

Institution: University of Chester

Unit of Assessment: 30: History

a. Context

In late 1996, Chester's Department of History and Archaeology forged a unique link with the city's Military Museum to create school teaching packs based around the museum's military collections. Writing at the time, the *Liverpool Daily Post* remarked with great perception that the 'ground-breaking venture' will 'pave the way for similar projects across the country' (*Liverpool Daily Post*, 25.01.1997). Seventeen years may now have passed but the values, ideas and beliefs that underpinned this project continue to hold true today. As the only academic history department in Cheshire, and one of the oldest in the North West of England, the Department has always placed itself at the centre of the local and regional community. Stemming from an impressive research base, our impact activities span from talks and school workshops through to heritage tours and interpretation.

The real strength of the Department's impact strategy rests on three foundational pillars: its structure, its research and an impressive range of resources. First, in terms of structure, the Department has a research coordinator (currently Dr Tim Grady) whose job is to direct historical enquiry, research projects and grant bids within the Department. The incumbent of this post also works with the Faculty's research officer and the University's Dean of Research to ensure a high impact strategy is both designed and maintained.

The second basis of the Department's successful impact work has been its members' often ground-breaking historical research. As the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) recognised, much of the Department's research is of international quality. With recent articles and monographs ranging from the English Civil War through to Cold War America, there has been considerable scope for translating research into the wider public sphere.

Finally, the Department has dedicated financial resources in place to ensure that colleagues have the time and money to complete impact projects. After the last RAE, in common with other institutions, the Department dedicated 20% of its QR money to impact activity. Alongside this financial support, the Department also has a well-developed infrastructure which ensures its research activities are firmly embedded within the wider community. Three longstanding seminar series, Departmental newsletters and social media newsfeeds, including Twitter, all offer the general public an initial means to engage with historians' research.

b. Approach to impact

The Department's impact may well stem from the research of individual historians, but all colleagues play a role in the actual development and application of this activity. This ensures that there is coordination, collaboration and a clear rationale behind the work undertaken. As is the case with the Department's teaching and research activities, a carefully considered strategy also underpins all impact activity.

Currently the Department's impact strategy runs on a four to five year cycle. The broad parameters of the Department's impact strategy are laid out at an annual away day meeting. These objectives are then reviewed annually at the start of each new academic year. When plans for the last impact strategy were drawn up in October 2008, two interlinked ideas shaped the Department's thinking. The first was that impact needed to be drawn broadly. This reflected the Department's strongly held belief that as historical research – regardless of topic or period – informs public discussion, all colleagues should have an opportunity to present their work to a wider audience. The second underpinning belief was that impact work not only needed to stimulate the public's imagination but also to challenge popular ideas about the past. For the period 2008-2012, these twin beliefs resulted in the formulation of an impact strategy based around three focal points: outreach to schools, public lectures and heritage interpretation.

The first of these – school outreach – offers an efficient and valuable way to engage the next

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generation of young historians. Beyond this, though, the Department's research provides school pupils with an opportunity to think about aspects of the past that are not normally a part of the national curriculum. In order to reach as large an audience as possible, the Department has promoted a series of one day history conferences to regional schools. In 2009, for example, all members of the Department discussed aspects of their work to A-Level students from West Cheshire. The event included talks, workshops, document interpretation and even a tour of civil war Chester led by Professor Peter Gaunt. Subsequent conferences have focused on medieval Rome and the constitutions of the 17th and 18th century. Besides these internal activities, members of the Department have also travelled across the country to speak to sixth form audiences. Dr John Doran, for example, was a frequent speaker at the Royal Lancaster Grammar School where he discussed the Crusades and the Papacy with students, while Dr Donna Jackson has run several workshops on the Vietnam War, based around her scholarship on American foreign policy.

Over the last four year period, public lectures have formed the second strand of the Department's impact strategy. Giving short talks and longer lectures, grounded in the latest historical research, has proved to be an exemplary way of reaching significant sections of the public in the North West of England and beyond. In order to provide a forum for this enterprise, the Department relaunched a series of public lunchtime lectures that had existed in a more basic form since the late 1990s. In conjunction with Chester's Grosvenor Museum, the Department now stages two series of lectures a year. Each of these is designed to bring the public face-to-face with the latest historical research. These have proved to be incredibly popular events. Over 2,000 people have attended the series since 2008 which has provided the Department with an additional revenue of £5291. As a further sign of their esteem, the recent series on 'The Legacies of Conflict' even featured in the *New Statesman* (09.05.2011).

In addition, as part of its last impact strategy, the Department provided – and continues to provide – support to enable colleagues to speak to a wide range of societies and groups. A budget has been set aside to provide financial assistance for these activities – travel costs, advertising, for example – and speakers are given latitude in their teaching to allow them to prepare their talks. The results of this policy have been impressive. All colleagues have delivered lectures and seminars both locally, nationally and internationally. Recently, for example, Dr Keith McLay addressed the Hargrave and Huxley History Group and will soon address the Weaverham History Society on the Duke of Marlborough.

