

<b>Institution: Sheffield Hallam University</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 30 History</b>
<b>Title of case study: Life on the Land: the British countryside from 1800</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study presents the impact of research undertaken by Dr Nicola Verdon on the social and economic history of the British countryside in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her findings, which focus on rural work patterns, family life and gender relations, are published in leading academic journals and have been used to inform and contribute to several public impacts: a museum exhibition on women's work on the land, a leading theatre production which centres on the fortunes of a Devon farming family, and several programmes on the broadcast media (radio and TV) on rural life and labour.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Verdon's body of research focuses on two key inter-related topics linked to the history of the countryside in the modern period: firstly, rural labour markets, employment patterns and the farm workforce, and secondly, rural households and family life. This research has been informed by, and makes a major contribution to, the 'new' rural social history, emphasising the complexities of class, gender and region in the countryside in the past.</p> <p>Dr Verdon has been in employment at Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) for two periods: January 2005 to August 2007 (as Lecturer, then Senior Lecturer) and from January 2011 to the present (as Reader in History). All the research (and impacts) presented in this statement represent work undertaken whilst at SHU in these two periods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research undertaken in her first period of employment was underpinned by the award of a year-long fellowship from the Museum of English Rural Life in (September 2005 to August 2006), which enabled her to use their extensive library and archive holdings. This resulted in several journal articles on gender, labour and agriculture from the late Victorian period to the beginning of the Second World War (one co-written with Alun Howkins – see references 2-4). Because of the interval between conducting the research, preparing the manuscript and final publication, these appeared between 2008 and 2010, but the underpinning research was carried out whilst in employment at SHU.</li> <li>• Research undertaken in her second period of employment, since early 2011, has already resulted in some key publications detailed below (see references 5-6).</li> </ul> <p>References 1 - 3 relate to Dr Verdon's interest in the farm work force, labour and wage patterns. Reference 1 shows that farm service survived across many areas of southern and midland England well into the 1920s, a 'survival' that has implications for broader debates on the nature of the rural workforce and social relations. In Reference 2, Verdon shows that thousands of women were still employed as agricultural labourers in the interwar years, arousing conflicting responses from various rural organisations including the National Agricultural Labourers Union, the Women's Institutes and the Women's Farm and Garden Association. Reference 3 traces the evolution of the minimum wage in agriculture in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Dr Verdon is currently writing a book that collates and extends this research on the farm labour force to cover the Second World War and its aftermath provisionally entitled <i>Working the Land: The Farm Worker in England from 1850 to the Present Day</i> (contracted to Palgrave).</p> <p>The second area of Dr Verdon's research, (References 4, 5 and 6), relates to farmers and farming families. Farmers as a group are neglected in the historiography as they have left few written records. Verdon's recent article on farm women, domesticity and social change in the 1920s and 1930s used the printed farming press to show the vital economic and social contribution made by farmer's wives in the interwar years (Reference 4). Her attention has recently shifted to exploring the role of women as farmers in their own right through an article on the promotion of farming as a professional career for single, middle-class women between 1890 and 1939 using contemporary journal literature and personal memoir (Reference 5), and a book chapter utilising the memoir of</p>

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Louisa Cresswell, a remarkable Norfolk widow who farmed 900 acres on the Royal Sandringham estate in the 1860s and 70s (Reference 6).

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

Underpinning research outputs: the following articles have all been published in leading international peer-reviewed journals or peer-reviewed books.

1. Howkins, A, and Verdon, N 'Adaptable and sustainable? Male farm service and the agricultural labour force in midland and southern England, c.1850- 1925', *Economic History Review* 61, 2 (May 2008), pp. 467-95  
doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0289.2007.00405.x
2. Verdon, N., 'Agricultural labour and the contested nature of women's work in interwar England and Wales', *Historical Journal* 52, 1 (March 2009), pp. 109-30  
doi: 10.1017/S0018246X08007334
3. Verdon, N, and Howkins, A., 'The state and the farm worker: the evolution of the minimum wage in agriculture in England and Wales, 1909-24', *Agricultural History Review*, 57, II (2009) pp. 257-74 ISSN: 0002-1490
4. Verdon, N., 'The modern countrywoman': Farm women, domesticity and social change in interwar Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 70, Autumn 2010, pp. 86-107  
doi:10.1093/hwj/dbq016
5. Verdon, N., 'Business and pleasure: Middle-class women's work and the professionalisation of farming in England, c.1890-1939', *Journal of British Studies*, vol 51, April 2012, pp. 393-415  
doi: 10.1086/663981
6. 'The lady farmer: Gender, widowhood and farming in nineteenth-century England', in ed., R. W. Hoyle, *The Farmer in England, 1660-1950* (Ashgate: 2013), pp. 241-262

References 3 and 6 can be supplied by the HEI on request. References 1, 2, 4 and 5 are included as Dr Verdon's research outputs in the HEI's REF submission.

