

<p>Institution: Sheffield Hallam University</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature</p>
<p>Title of case study: English Popular Fiction 1900-1950 and the Reading Public</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) This case study focuses on impact achieved through the public engagement programme of the Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) <i>Readerships and Literary Cultures 1900-1950 Special Collection</i>. This collection, of 1000 early editions of popular fiction, was initiated by English academics and Information Specialists in 2009, and stemmed from research into popular fiction, readerships and hierarchies of literary taste. The programme has specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preserved and opened up to the public a neglected cultural and material heritage • Enhanced cultural enrichment and personal development in South Yorkshire • Brought a new regional community of readers into being to read critically popular fiction from the past and to create a scholarly resource • Created a new national and international community of such readers through its blog • Initiated a programme of co-produced research with community readers/interviewers/interviewees
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) The research programme brought together an inter-disciplinary group of researchers at SHU sharing an innovative focus on the operations of literary hierarchies within British Culture, 1900-1950, including effects on what is regarded by whom as literary or sub-literary and what is studied, remembered, and retained in cultural institutions and libraries. The research dates back to 2000 when Baxendale developed his existing historical interest in cultural distinction towards a focus on J.B Priestley's place in English culture and writing (reference 1) and to 2003 (reference 6), when C. Hopkins explored the relationships between serious political writing and the popular literary form of the thriller in the nineteen-thirties. From this grew further work (e.g. reference 5) which argued that to understand literary and political writing between the 1920s and 1950s it was essential to trace how writers of the period located themselves, or were located, among the cultural assumptions about literary hierarchies (especially the highbrow, middlebrow, lowbrow taxonomy). Thus, Brown and Grover argue that: 'the term "middlebrow" ... is a nexus for prejudice towards the lower middle classes, the feminine and the domestic, and towards narrative modes regarded as outdated. Unless the rhetorical uses of this term are understood, the material culture from which any text in the twentieth century has been generated, the way that most American and British readers come to those texts and the way we teach canonical literature from the period will not be fully informed' (reference 3, p.1). Hopkins and Baxendale supervised both Grover's and Brown's PhD projects which were centrally concerned with literary taste and hierarchy (1998-2002 and 2005-11). Baxendale and Hopkins continued to develop this strand while both Grover and Brown published work in their own rights as members of staff (references 2, 3, 4) which argued for the central part played by perceptions of literary status on the ways in which writers between the 1920s and 1950s regarded themselves and were read by others, with such cultural discourses radically affecting the reception of texts, and also the production, marketing, consumption and conceptualisation of writing as cultural activity and material object. All four staff (with Professor N. Humble, Roehampton) were accepted as a panel (convened by C. Hopkins) on 'What is Middlebrow?' at the national conference of the North American Conference of British Studies in Boston in 2006.</p> <p>Because of their expertise in this topic, Hopkins, Baxendale, Brown and Grover were closely involved with the <i>AHRC-funded Transatlantic Middlebrow Network</i> (F. Hammill, Strathclyde, 2008-11), three being Advisory Board Members and the fourth being the network web-administrator (Brown). Brown, Grover, Hopkins and Baxendale contributed to the organisation and content of Network conferences and the final report to the AHRC referred to the significant intellectual collaboration with SHU. Thus this research took place in a collaborative and international context based on this AHRC Network, which (as of 31/7/13) had 297 members in its mailing list and 167 on its researcher database. The website lists three official network publications, in two of which SHU played a leading part: one was an essay collection co-edited by Brown and Grover (reference 3), while a second was edited by Brown ('Investigating the Middlebrow', <i>Working Papers on the Web</i>, 11, July 2008: http://extra.shu.ac.uk/wpw/middlebrow/). In her role as designer of the network web-</p>

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site, Brown also played a key role in disseminating project research findings, creating a bibliography, a list of network publications, a researcher database and a listing of media discussions of the 'middlebrow' (see <http://www.middlebrow-network.com/Home.aspx>). The SHU research cluster therefore contributed substantially to the network and associated publications while benefitting from its bringing together of international expertise. The Special Collection itself was first envisaged as a further outcome of the Network, providing a permanent and physical collection of middlebrow and popular fiction so that work could continue on cultural and textual issues and the book as object in formations of literary taste. From the outset, the collection was designed to be a resource for scholars and the public. Its development - including specialised cataloguing, appropriate access and a custom-built shelving and study area - has been supported by substantial staffing resources from the SHU University Library budgets. Since its launch in 2009 the collection's resources have been used to support research and systematic public engagement in tandem, including much of the impact detailed below in 4.