Third, when outlining its impact approach in 2008, the Department decided to place great weight on the public interpretation of heritage. This is a theme that crosses over into a number of colleagues' work, while crucially also going to the heart of the way in which many people actually discover history. Dr Donna Jackson, for example, has acted as a consultant for the National Trust, supervising research into the landscape history of Speke Hall and Mendips in Liverpool. In a similar fashion, Professor Peter Gaunt has worked with the Battlefields Trust, Yorkshire Archaeology and two local councils in designing an interpretative strategy for Naseby and Marston Moor.

However, by far the most ambitious heritage project was led by Dr John Doran. During the Department's previous impact cycle, he launched a project designed to increase public awareness and understanding of the city of Rome amongst communities in the North West of England. There were two elements to the project: a series of public talks placing Rome in its historic context and a study tour to the city also to be led by Dr Doran. A successful bid for Knowledge Transfer funding (£2,000) enabled a preliminary site visit to Rome during summer 2012 and promotion of the events to begin. Tragically, though, the sudden death of Dr Doran in October 2012 meant that this path breaking impact project never came to fruition. Dr Doran's inventive marriage of academic scholarship, heritage interpretation and public tours has laid the framework for this form of impact work which other members of the Department hope to build on in the future.

c. Strategy and plans

After the obvious success of the last impact cycle, which ran from 2008 to 2012, the Department has recently drawn up an impact strategy that will run until 2017/18. The basic principles that had

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informed the Department's previous approach to impact remained true in this new strategy, which is to pursue a broad approach but one that also challenges the public's historical understanding. However, there has been one significant change in approach. Rather than focusing on specific forms of impact, the Department has decided that its new strategy will concentrate on two specific themes. This development will lead to an even more coherent impact strategy, while at the same time still embracing the contribution of all colleagues.

The first new focal point is the First World War, including its pre-history and legacies. With the war's centenary fast approaching, there is considerable opportunity for the Department to use its research to connect with the public's interest in the war's history. Beyond this, however, the war also provides an obvious thematic focus as the history of warfare is already firmly embedded in much of the Department's research. Almost all of Chester's historians have published on the history of conflict; the Department runs a longstanding and very popular MA in Military History; and in 2014 it will also stage an international conference on 'Minorities and the First World War' (<http://www.chester.ac.uk/node/16941>).

Building on the research above, the Department has already started to arrange a series of significant events based around the centenary of the Great War. As with the previous impact strategy, members of the Department will once again run a series of visits to local schools to bring the war's history to a younger generation. These workshops will be complemented by a special series of lectures on the First World War to be held at the Grosvenor Museum in Chester. On a much larger scale, the Department will also exhibit its research on the conflict to the people of Cheshire and North West England more generally. In conjunction with Cheshire East Council, the Department is a lead partner in a wide-ranging heritage project: Cheshire's Great War Stories. This will see members of the Department investigate local sites of memory and then use digital kiosks within Chester Cathedral to display their findings. As part of these centenary events, the Department also intends to produce an exhibition related to the 2014 conference on wartime minorities. Cheshire Military Museum has already agreed to host the exhibition and a bid will soon be submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for financial support.

The second focus of the Department's new impact work is the history of the urban environment, through a project entitled 'Chester and the Wider World'. This is an area of research that links the work of the Department's medievalists, early modern and modern historians whose collective interest is in spatial aspects of cityscapes and the material environment of the city. In this respect, Chester as a city with one of England's most historic centres, offers a unique case study for this project. Building upon its strong links with heritage agencies, local museums and schools, the Department will highlight the city's connections to Britain, Ireland and the wider world.

Drawing on the Department's research expertise, this impact project seeks to highlight important moments in the history of Chester in the Roman, medieval, early modern and modern periods and draw out its significant connections to the continent and beyond. By working in close consultation with Cheshire West Council, Chester History and Heritage and local schools, a series of day events are planned based around key moments in the urban history of Chester. These will include public lectures from academics, heritage stakeholders and museum conservators, alongside workshops for primary and secondary pupils. Further impact outputs from the event will include an interactive webpage targeted at a public audience, including podcasts as well as a collection of learning resources for primary and secondary teachers. To help support this initiative, the Department has decided to place a funding bid with the Sainsbury's Community Grant fund.

d. Relationship to case studies

The Department's two impact case studies demonstrate very clearly the fruits of the research and impact strategy that was implemented in 2008. Both case studies contain a raft of impact activities, based around a particular research theme. Crucially, it was the Department's overall research and impact strategy that made these two case studies such a success. The decision to promote school outreach, public lectures and heritage interpretation secured the wider framework in which the impact work of the case study authors sits.