

3a. Impact template Unit 30

a. Context:

The University defines itself as a modern 'civic' university, primary among its aims being serving the wider communities of the city, region and beyond. The History Unit has always taken this aim seriously, and reached out to non-academic audiences at every level possible, and by all media.

One important factor has been the interdisciplinary character of research in the Unit, which includes researchers in the social sciences (Politics, Sociology) and French, within a broader context of a Faculty where we also have close links to cultural and literary research.

Historical research and historically-informed debates remain of great interest to the wider public both nationally and, particularly, in NE England. We have responded to requests by local history societies and other community groups to give talks on our research, and built up a relationship with them across the region (see 'Details', below)

Regional and cultural history has been a longstanding area of research in History, and staff have made use of regional resources in terms of archives and other records to reflect on problems of understanding early modern British society, national identities in terms of the Borders and the North, and historical changes in area such as crime and punishment (see Peter Rushton, 1998, 2003). An important resource for the history of workers in the coal industry, the NE England Mining Archive and Research Centre, has been created as a repository for the documents of the Durham Miners and the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS), and is used by an increasing body of non-academic and other researchers. The aim is to make this an increasingly online resource (see NEEMARC Case Study).

We also actively seek to participate in public events and debates, in areas of current controversy, where historical insights are valuable. The role of weapons in North American societies (Yuill on the USA and Canada), or the history of the controls of free speech (Rushton on sedition) are typical examples where an historical perspective throws new light on modern debates. The policies affecting transnational adoption (Hayes), or the ethical and philosophical problems of permitting assisting suicide (Yuill) have engaged a wider audience in national forums.

Previous members of staff in Archaeology (Colm O'Brien) and in Geography (Dennis Wheeler) made vital contributions to areas of public interest. The project sponsored in part by the Cultural and Regional Studies Beacon for surveying the early medieval landscape of Loughswilly (Irish Republic) has engaged both adult learners and local people. The contentious issue of climate change (Wheeler) has been of national and indeed international significance in documenting climate change over the last three centuries.

b. The Unit's Approach to impact 2008-13

The policy of the Unit, together with the Beacon for Cultural and Regional Studies during 2008-2013, has been to encourage staff to engage with the wider community at all levels, both organizationally and individually. Thus, participating in local organizations that build bridges between academic and popular interests, reaching out to local historical societies, acting as consultants to the media on matters of interest and contention, offering research-based policy recommendations to political debate, or designing projects which have built-in public participation, have all been encouraged, and form part of the fulfilment of our more general role as academics in a civic university.

The development of links through the establishment of NEEMARC, and individual participation with bodies such as Sunderland Antiquaries, Hexham and other Local History Societies, together with regional bodies such as the NE England History Institute, have all provided opportunities to interact with a wider public who are members and active researchers in these organizations. In terms of significance, the NEEMARC archive is a means of commemoration and memorialisation for many people, as well as a resource for historical investigation. NEEMARC provides the opportunity to explore regional and occupational identities in the recent economic, political and cultural history since industrialization.

More specifically, engagement with some key issues of current debate has reached audiences in the political worlds as well as through the broadcast media. Historians rarely enjoy influence over individual political policies or organisational practices, but they have a crucial role in forming the background to debates about identity at local, regional and national levels: thus, many of the activities of the Unit have impact in providing academic input to debates at national and international level.

Details of Activities and Impact:

1. *Public History*

- a. Prof. Peter Rushton was invited to give talks to local groups 2008-2012 – Hexham Local History Society (2011), ‘Dangerous Words: Local Sedition and the British State in the 18th Century’; Sunderland Cardiac Support Group, (2013), ‘Witchcraft in North-East England’; and Teesside Centre for Regional and Historical Research (1-day Conference, March 2013), ‘Sedition, Riot and Rebellion in 18th-century North Yorkshire’: audiences have been customarily 60-70 people for these events. He also acted as adviser and participant in a half-hour programme on witchcraft in 2011 on Tyne Tees Television.
- b. Stuart Howard was instrumental in establishing the close relationships with the trade unions whose records have formed the core of the NE England Mining Archive and Research Centre.
- c. Stuart Howard was a contributor to a radio programme, 'Britain In Their Sites: Peterlee', BBC Radio 4, May 2009, presented by Tristram Hunt, produced by Julia Johnson (in which NEEMARC was referenced explicitly).
- d. Peter Rushton is Publications Secretary of the NE England History Institute, whose conferences engage the public, and sits on the Institute’s management committee.
- e. Laura O’Brien has broadcast historical vignettes – a few minutes each week – in a regular slot on Irish radio (RTE)

2. *Institutional facilities, expertise or resources:* The NEEMARC Archive (directed by Dr Stuart Howard) has its own room and supporting facilities in the Murray Library, next to the History and Humanities sections of books and journals thus forming an integral part of the resources available for undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as the wider public. It has a website provision for accessing the resources, and engaging a wider public. See NEEMARC Case Study

3. *Current Controversies* –

- a. Kevin Yuill has participated in the debate on assisted dying. This has involved a large radio audience after an appearance in February 2011 on the Moral Maze programme; and TV debates with sitting MPs and with Debbie Purdy,

whose case in 2011 provoked the changes introduced by Director of Prosecutions Keir Starmer (3988 viewers have accessed the online video of the debate).

- b. Peter Hayes's research has supported transracial adoption as having positive outcomes for the children concerned at levels that are comparable with outcomes for adoptions where race is not at issue. He has gone on to explore the history of opposition to transracial adoption, and argued that it has been rooted in the ideology of black separatism in the USA. These views have been taken up by parliamentary politicians as well as constituting an essential part of broadcast public debate on the issue.
4. *Public Lecture Series*: The Lord Lawson Memorial lecture, in association with the NE Mining Archive and Research Centre (NEEMARC) has formed a crucial opening for public participation in mining and industrial history, bringing in many members of the public. Speakers have included David Douglass (2010) and Professor Paul Younger (2011).
5. *Leadership in Key Regional Organizations*: Dr Stuart Howard was Chair of the North East Labour History Society, 2003-8. A former colleague, Colm O'Brien is a Vice-President of Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne and organises an annual programme of 11 lectures, and has been a Trustee of Bede's World in Jarrow. Rushton is Publications Secretary of the NE England History Institute (NEEHI), an alliance of the five NE universities with a regional studies remit to link the academic world with the wider public.

c. Strategy and plans for supporting impact:

The History Unit intends to engage wider members of the public and local community in the research process, both in terms of use of resources such as the NEEMARC Archive, and through the work of Hayes and Yuill by participating in important areas of public controversy. Thus we intend to break down, as far as possible, the professional/amateur divide in research, and more fruitfully engage with the wider community of independent researchers and the interested public.

d. Relationship of the Unit's Approach to the submitted case studies:

The case studies reflect the different modes of engagement with, and reaching out to, the wider community. There has been a longstanding interest in regional and national identities in History, and this is reflected in the creation of an archive of unique material related to the Great Northern Coalfield and the national trade union organizations of the coal industry can be demonstrated by the NEEMARC case study.

Participation in national and international areas of public concern, with a view to having an impact on the terms of the debates and the language of public discourse (see case study of 'Current Controversies') reflects the aim of the Unit to affect modern society and its personal difficulties through an historically-informed dialogue.

Reach and Significance:

Participation in wider debates, particularly with the deployment of both critical and historical perspectives on urgent current issues has been an essential aspect of our work.

We have a strong regional presence in public forums and have reached, through radio in particular, a range of national audiences.