

<b>Institution:</b> University of Chichester
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> History
<b>Title of case study:</b> Enhancing the Visitor Experience at an Open Air Museum
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Impacts of Dr Danae Tankard's research into furnishing and clothing of the 17c. rural poor are evidenced for the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum (WDOAM) and its staff and volunteers, for visitors to the exhibit-house, Poplar Cottage, the Poplar Clothing Project exhibition and for the interested public at large. It is a case of historical research informing heritage practice and experience.</p> <p>These impacts have been achieved through two projects, the first focusing on informing a historically accurate interpretation of the furnishings of the 17c. Poplar Cottage and the second recreating accurate replica clothing for an exhibition and subsequent use by the WDOAM's interpretation staff and volunteers. The enhanced visitor experience was evaluated through a post-exhibition survey and the impact on the Museum and its staff evidenced through training delivered and subsequent modified practices and the additional press coverage arising from the exhibition.</p> <p>Tankard is part-time (0.5Fte) senior lecturer at the University of Chichester (since January 2008) and also part-time (0.5Fte) social historian at the WDOAM.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Tankard's research on the rural poor developed out of her interest in one of the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum's (WDOAM) exhibit buildings, Poplar Cottage, a 'wasteland' or 'wayside' cottage, originally located in Washington, West Sussex and built c.1630.</p> <p>Two framing themes have developed:</p> <p>(i) Wasteland cottages are those that were built on manorial 'waste' (e.g. commons or roadside verges), with or without manorial licence. They were built in considerable numbers in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as rural populations began to rise rapidly and rural poverty increased as a result of an oversupply of labour combined with low wages and inflation-fuelled hikes in the costs of rents and consumables. In response to increasing public concern about illegal cottage building and the subdivision of existing housing in 1589 the Elizabethan government passed an act which made it illegal to erect a cottage without four acres of land attached to it and prohibited multiple occupancy. Whilst the existence of the 1589 Act was well known to historians of rural housing and the rural poor, no one had ever examined the implementation of the legislation in any detail. Tankard's research (published in <i>The Agricultural History Review</i> in 2011), which drew primarily on the records of the courts of quarter sessions and assize, looked in detail at the origins of the Act, its implementation in seventeenth-century Sussex and its interaction with poor law legislation.</p> <p>(ii) The clothing culture of the rural poor in the seventeenth century has been hard to recover because of a paucity of documentary and pictorial sources and surviving garments. This is in contrast to the relatively ample sources for studying the clothing of the elite. In consequence, most studies of seventeenth-century clothing have focused heavily or exclusively on the clothing of the elite or an affluent 'middling' sort (e.g. Aileen Ribeiro, Susan Vincent). Whilst using the records of the courts of quarter sessions Tankard discovered that they contained valuable and unique information about the clothing of the rural poor. Unusually, the Sussex quarter sessions retain their paper (as opposed to parchment) records, including paper depositions from perpetrators and victims of clothing and textile theft. For many counties the paper records were thrown away. Using these records, along with a wide variety of other documentary sources (including probate material, overseers' accounts and coroners' rolls) Tankard researched the clothing culture of the rural poor in seventeenth-century Sussex, looking at what men and women wore, how they acquired their clothes and the social and cultural value they attached to their clothing. The first part of this research was published in <i>Textile History</i> in 2012 and presented in a paper at a one-day conference on Early Modern</p>

Sussex at Petworth House in May 2013. The second part of this research (to be published in *Rural History* in 2014) has looked more broadly at *attitudes* to the clothing of the rural poor, looking at popular representations of rural clothing in ballad literature, together with elite observations and the rural poor's own assessment of their clothing and its social and cultural significance. A paper on this research was given at the Social History Society conference in March 2013.

### 3. References to the research

1. 'The Regulation of Cottage Building in Seventeenth-century Sussex', *The Agricultural History Review* 59, no. 1 (2011), pp. 18-35.
2. "A Pair of Grass-Green Woollen Stockings": the Clothing of the Rural Poor in Seventeenth-century Sussex', *Textile History* 43, no. 1 (2012), pp. 5-22.
3. *Houses of the Weald and Downland: People and Houses of South East England c1300-c1900* (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2012).
4. 'The Weald & Downland Open Air Museum 1970 to 2010', *The Local Historian* 40, no. 4 (2010), 281-291.
5. 'I think myself honestly decked': Attitudes Towards the Clothing of the Rural Poor in Seventeenth-century England', paper presented to the Social History Society Annual Conference, Leeds, (25-27 March 2013); accepted for publication in *Rural History* (2014).