Roles of researchers at SHU:

Baxendale: Principal Lecturer in History (retired; Visiting Fellow in the Humanities, 2012-15; in post 1971-2011)

Brown: Special Collection Research Fellow (1 fte 1/6/2012 - 1/1/2015: ECR; contributed to research impact only after completion of PhD in 2011)

Grover: Senior Lecturer in English (retired; in post 1/1/2009 -1/1/2011)

C. Hopkins: Professor of English (in post 1/1/1991 to present).

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

Books

1). J. Baxendale. *Priestley's England: J.B. Priestley and English Culture*, Manchester University Press, 2008. Submitted to History sub-panel as output in RAE 2008. Can be supplied by HEI. Quality Indicator: editorial selection and review process. Review: 'must stimulate thought on the locations and operations of cultural authority' (P. Mandler, Cambridge, *H-Albion*, Sept 2008 - also his Book of the Year in *History Today*, 2008).

2). E. Brown. *Comedy and the Feminine Middlebrow Novel: Elizabeth Von Arnim and Elizabeth Taylor*, Pickering and Chatto (Literary Texts and the Popular Marketplace series), 1 December 2012. Listed in REF2. Quality Indicator: editorial selection and review process. (Reader's report: 'contributes to the growing body of criticism of middlebrow culture, in particular in its charting of the history of reception').

3). E. Brown, and M. Grover (eds), *Middlebrow Literary Cultures, The Battle of the Brows, 1920-1960*, Palgrave-Macmillan, 30 November 2011. Listed in REF2 (introduction joint-authored by Brown and Grover). Quality Indicator: editorial selection and review process (Reader's report: 'substantial contribution to the field').

4). M. Grover *The Ordeal of Warwick Deeping: Middlebrow Authorship and Cultural Embarrassment*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 15 May 2009. Can be supplied by HEI. Quality Indicator: editorial selection and review process.

Articles

5). C. Hopkins. 'The Army of the Unemployed: Walter Greenwood's Wartime Novel and the Reconstruction of Britain', *Keywords: a Journal of Cultural Materialism*, June 2012. Listed in REF2. Quality indicator: peer-review process (reader's report says has 'an original argument' and makes 'a potentially very significant contribution to understanding the arc of Greenwood's later work and its wider importance in the cultural politics of the 1940s' (16/4/2012)).

Book Chapters

6). C. Hopkins. 'Leftists and Thrillers: the Politics of a Thirties Sub-genre' in *And in Our Time: Literature of the Nineteen Thirties*, Bucknell University Press, pp. 147-162, 30 April 2003. Can be supplied by HEI. Submitted as output in RAE 2008. Quality indicator: editorial selection and review process.

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

The researchers contributed to the activities of the *AHRC Transatlantic Middlebrow Network* and played a substantial part in promoting the middlebrow and literary hierarchy as distinct areas of study, as evidenced by the referenced key publications (especially 1, 2, 3, 4). The Final Report to

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the AHRC from that project (Prof F. Hammill, Strathclyde) outlined the Special Collection at SHU as a follow-on project which has subsequently been substantially achieved: 'In our application, we identified a possible follow-on project with a particular value for non-academic audiences. This was the establishment of a freely-accessible repository of popular fiction which is now out of print. This has actually been accomplished within the span of the funding. Dr Mary Grover, the third member (with Brown and Hammill), of the Network's Project team, has established a Special Collection, 'Readerships and Literary Cultures 1880-1950', at Sheffield Hallam University. This has been done in collaboration with Professor Chris Hopkins, who has done much to forward the joint effort of Strathclyde and Sheffield Hallam Universities in establishing and expanding the Network'.

The decision to build a unique scholarly, publicly-available resource to support further work on this topic at SHU stemmed directly from presenting research within the Network and subsequent publication (reference 3 includes essays by 11 Network members). Alison Light was appointed Visiting Professor of Popular Literature (2011-14) to help develop the Collection, as was an external steering group (Hammill: Strathclyde, Jobey: Sheffield City Libraries, Waller: Roehampton, Wild: Centre for History of the Book, Edinburgh). The decision to build public engagement into Special Collection activity was itself a result of research findings about the ways in which many kinds of widely-experienced popular and middlebrow texts and reading experiences have been excluded from being studied, valued, preserved and remembered. The Special Collection aimed to create a scholarly / community forum where such material would be researched, co-researched and become a legitimately-recognised focus for cultural and personal development. It has bought into being or supported four overlapping public groups: a) Friends of the Special Collection - 136 on the mailing list, excluding academics; b) Reading groups: three groups of eight readers drawn from the general public; c) the 'Reading Sheffield' community history group, made up of 12 active interviewers, together with 60 interviewees in Sheffield; d) the *Reading 1900-1950* blog community (<http://reading19001950.wordpress.com/>). Friends attend the regular public events of the Special Collection. The Reading groups discuss the novels and gather particular sets of data (e.g. references to taste, popular or 'highbrow' authorship) from collection novels, which are added to the Special Collection enhanced cataloguing templates on the University Library online catalogue, which is publically accessible (80 records completed). The 'Reading Sheffield' group has recorded 60 oral reading-histories from a systematic sample of Sheffield citizens who became adults in the city between 1945 and 1960. The Friends of the Collection and the Reading groups are directly part of the Special Collection public engagement programme, while Reading Sheffield is an independent community group which has received scholarly advice, in-kind assistance and funding from the Special Collection (including for training, events, transcription and permanent preservation of interviews). The *Reading 1900-1950* blog has extended our reach: it had 223 followers, good quality posts on 86 novels and 344 comments on these (31/7/13); new postings are also announced via Twitter. 51% of visits are from the UK, 49% are international, with 32% consisting of visits from the US, Canada and Australia, and 17% from the rest of the world. There is a distinct blogging community which focuses mainly on fiction from this period and our blog is linked to from several of these (e.g. *Literary Taste*, *Great War Fiction*). We have also circulated a hard copy edition of our *Newsletter* (see <http://reading19001950.wordpress.com/newsletter/>) to any beneficiaries who do not have on-line access. This has been particularly valued by some elderly or housebound participants: "Many thanks for your Spring Newsletter. Even if I don't make the meetings in Sheffield I enjoy reading about the various projects' (1/5/2013). Reciprocal links have also been established with Sheffield Libraries: the Special Collection website (<http://www.middlebrow-network.com/SpecialCollection.aspx>) points people towards their store of out-of-print fiction, and we have placed a book plate about the SHU collection in books in the store. This brings the Collection and its work to the attention of readers who order books from Sheffield Library's store.

