a Trustee of the Charles Dickens Museum in London, which served as the headquarters for the worldwide celebrations of the Dickens bicentenary.

4.2 The most impactful event, as measured by attendance, was the exhibition at the Ulster Museum, entitled 'Charles Dickens on Tour: The Belfast Public Readings', and curated by Litvack. It ran from 19 October to 3 November 2012, and attracted 22,189 visitors. It formed part of the internationally acclaimed Ulster Bank Belfast Festival at Queen's, and told the story of the author's three visits to Ireland, through relevant original objects borrowed from the Charles Dickens Museum; unique and rare print material from the collections of both Litvack and the Dickens Museum; panels featuring both text and images, relating to the readings and their legacy for Ireland, to Dickens's attitudes towards Ireland and the Irish, and to Belfast in the 1850s and 1860s. Comments recorded in the visitors' book include 'Really interesting and informative'; 'Beautiful'; 'Fascinating'; 'Enlightening'; 'Things I never knew'; 'More please'; 'Full of information and interest'; 'A wonderful homage to Dickens'; 'Keep up the good work'; and 'A Dickensian delight second to none'. This particular impact also demonstrates how existing works of art can inspire new ones, how a particular event can produce attitudinal change, and how it can facilitate further engagement with culture, in the ways identified by Sara Selwood in her 2010 publication *Making a Difference: The Cultural Impact of Museums*. There was a special BBC radio broadcast from the exhibition venue on 19 October 2012, and a television broadcast on 25 October 2012, featuring an interview with Litvack, and an account of Dickens's Belfast readings. The exhibition was complemented by two events for children on 20 and 21 October. Of particular note is the arts and crafts workshop, in which attendees used images featured in the exhibition as inspiration for their own creations.

4.3 The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) hosted a unique Dickens exhibition, curated by Litvack, from 22 October to 9 November 2012; it attracted 810 visitors. Entitled 'Dickens: Irish Friends and Family Ties'. This visually arresting display brought together unpublished material relating to Dickens and his three Irish friends: JE Tennent, FD Finlay and Lord Dufferin. The display was not only impactful through educating visitors about Dickens's own family history and its Irish dimension; it also served as a source of inspiration to attract users to explore their own heritage and genealogy. The *Irish News* printed a report on 23 October 2012, in which Carál Ní Chuilín (the Northern Ireland Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure) stated, 'This exhibition offers the chance to explore the link between history and literature, shedding light on one of the great authors and highlighting his local connections'. The paper also added 'Visitors. . . will be treated to a visual exploration of how this hugely influential writer left a lasting impact on the social and cultural landscape of people in the north [of Ireland]'. A second report appeared in the *Belfast News Letter* on 24 October 2012 emphasised that 'One of the English language's most feted authors had closer Ulster ties than many people realise'. The Director of the Charles Dickens Museum, Dr Florian Schweizer, who was present at the launch, reinforced how the exhibition benefited not just those who had a deep and abiding interest in Dickens, but also the public at large, who had much to learn from the Victorian author which was relevant to life in the twenty-first century. Comments recorded in the visitors' book include 'Such a pleasure to see these panels and to learn more about Dickens's Irish connections'; 'Wonderful exhibition'; 'Great story'; 'Fascinating insight into the life of Charles Dickens'; and 'PRONI is so valuable'. There is evidence of follow-through from this initial engagement process: the exhibition was re-erected for the Féile an Phobail (Ireland's largest community arts festival, based in West Belfast) in August 2013 (attendance 10,000), thus providing an opportunity to enhance and diversify the engagement with culture and creativity, in an area where economic and religious divides are pronounced.

4.4 The effect of the research was also felt through the staging of a drama which depicted Dickens's visits to Belfast; it played to 590 people across its five sellout performances, from 8-12 May 2012. 'Dickens at the Ulster Hall' was a collaboration between Litvack and dramatist Sam McCready, and emerged from a series of meetings and discussions in August-September 2011, a review of the key outputs cited in 3.1 above, and of the original research materials upon which the outputs drew. The play had a second province-wide run in March 2013. Its impact with the public was such that audio extracts from the production formed the basis of a sound installation in the Ulster Museum exhibition described in 4.2 (above).