### 4. Details of the impact

#### Context

The internationally renowned WDOAM (which opened in 1970) is one of the leading museums of historic buildings and rural life in the UK, receiving about 130-140,000 visitors a year (15,000 of whom are school children). It has a collection of nearly fifty historic buildings – domestic, agricultural, industrial and commercial – dating from the late thirteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Many of the buildings have been furnished to replicate historic domestic interiors and whilst the museum was set up as a museum *about* buildings, over the last 20 years its focus has shifted to reflect public interest in how men and women lived in the past. See further at: <http://www.wealddown.co.uk/>

#### Overview of impact

The impacts are:

- For visitors: enhanced experience of the historic building, Poplar Cottage (2011-2013) and inter-action with the Poplar Clothing Project exhibition (May 2013);
- For interpretation staff and volunteer guides at WDOAM: an increased understanding and awareness of historical research underpinning public presentation of 'Poplar' and rural clothing;
- For the WDOAM as an enterprise: enhanced visitor offering, enhanced material for magazine, additional radio and online press coverage and public interest arising from the Poplar Clothing Exhibition;
- For the public at large: readers of the magazine, audiences for the radio and online press coverage have had their awareness raised about how archival historical research can enhance heritage exhibits and how the museum's work is underpinned by rigorous scholarship.
- For the interpretation department: the Poplar Clothing Project exhibition has provided a blueprint for future clothing project exhibitions.

#### Interpretation of furnishings at Poplar Cottage

The first impact was the reinterpretation of Poplar as a shoemaker's cottage as it might have been c.1630, informed by Tankard's scholarly publications, cited above. In 2010 Tankard created an interpretation plan for the cottage, detailing furnishings and domestic utensils and shoemaker's tools and outlining the 'story' that would underpin its presentation. Between 2010 and 2011 she worked with colleagues at the museum and specialist craftsmen and women to furnish the cottage. Information about the reinterpretation was disseminated through training sessions for volunteer house stewards (in 2012 and 2013), through a visitor information folder inside the exhibit building and by means of an article ('Interpreting Poplar Cottage') published

in the museum's magazine in autumn 2011 (direct print circulation of 11,000; estimated indirect circulation of 22,000; also available through museum's website).

The furnishing of Poplar Cottage has enhanced visitors' experience by providing them with a robust and well-researched interpretation of what the interior of a cottage like this might have looked like in the early seventeenth century. The selection of shoemaking as an interpretative scheme offers visitors an insight into a significant rural craft and helps them to understand the way that small cottages like this one were used as both domestic and economic spaces.

The museum's trained volunteer stewards and domestic interpreters are, as a result of the training and information packs, able to talk to visitors about the cottage's historic context and the social and economic status of its occupants. Costumed interpreters talk to visitors about their clothes, how they were made and what they are like to wear. They also discuss how men and women acquired their clothing and link this in to aspects of the rural economy (e.g. clothing and textile production, the role of shops, fairs and pedlars, the availability of ready-made clothing) and social and domestic life. A conservative estimate, informed by WDOAM staff, would be that half of all visitors to the WDOAM (c70,000 per year and >200,000 from 2011-2013) would visit Poplar Cottage. On that basis: Tankard's work has therefore informed approximately 100,000 visitors. The newly framed Poplar exhibition informs their understanding of rural history and activates their historical imaginations.

#### **Research informs costumed interpretation/broader cultural knowledge of rural dress**

The second project was the production of two seventeenth-century outfits to be worn by interpreters working in Poplar Cottage. The 'Poplar clothing project' forms part of the museum's Historic Clothing Project (HCP), which began in 2007 to produce replica historic clothing to be worn by the museum's domestic interpreters (staff and volunteers). All replica clothing is produced on site by a team of 30 volunteers, under the supervision of an external clothing consultant, Barbara Painter, and the museum's domestic life interpreter, Lesley Parker. Prior to Tankard's involvement, the HCP produced clothing based on generic sources (i.e. sources that were not specific to the Weald & Downland region). Working closely with Painter and Parker, Tankard has applied her documentary research to the design of the two outfits, selecting garment types, fabrics, colours and accessories that would have been typical of those worn by the occupants of Poplar Cottage around 1630. Thus the HCP going forward has more accurate regional reference points for its on-going work.

An exhibition about the Poplar clothing project, held at the museum from 20 to 26 May 2013, was visited by approximately 960 people (counted manually). The exhibition displayed the replica clothing alongside Tankard's text panels explaining what the rural poor wore, how they acquired their clothing and how archival evidence had been translated into the production of replica garments. In addition, two documentary films explaining Tankard's work were part of the exhibition, both running on a continuous loop (see further below). The exhibition was stewarded by museum staff and volunteers who were able to answer visitors' questions and visitor responses to the exhibition were collected via a questionnaire (87 responses) and a visitor book (87 comments). Responses consistently showed that the exhibition had informed them about a previously unknown subject. 84 questionnaire respondents confirmed that the exhibition had increased their knowledge of the subject. Observations about what they had learned from the exhibition showed a high degree of accuracy about its factual content. Respondents expressed surprise about the amount and variety of clothing owned by the rural poor and the use of bright colours – both key findings of Tankard's published research. 74 respondents stated that historic clothing was a useful/important means of learning about the past. Moreover, the exhibition visitors book evidences engagement with the research from people around the UK and internationally including from Australia, Belgium, Holland, and the US.