The beneficiaries of this impact are principally life-long readers of fiction in Sheffield and environs. They have been invited to participate through 1) publicity distributed through Sheffield City Libraries, especially to its network of reading groups; 2) publicity in city bookshops; 3) digital social media focusing on South Yorkshire; 4) the media, with two newspaper articles and two radio-interviews about the collection since 2009; 5) a regular newsletter distributed in hard and e-copy. The Reading Sheffield project has had a particular group of beneficiaries as well as the

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interviewers: many of the target group of readers are aged between 70 and 90 with mobility issues and were recruited through Sheffield's Mobile Library Service. Interviewers' visits to their homes and a subsequent celebratory communal event were valued for adding a social aspect to private reading, as well as valuing their experience, tastes and memories. The impact on beneficiaries has been to create several comfortable but informative community spaces where they could share regular learning and conversation about particular texts, reading as an activity, judgements about reading, and personal and more formal histories of reading popular fiction (see brief documentary commissioned to record celebratory event: <http://vimeo.com/58095219>). Participants in public events were able to listen to and question invited speakers on popular and middlebrow fiction, as well as to see the University Library / Special Collection as a freely accessible public space and resource. Reading Group members and oral-history interviewers have entered more deeply into this benefit through working actively to produce new research material. In both cases, a leisure activity has been put into conversation with current academic research in the Humanities. Research by Reading Group members informed the keynote presentation by Hopkins and Brown at the conference 'Space and Place in the Middlebrow' (London University 14/9/13). The extent of the impact is evidenced by average attendance at six public events (40 members of the public), by the Friends' mailing list (136 addresses), by emails and letters received about the Collection (some 100), by public donations of relevant editions (initial donation of 450 volumes supplemented by 550 further editions), by involvement of 24 reading group members, of six oral history interviewers, by the 60 oral histories collected, and by traffic on the *Reading 1900-1950* blog, which has had 14,202 page views. The quality of the impact can be evidenced by feedback from beneficiaries: "Light is thrown onto the past, books are unearthed and read once more, a community that would never seek to identify itself as one is created and flourishes" (<http://literarytaste.wordpress.com/2012/11/21/a-liebster-award/>), 'brought out for me in a very clear and entertaining way the fascinating intent to give serious study to something which is essentially of a popular nature'; 'has given many retired people and other committed readers a chance to contribute something really worthwhile to their local, forward-looking university and to Eng Lit.' (emails 15/12/11; 24/10/13). In addition, Reading Group members said they read 'with more attention', 'more closely and more critically', 'more carefully and learn more' (questionnaire). This range of activities produced the five types of impact outcomes listed in the **Summary** above and evidenced in **5**.

Dates of impacts. Public events: 21/6/2009, 10/6/2010, 9/12/2012, 22/6/2012, 19/10/12, 14/6/13; Reading Groups monthly 2012-13; Reading Sheffield meetings and interviews 2010-13; blog 2012-13.

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

For audit / corroboration purposes of impact claims we can supply details of 5 individual beneficiaries as follows:

Sources	To Corroborate Claims
Special Collection Reading Group - sources 1 and 2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preserved and opened up to the public a neglected cultural and material heritage Brought a new regional community of readers into being to read critically popular fiction from the past and to create a scholarly resource Initiated a programme of co-produced research with community readers / interviewers
The Community Oral History Group: 'Reading Sheffield' interviewers - sources 3 and 4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preserved and opened up to the public a neglected cultural and material heritage Initiated a programme of co-produced research with community readers / interviewers
Reading Sheffield interviewees - source 5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preserved and opened up to the public a neglected cultural and material heritage Enhanced cultural enrichment and personal development in South Yorkshire