

Impact case study (REF3b)

| |
|--|
| Institution: Leeds Trinity University |
| Unit of Assessment: History |
| Title of case study: Impact on Public Engagement with Popular Presentations of the Past |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Professor Karen Sayer’s research on the rural, ‘Nature’ and the countryside, farming and the farmed animal in the Modern period, has informed three TV series (<i>Victorian Farm, Edwardian Farm, Wartime Farm</i>) viewed by millions in the UK and worldwide. These extremely popular series have had a major impact within public understandings of not only the history of agriculture and its strategic importance, but also rural social history within British society. Sayer’s input ensured a historically accurate representation of the past and, in the case of <i>Wartime Farm</i>, brought the rural experience into the discourse of World War II, which so often focuses on the urban. This impact has been further developed through a partnership with the Yorkshire Museum of Farming where Sayer undertook consultation with museum staff on exhibitions and displays.</p> |
| <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Professor Karen Sayer has been employed at Leeds Trinity University since 2001, as a Senior Lecturer, and as Professor of Social and Cultural History (2010 – present). With an established international reputation, Sayer was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in 2002. Her research in the field of environmental and cultural history focusing on farming, rural domesticity, technological change in the home and on the farm, labour and the farmed animal in the Modern period, continues to be widely cited in nineteenth century rural and social history, history of science, and cultural geography.</p> <p>Over the last decade, Sayer’s research has produced numerous insights in the above listed foci. In the article ‘A Sufficiency of Clothing’ (2002) (output 1) Sayer uses parliamentary papers, social commentary and advice literature to study dominant conceptualisations of women in the countryside. In particular, she considers the interface between clothing, the body and work with reference to social perceptions of women’s agricultural labour, and of women’s work in reference to the maintenance of clothing, e.g. sewing and washing. In doing this Sayer discusses the changes to the longer-term social, political and cultural meanings attached to labouring women and domesticity. Women’s labour is further considered in ‘The Labourer’s Welcome’ (2005) (output 2), which looks at the boundaries between home and work, especially what counts as domestic work, gardening or labour for women. The piece discusses official and cultural representations of the cottage and cottage garden in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, what work was undertaken in each space, how that work was gendered and to what supposed effect. Sayer highlights the movement between home and garden of garden produce, and the thrifty and adaptable use made of home-grown flowers, herbs and vegetables, and therefore argues for the material significance of the unaccounted work done in the cottage and garden for the home economy.</p> <p>Sayer has used oral testimony, built space and the material culture of labourers’ housing in order to read out from the experiential to interpret the wider history of social change in the countryside, with particular reference to gender (output 3). She demonstrates that the speed, degree and evidence of change varies depending on the particular element of the cottage being discussed (e.g. built structure, or services such as water and electricity), and also raises the question of the wider invisibility of these narratives of rural life in modern history.</p> <p>Focusing on technological change, Sayer has used the adoption of artificial illumination within poultry keeping, and its material influence on the animal body, as a case study of the processes of industrialisation, standardisation and consumption within farming (output 4). Her research demonstrates the very uneven way in which the processes of change, such as electrification, took place. The findings show that adopters of new technologies in farming frequently, and very effectively, resorted to alternative forms of light and power, such as paraffin and generators, which remained significant in country areas until long after the post-war period. Technological changes</p> |

Impact case study (REF3b)

have most recently been examined by Sayer with particular reference to the sexual division of labour within agricultural work (output 5). This research highlights that women remained involved in egg production for much longer than has normally been assumed, and that their invisibility in the history is attributable to a much wider and erroneous over-emphasis on 'progress' within the dominant narratives of modernisation, from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century.

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

1) Sayer, K. "A Sufficiency of Clothing": Dress and Domesticity in Victorian Britain' in *Textile History* Vol. 33, No. 1 (May 2002).

Cited in Anderson, C. (2004). *Legible bodies: Race, criminality and colonialism in South Asia*. Berg Publishers

2) Sayer, K., "The Labourer's Welcome": border crossings in the English country garden' in L. Dowler, J. Carubia and B. Szczygiel (eds.) *Gender and Landscape: Renegotiating morality and space* (Routledge, London and New York, 2005).

Published in a book of note, entered in RAE 2008. Chapter cited in a paper presented at Rural History 2013, Bern, Switzerland.

