

**Institution: Birkbeck, University of London**

**Unit of Assessment: 30 / History**

**a. Context**

The Department of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) spans a very wide range of research, from early human history to the present, and its research has had impact from across that whole spectrum. We have not on the whole attempted to ‘target’ particular audiences, but the following groups have been the main beneficiaries of our research to date:

- The general public: people who are keen consumers of history books, periodicals, radio and television programmes;
- The media, including the BBC, Channel 4, *History Today*, the *BBC History Magazine*, *The Times*, *The Guardian* and the *Lancet*, British Armed Forces Radio; foreign media such as RAI (Italian TV) and the international syndicated press;
- Museums and heritage organisations, including the Museum of London, Imperial War Museum, the Freud Museum, London Metropolitan Archive, English Heritage, Yale Art Gallery (USA), Wellcome Trust, Bishopsgate Institute, Geffrye Museum, Historic Royal Palaces, London Transport Museum, Must Farm Quarry, British Library, Wiener Library and the Red Cross archive;
- Communities, institutions and social movements with specific reasons for being interested in history, including the Diocese of Ely, working-class gay men, gypsy and traveller communities, amateur archaeologists and metal detector clubs;
- UK government agencies, international organisations and political think-tanks, including the Foreign Office, the Labour Party, Cooperatives UK, the Runnymede Trust, Department for Communities and Local Government, the House of Lords, Members of Parliament, the British Council, the Council of Europe, the World Bank and the China Medical Board.
- Education: Secondary school and FE students, lifelong learners.

Areas of research which have particularly attracted non-academic attention during this REF period include historical archaeology (research in the internationally significant Dura-Europos dig; Baird’s research provided important material for the Yale Art Gallery “Crossroads of Antiquity” exhibition in the USA), classics (notably, Edwards’ successful 2013 BBC4 series ‘Mothers, Murderers and Mistresses: Empresses of Ancient Rome’); late Antiquity (Humfress’ contribution to the Channel 4 TV series ‘Christianity: a History’); the history of health and disease in early modern Europe (Harding’s work with English Heritage and other bodies on heritage protection and archaeology); World War Two, camps and public health (Reinisch’s work was used by the Imperial War Museum in the exhibition “Beyond the Camps”).

More recently, HCA has developed new research subjects of public relevance such as sexuality, race, religion and global history, where we actively engage a number of non-academic audiences and stakeholders in the cultural sector, business, professions, government and civil society. Our work demonstrates how historical knowledge can enhance understanding and provide insight for a range of contemporary issues, from sexual politics and discrimination to consumption and migration.

**b. Approach to impact**

The Department of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) has a longstanding commitment to public engagement and sharing research with non-academic partners and audiences locally, nationally and internationally. Its academic excellence and reputation provides a strong basis for effective public engagement and the development of partnerships with stakeholders. It continues to build on the foundations laid by the late Eric Hobsbawm (who, as emeritus professor, remained an active force in the department until his death in 2012) and on the work of former colleagues including Richard Evans and Mark Mazower (whose impact on the public understanding of Nazism, the European past and the international order have continued into this REF cycle). Our commitment to enhancing public understanding of key historical themes is further reflected in the appointment of high-profile honorary fellows and public historians such as Antony Beevor (author of *The Second World War*, 2012), Tim Boon (Head of Research and Public History at the Science

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Museum), Julie Peakman (general editor of Berg's *History of Sexuality* series), John Tosh (author of *Why History Matters*, 2008, and active participant in the 'History and Policy' think-tank).

The Department encourages an energetic approach towards public engagement and working with partners and stakeholders to establish the relevance of historical research and understanding to the contemporary world.

**Public engagement:**

The underpinning ethos of the department is to make history accessible to a wider public. Success in writing for public audiences, building bridges between academic rigour and popular interests, is reflected in the high sales of books, such as Figes' *Natasha's Dance: A cultural history of Russia* (2003) which sold over 200,000 copies, Arnold's popular *History: A Very Short Introduction* (2000) which has enjoyed six-figure sales (70,000 in English, the remainder in its various translations), and White's prize-winning books on London in the modern period. In addition to preparing accessible books and print publications, many colleagues are active in online dissemination of their work through podcasts, blogs and other social media.