The Poplar clothing project was documented in two short films made by Darren Mapletoft, Senior Lecturer in Digital Film Production at the University of Chichester. The longer of the two films (details below) included an interview with Tankard and Painter about their interest and expertise in seventeenth-century clothing and what they had learned from their collaboration. The shorter of the two films (details below) focused on natural dyeing. These films are linked

from a number of websites, site statistics indicate that they have recorded a total of 250 views since their uploading in May 2013, 25 Facebook likes and comments such as 'this is fascinating' from viewers. Following on from the exhibition was a day-school on seventeenth-century clothing at WDOAM held on 17 June 2013. The day-school also drew on the research materials and outputs of Tankard's work (displays, films); a total of 12 people attended.

An impact on public understanding of rural history and the quality of the museum's exhibits was also achieved through various media activity. In particular, Tankard was able to describe how the research had informed the Poplar Clothing Exhibition on an interview on BBC Radio Sussex Breakfast Programme (Audience reach of 248,000 for June 2013; RAJAR stats). The exhibition was also picked up by *The Portsmouth News* (16 May 2013) and then actively shared by its readers. Modest online coverage was achieved through the pro-active promotion of the event by WDOAM on its main website, historic clothing blog, Facebook and Twitter platforms. For example, WDOAM tweets on the project went to 3854 followers and items re-tweeted to 10,000 followers by various 'active tweeters' and organisations such as Warwickshire Museum.

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Dissemination and discussion of interpretation of 'Poplar' for members of the museum: see D Tankard, 'Interpreting Poplar Cottage', *Weald & Downland Open Air Museum* (Autumn 2011), pp. 19-21; D Tankard, 'Clothing the rural poor in seventeenth-century Sussex and the Poplar Cottage project', *Weald & Downland Open Air Museum* (Spring 2013), pp. 27-29. (This is the official magazine of the museum and has a direct print circulation of 11,000 & is also available through the museum's website).
2. Updated historical briefing document in 'Poplar' cottage – displayed and used by visitors and guides. As noted above, conservatively, it is estimated that 100,000 museum visitors interacted with the updated Poplar house/exhibition in the period after Tankard's research. The museum is supported by 500 volunteers 270 of whom serve as stewards.
3. Testimonial letter from historic clothing consultant, Barbara Painter, Karen Barrett (Head of Interpretation at WDOAM) and Richard Pailthorpe (Director of the WDOAM).
4. 'The Historic Clothing Project' (44-page booklet about the HCP, published June 2013, which features the Poplar clothing project). This publication was part-funded by a publication grant from the Pasold Research Trust. Its print run was of 1000 copies.
5. The Historic clothing exhibition, Weald & Downland Open Air Museum, 20-26 May 2013 and the training day: Seventeenth-century clothing, Weald & Downland Open Air Museum, 17 June 2013. See archived website: <http://www.wealddown.co.uk/Events-Information/Historic-Clothing-Project-Exhibition-20-%E2%80%93-26-May>  
[http://www.arundel.org.uk/uploads/diary/W&D\\_Events\\_Leaflet\\_Final.pdf](http://www.arundel.org.uk/uploads/diary/W&D_Events_Leaflet_Final.pdf)
6. 87 Anonymous Visitor Experience Survey Forms for the Poplar Clothing Exhibition (completed at the Historic Clothing Exhibition).
7. 87 Anonymous entries in the Exhibition's Visitor's Book to the Clothing Exhibition.
8. Regional Media Dissemination informing publics on the exhibition: Tankard interviewed on BBC Sussex Breakfast Programme 20/5/13 (audience reach of 248,000 for June 2013 (RAJAR)) (MP4 available on request); *The Portsmouth News* <http://www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/education/chichester-exhibition-studies-17th-century-clothing-1-5096082>
9. Online interaction and engagements with project: including exhibition film, see: Poplar Clothing Project at the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum (9.16 minutes) (<http://vimeo.com/69879622>) (<https://www.youtube.com/user/wealddownlandmuseum>) (Dyeing cloth at the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum (2.31 minutes) (<http://vimeo.com/69880544>) (<https://www.youtube.com/user/wealddownlandmuseum>)  
Blog: Historic Clothing Project <http://historicclothing.wordpress.com>  
And (<http://historicclothing.wordpress.com/poplar-clothing-project/>)