4.5 Several strands of the project provide evidence of how this process of engagement led to increased awareness amongst the general public. A non-academic audience was reached through a widely publicised lecture entitled 'Dickens at the Ulster Hall', delivered by Litvack as part of the venue's sesquicentenary celebrations, on 4 May 2012; it attracted a full house of 120 people. A non-specialist audience was also engaged through the publication of a distilled version of the original publication in the literary journal *Irish Pages* under the title 'Dickens and Ireland'. The print and broadcast media also availed of the expertise offered by the research, in communicating the enduring importance of Dickens and Ireland to their audiences. The *Belfast News Letter* (circulation 22,000), the *Irish News* (circulation 40,000), and the *Belfast Telegraph* (circulation 60,000) interviewed Litvack at the time of Dickens's 200th birthday, for reports celebrating Dickens's Irish connections. Litvack was also appeared as an expert panellist on a special 'Arts Extra' broadcast on Dickens and Ireland, broadcast on BBC Radio Ulster (39,000 listeners).

4.6 Employment training in arts management was provided for a group of five students undertaking the 'Modern Literary Studies' MA at Queen's (S. Conlon, W. Howell, A. Hurle, M. Madders, and L. Scott), in both the planning and delivery stages of the impact activities listed above. They acquired experience of fundraising in December 2011-February 2012 (pitching this festival to potential donors, through written communication, telephone conversations, and personal interviews), as well as event organisation and event delivery from January to December 2012 (visitor facilitation at the launch event, organising the *David Copperfield* Read-a-Thon, and undertaking introductory talks for each of the Dickens films shown during the festival). The training was provided by Litvack in partnership with Type AB Consultancy (a Belfast PR and marketing firm). Two of the beneficiaries

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of this training (Howell and Conlon) have been successful in obtaining full-time work in arts administration.

4.7 The impact with the potential for lifelong benefit was made possible through formal links with the charity Barnardo's. This collaboration allowed Litvack to deliver special events in primary schools involved in Barnardo's 'Ready to Learn' literacy programme. Using the 'hook' of Dickens's visits to Ireland, Litvack undertook reading projects in six specifically targeted, underperforming schools. The events consisted of readings, music, and structured conversations with young people about Dickens and Ireland, about books, and about Victorian culture in general. These events not only introduced Dickens to a new generation, but also deepened contact with artistic endeavour, and built an atmosphere of trust about learning and creativity, in areas deeply afflicted by social exclusion, mental health issues, and family breakdown. A report in the *Andersonstown News* on 11 December 2012 gives a flavour of the schools' response to the programme: Raymond Hunter, Principal of St Aidan's School in Ballymurphy, said: 'We were delighted to welcome Dr Litvack to our school as part of our ongoing literacy programme. Having an expert in Victorian literature read some of Dickens' work and talk about life 150 years ago was a fantastic experience which really brought it to life for our pupils'. Litvack will undertake follow-through visits to these same target schools in November-December 2013, in order to maintain these important links, re-emphasise Barnardo's aim to help the most vulnerable young people transform their lives and achieve their potential, and confirm the transformative power of the arts to deliver benefits to communities which need it most.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)**5.1 Barnardo's**

Statement by Barnardo's on the impact of 'Ready to Learn' literacy events

5.2 Charles Dickens Museum

Statement by the Charles Dickens Museum on the impact of the underpinning research on the exhibitions held in Belfast

5.3 Ulster Museum exhibition:

Director of Collections & Interpretations, National Museums Northern Ireland

5.4 Public Record Office of Northern Ireland exhibition:

Director of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland

5.5 'Dickens at the Ulster Hall', Lyric Theatre:

Director of Two for One Productions

Script, programme/flyer, and reviews.

5.6 Ulster Hall Public lecture

Ulster Hall programme

5.7 Media:

Festival programme and media coverage articles/reviews.

5.8 Arts Management Employment Training

Type AB Consultancy screenshot webpage