Public dissemination of the department's research takes place extensively through the media. More than half the department regularly contributes to television, radio and print journalism, from talks on religious fundamentalism in Britain and Ireland for the British Armed Forces Radio (Brady) to the creation of the Italian nation for BBC Radio 4's "The Invention of Italy" (de Vivo), to the power-politics of medieval confession for Radio 3's "The Essay" (Arnold). Colleagues have since 2008 taken part in nine episodes of "In Our Time" (BBC) with over two million listeners every week. Colleagues have been expert consultants on series such as BBC Wartime Farm series (Taylor) and have featured in BBC radio programmes (e.g. *Wavelength*, *Thinking Allowed*, *The Essay*) on topics ranging from Augustan Rome (Edwards) to Victorian London (White), from hunger strikes (Bourke) to citizen consumers (Trentmann). In addition to reaching out to non-academic enthusiasts in *History Today*, *BBC History Magazine* and website, our work has appeared in the local, national and the international syndicated press. In 2008-09, one colleague (Bourke) published over twenty articles in *The Times*, *The Guardian* and the *Lancet*. An article on BBC History News Magazine Online (April 2012), based on Pick's book on psychoanalysis in the fight against Nazis, had over 300,000 hits. The international reach of the department's work is indicated by Italian TV's use of Riall's new interpretation of Italian Unification, which was watched by over a million viewers (Rai Uno, May and Nov 2010).

**Working with stakeholders and cultivating partnerships:**

The department has two research centres: the Raphael Samuel History Centre (RSHC) and the Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism -- the focus of two of our five impact case studies. They play a major role assisting the department to respond effectively to stakeholders' interests and to cultivate partnerships which explore how history research can help us understand and deal better with contemporary problems. The Pears Institute and the RSHC have provided members of the department with a public platform to apply their historical insight on controversial contemporary topics, such as boycotts and the role of fair trade.

Work with stakeholders includes political think-tanks and commissions from British and international organisations, such as the Wellcome Trust and the World Bank. Reynolds has acted as archaeological advisor to the Diocese of Ely as well as giving his expertise to amateur archaeologists and metal detector clubs; in 2011-12, he contributed to 428 consultations and 112 briefs, which fed into planning and management processes. Bourke has worked with the medical profession in her Wellcome project on the history of pain, and has communicated the findings of that research in broad and imaginative ways to audiences including GPs, sociologists and pain-management specialists. Drawing on his expertise in the history of psychoanalysis, Pick has discussed the relation between psychology and politics at the Freud Museum and elsewhere. Other examples include Taylor's research on gypsy and traveller communities which led to invitations to participate in policy discussions at the House of Commons. Rueger serves as on the international expert group advising the National Maritime Museum and regularly gives public seminars, strengthening the partnership between Birkbeck and the Museum, which attracts more

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than two million visitors a year and close to 100,000 participants in formal educational visits. In archaeology (McFadyen), the Department's field school "Buried Humanities" works with local farmers and Hanson UK at Must Farm Quarry in Cambridgeshire, a Bronze Age site of national historic significance. Humfress works with the Spanish film company Lopez-Li Films on one of the European Union FP7 ITN projects.

An outstanding example of the department's approach is Reinisch's work in 2009 with the Foreign Office Commission on the International Tracing Service Archive, which lobbied the government to digitise 50 million records concerning 17 million people, including all concentration and slave labour camp records collected by the four Allies in Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe. When the National Archive and British Library declined to house the digital archive, Reinisch worked with the Wiener Library (Britain's largest collection on the Nazi era) to gain support from Birkbeck and the Foreign Office in favour of the Wiener Library taking the collection. Thus a vital resource was opened up for the restitution claims of individual survivors.

**Working with schools:**

Colleagues are often invited to talk about their research to secondary school students. The late Barry Coward (d. 2011), president of the Historical Association (2005-8), probably did more than any other scholar to shape the way pupils think about the Stuart Age; his textbook has sold over half a million copies. Sapire has introduced school children to new approaches in African and imperial history. Reinisch has presented her research on refugees. Brady and Cook have provided popular podcasts on gay and lesbian history for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) week for the Historical Association; this has been the first teaching resource for LGBT history since Section 28 legislation (banning the "promotion of homosexuality" in schools) was overturned, with lectures by Brady and Cook based on their research and publications.