3) Sayer, K. 'The life of a Country Cottage' in Jo Croft & G. Smyth (eds.) *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture* (Rodopi, 2006)

Review of book in *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* picks out Sayer's chapter, highlighting how she unravels 'the complex construction of "home" as negotiating between past and present, rural and urban, empire and colony' and shows how the cottage 'embodies elements of class and gender, and how it gives rise to complex memories of border-crossing and migration' (2008, vol. 23, p. 72).

4) Sayer, K. 'Battery Birds, 'Stimulighting' and 'Twilighting': the ecology of standardized poultry technology', *History of Technology*, (2008), 28, pp. 149 – 168 (REF entry).

On reading list for History masters level module at King's College London. This article was cited at the Animal Housing Workshop, University of Oslo, 07th – 08th Nov 2013. This international workshop brought together scholars within the social sciences and humanities working on human-animal issues and was open to invited attendees only.

5) Sayer, K. "His Footmarks on Her Shoulders": the significance and place of women within poultry keeping in the British Countryside, c. 1880-c.1970' *Agricultural History Review* Vol. 61, No. 2 (2013) (REF entry).

Received very positive anonymous peer reviews with one describing the article as 'engagingly written, well structured, and nicely illustrated' and that Sayer 'very usefully draws upon corresponding literature from the US, Ireland and other parts of Europe to make some interesting international comparisons'.

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

The reach of Sayer's public engagement of her research has been wide through her media appearances, consultation work with museum staff on exhibitions and displays, and numerous public lectures. Her research has informed three popular TV series (*Victorian Farm, Edwardian Farm, Wartime Farm*) focused on agriculture, and influenced an exhibition on the Women's Land Army at the Yorkshire Museum of Farming. Sayer's particular involvement in *Wartime Farm* has brought the rural experience into the discourse of WWII which predominantly focuses on the urban

experience (particularly London). As a result of these activities Sayer has engaged with the general public, tourists and visitors to local museums, and those particularly interested in agricultural and women's history.

In the making of the Farm series, Lion TV (one of the leading and most successful independent producers in the UK) used specialists in agricultural history as consultants and on screen to ensure that each series remained accurate, and that the scripting could be fully referenced by the production team. Sayer was specifically sought out by researchers involved in the series (broadcast on BBC 2 in 2008, 2010 and 2012) due to her research on electrification in the countryside and the way in which her research makes the history of technology accessible through real life examples. Sayer's interpretation of material culture and experimental approach to modern history (which draws on approaches from archaeology) was particularly attractive to the producers.

Sayer acted as a consultant for all three series and her involvement increased throughout as she was interviewed for one episode of *Edwardian Farm* (2010) and appeared in three episodes of *Wartime Farm* (broadcast during September 2012: episode 1 (establishing the need for paraffin); episode 2 (laundry and women's history); and a Christmas Special (use of garden produce, e.g. flowers; thriftiness and provisioning), for which she was also interviewed and cited on the BBC website). When consulting with the researchers of Lion TV's *Wartime Farm*, Sayer provided primary material, grounded in her research on rural domestic life, that could be used either by her or the regular presenters experimentally, and that in the process of filming could lead to the interpretation of material objects, discussion of which led to a narrative of social history framed by the experiences of rural people 1939-1945. The process of interpretation through the handling of material objects on screen was grounded in archival research and Sayer's academic work on the period, and had to fit into the storyline/script and narrative of the broader episode, but was also open to discussion and uncertainty in that the final product or the object in use might or might not work. This uncertainty was in itself engaging for the audience, and addressed the difficulty within media presentations of the past, the production of a rather one-sided narrative. Specific examples of Sayer's contributions include advising on the use of an electric oven (which producers originally thought they would be able to use), access to the national grid, and the use of soap and its alternative, lye. Producers at Lion TV described her input as 'pertinent' and one which 'really bolsters our storyline' (email communication May 2012). They also particularly valued Sayer's work on electric fencing and the provision of water for livestock, two subjects which producers found to be 'scarcely written about'. Consequently Sayer's involvement was 'vital for putting these sequences together' (letter from *Wartime Farm* producer, August 2012).