**Consultancies:**

The Department encourages scholars to take their work and insights to interested stakeholders outside the academic community. Several colleagues have been commissioned as consultants on the basis of their expertise. For example, Bourke's research on the body in history led to her being chosen to oversee the 2011 policy review of the Wellcome Trust, a charity, which transformed the funding model (£12 million at that time) and produced a new funding stream for the medical humanities. Amrith's research on public health in the developing world led to consultancies for the World Bank and the China Medical Board. Trentmann has provided insights from historical research on consumption to the Council of Europe, contributing to the report on *Rethinking Consumer Behaviour for the Well-Being of All* (Dec. 2008), and more recently to the Labour Party's independent review of consumer policy (2012), headed by Ed Mayo, chief executive of Cooperatives UK. Lovell's expertise has made her a cultural ambassador between the United Kingdom and China.

**c. Strategy and plans****Thematic focus:**

Over the coming period HCA plans to build on its strong reputation with the public and non-academic partners around four broad thematic clusters. These relate to existing and potential user groups and beneficiaries. They aim to pool our collective resources and experiences in core areas of high-impact research, facilitating the exchange and collaboration between young and senior scholars in the department and to capitalize on the knowledge about impact activities in the past; to strengthen the synergies between our activities and expertise; and to help us further in identifying future partners and stakeholders with whom we can develop research and cultivate pathways for impact in the future.

The thematic clusters are:

- + *public and mental health* to share information with health professionals and patients and explore how historical knowledge can inform contemporary practice;
- + *museums, libraries and heritage* to work more effectively with cultural institutions and build on the experience of our archaeology colleagues with architects, developers and tourism;

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+ *state and society*, with a focus on civil liberties, to involve NGOs and cement our relationships with schools in partnership with the Historical Association;  
 + *race, minorities, identity and assimilation*, to spread our insights on these topics to amateur historians and family genealogists as well as relevant NGOs.

**Research centres:**

Our research centres will continue to provide an important platform for communicating our expertise to non-academic stakeholders and cultivating partnerships for applied research. They also offer early career researchers opportunities to work with external partners, within the research centre framework.

**Sharing good practice:**

A major AHRC grant under the “care for the future” scheme has been awarded to Trentmann for a research project on “material cultures of energy” which will involve partnerships with 20 organisations, including the World Energy Council, the UK Department of Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Institute of Advanced Sustainability Studies (Potsdam, Germany). The bid for this project learned from work undertaken by Bourke with the Wellcome Collection (see above), for example in its incorporation in the grant design of additional cultural genres, such as musical forms of communication, to reach non-academic communities. In addition, colleagues’ previous work with stakeholders and cultural institutions facilitated thinking about potential pathways and developing partnerships with the Science Museum and the British Film Institute on the AHRC grant. Similarly, in its design of web-based communication and use of technologies, Wachsmann’s project on Nazi camps learned from the experience of the ESRC-AHRC Cultures of Consumption research programme. Special away days as well as the group discussions of the thematic clusters provide us with an opportunity to discuss the lessons from these experiences within the department.

The department will continue to encourage colleagues to draw actively on resources provided by the college and school, including support provided by the Knowledge Transfer and Impact Manager, the Research Grants office, Birkbeck’s Department for External Relations and in-service training provision. An impact working group will facilitate the recording and sharing of experience, activities and data, and provide a forum for thinking about individual and departmental strategies and opportunities for impact, including effective development of online and social media to support collaborative work and public engagement.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

The selected case studies exemplify the department’s national and international range and approach to developing research impact:

- Lovell’s research on modern China exemplifies impact on cultural life and public discourse through work with a range of cultural agencies.
- Amrith’s research on the history of public health in Asia exemplify benefits of a historical perspective to policymakers and professional development.
- Feldman’s case study on anti-semitism and discrimination shows how one of the department’s Research Centres has built on a particular research base to influence a significant area of international public discourse and policy debate.
- Professor Figes’ case study on private lives in Soviet Russia reflects the department’s commitment to public engagement through popular but academically rigorous history.
- Dr Cook’s case study on gay history describes how community-oriented historical research can impact on lifelong learning and facilitate a more complex understanding of history among LGBT communities and wider networks.