The *Wartime Farm* series aired on prime-time BBC 2, with the first episode receiving 2.38 million viewers and subsequent episodes receiving around 2.5 million viewers (then repeated on other platforms). The series has been positively reviewed, for example, Sarah Dempster, *The Guardian* Saturday 1 September 2012, described it as 'a winning attempt to recreate a year in the life of a busy Hampshire farm'. In a similar vein, David Chater, in *The Times* Saturday Review 1 September 2012, p. 40, designated *Wartime Farm* 'Pick of the day.' Sayer's research has also been cascaded through BBC books linked to two of the series (*Edwardian Farm* and *Wartime Farm*). In addition, Sayer provided information on the Women's Voluntary Service helping everyday people for a feature on the BBC website. This feature discussed the role of women during wartime Christmas, coinciding with the Christmas special of *Wartime Farm*.

There is evidence to suggest that the general viewing public showed positive and interested responses to the *Wartime Farm* series. Tweets relating to the Christmas special were archived on 23rd December 2012 and analysed. 146 tweets were sent that simply mentioned the episode,

promoting the broadcast time. However, a significantly greater number (248) provided their opinion on the show (such as 'Watching wartime farm on BBC 2 and learning so much' and 'Christmas Wartime Farm. Another fascinating, thought-provoking history programme from the BBC'), or engaged with the content, mentioning specific details that Sayer was involved in ('According to Wartime Farm Christmas, during the war, British people made Christmas decorations from salvaged Luftwaffe chaff. Cool.').

In addition to being aired across the UK, *Wartime Farm* has been distributed to other countries, meaning that Sayer's consultation work and appearances in the series have reached both national and international audiences. Knowledge Network in Canada, which encompasses a consortium of 75 of the country's top universities part funded by the provincial government and 35,000 individual donors, has signed up for the *Wartime Farm* series. ViaSat, a DBS distributor and TV broadcaster, owned by the Swedish media conglomerate Modern Times Group, has purchased the distribution rights for Eastern Europe and Russia from distributor All3Media International. These other countries that have broadcast *Wartime Farm* all have large rural areas. This suggests that there is an interest from such countries in the rural experience portrayed in the series rather than the urban wartime experience that dominates the discourse.

Though Sayer's input to the Farm series was grounded in her research on the rural, 'Nature' and the countryside, farming and the farmed animal, Lion TV have asked Sayer questions which have not yet been fully addressed by the academic community. This led Sayer to access archives at the Yorkshire Museum of Farming (and to further academic research) in order to address these questions. Sayer developed this relationship with the museum, offering to deliver public lectures centred on her research. Aligning with the broadcasting of the *Wartime Farm* series and the (then forthcoming) Christmas special, Sayer gave a talk in December 2012 at the museum, which included an object handling session. It was attended by 39 members of the public including Women's Institute groups, local history societies and the coordinator for the East and West Ridings Women's Land Army Reunion Group. Following this Sayer has worked with museum staff (Dec 2012-Feb 2013) in the interpretation of panels for an exhibition on the Women's Land Army (WLA), that opened in Spring 2013. This exhibition aimed to raise awareness of the WLA through using the collections of the museum to create a permanent exhibition and a programme of outreach events. The museum has stated that they have benefited from Sayer's 'expertise, connections and enthusiasm for the project'. Visitor comments regarding the exhibition have shown an appreciation for the promotion of the WLA ("A wonderful exhibition doing the vital work of the WLA proud. So great to see land girls inspiring work being recognised and appreciated. Many thanks.") and indicated an engagement with the displayed collection ("Excellent informative displays. Makes you think about the past."). Sayer's research has therefore also had impact through contributing to the quality of the tourist experience in a cultural heritage setting and developing stimuli to tourism.

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

Archived tweets related to *Wartime Farm*

Archived email exchanges with Lion TV demonstrating some of Sayer's input to *Wartime Farm* (Sept 2011, Nov – Dec 2011, March – May 2012, July – Nov 2012) and *Edwardian Farm* (Jul – Aug 2010)

Letter from Giulia Clark (Producer of *Wartime Farm*, Lion TV)

Sayer interview on BBC website for Christmas Special <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/0/20700219>

Letter from Naomi Beeley (including visitor comments), Community Outreach, Yorkshire Museum of Farming