#### Research grants:

Verdon, N., 2005-6: Museum of English Rural Life Research Fellow (£10,000 grant). Project entitled '*Gendered lives: the changing roles and identities of women workers in rural England, c.1918-1939*'

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

Dr Verdon has contributed to impact activities with museums, theatre, and the broadcast media. These activities have harnessed her academic expertise and applied them to a number of projects relating broadly to the social and economic history of the British countryside in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They have enabled different groups of communities – exhibition audiences, actors, and TV viewers – to engage with, and interpret, various aspects of modern rural history.

#### Museum curatorship

In 2011 Dr Verdon was the guest curator of an exhibition at the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) entitled 'Land Ladies: Women and Farming in England, 1900-1950' (Source 6). This ran from January to April 2011. It was publicised widely in both the local and national press, receiving notices in, amongst other outlets, *The Times* (March 3, 2011), Radio Berkshire's Anne Diamond show (March 1, 2011) and a two page spread in the BBC's *Who Do you Think You Are?* Magazine (April 2011, sales 22,000). The aim was to broaden the public's understanding of the history of agricultural work and was attended by a total of 7,900 members of the public. The exhibition focused on Verdon's research into women's involvement in agriculture, and centred upon one of the key contentions of her research – that women remained important, even vital, to many

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developments in modern farming in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (References 2, 4 and 5). Verdon was the sole author of all the exhibition banners, which had to condense into 150 words each the history of women in farming for a public audience. There were 10 banners and the topics covered were agricultural education for women, rural women's organisations, women's work in the dairy, with poultry, in agricultural field work and horticulture, the role of farmers' wives, women farmers, and the impact of the Second World War. She worked closely with the curatorial staff to choose appropriate photographic/printed images and exhibits from the museum collections for display (Source 1). This exhibition was part of a MERL case-study undertaken under the auspices of the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement to cement the relationship between external academic researchers and MERL's public programme (Source 7). It was accompanied by a public lecture, 'Business and pleasure: women, work and professionalization of farming as a female career in England, 1900-1950' given by Dr Verdon at MERL on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2011 to mark International Women's Day (attendance: 50).

### Theatre

Since 2010 Verdon has worked with New London Theatre's production of Michael Morpurgo's 'War Horse'. Much of the first act of the play is set on a farm in Devon in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. She has worked with four successive casts of actors since 2010, conducting day-long workshops on the history of rural England before 1914 with the full cast (up to 25 actors at each workshop). Her research expertise has shaped how actors understand and approach their roles. They carry out research on their characters prior to the seminars and then discuss their ideas, issues and problems with Dr Verdon. The workshops make a link between Dr Verdon's research interests and the key strands of the play: family farming (the use of family labour and the role of the farmers' wife), farm production (labour on the land and the use of horse power), and rural social relations (class and gender in the countryside) (References 1, 3 and 5). The Associate Director of the play, who liaises with Dr Verdon has explained the impact her sessions have had on directors/actors, and ultimately the audience: "*Your knowledge of this time and the people who lived during it allows the actors, and us, to really understand the situations in which these people lived, thus bringing life to the characters more accurately ... this results in a more visceral experience to the audience as the characters are real rather than caricatures ... your visits give us immediate access to this time and place*" (Source 3).

### Media

Dr Verdon's expert knowledge has also been drawn upon by the broadcast media and she has made substantial contributions to several high-profile radio and TV programmes including Open Country (Radio 4), Victorian Farm (BBC2), Mud, Sweat and Tractors (BBC4). All of these, and those outlined below, involved considerable dialogue between Dr Verdon and the show's producers/researchers, via phone/email to establish the research context and main issues, and in person on 'set'. Contributions since 2011 are detailed here.

Wartime Farm (Lion TV, Episode 2, BBC2, first broadcast September 13<sup>th</sup> 2012, audience 2.7 million on the night; 3.84 million including repeat and i-player viewing). An on-air contribution was made, with Verdon helping two of the programme presenters make silage. The dialogue concentrated on the substantial contribution women made to farm work, including areas of innovation such as making silage, stored fodder for animal feed, which the government encouraged during the war. The audience appreciation measure for this programme was very high (score of 88 = highly rated by viewers). According to the programme Director '*Verdon's contribution, including 'generosity in terms of her time and sharing her knowledge', were an 'amazing asset' and 'instrumental ... enabling the producers to explore the stories of women that have hitherto been little seen on television*'. She concluded that '*as a result of her close collaboration with us, a slice of the history of rural women has been brought to an audience of millions*.' (Source 4) Immediately after this programme was aired Dr Verdon was contacted by several other non-academic agencies connected to the promotion of farming history. As a result she gave a public lecture on the history of women's work on the land at the Yorkshire Museum of Farming, February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013. Her talk linked the contribution made by the Women's Land Army to the broader history of women's work in agriculture across the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The day included oral contributions from five women who had served in the WLA in Yorkshire, followed by a

Second World War themed tea and was attended by 82 members of the public. In summer 2013 an article by Dr Verdon appeared in *Heavy Horse* magazine on the history of women's association with working horses on the farm, commissioned by the editor after watching Wartime Farm.

The Restoration Man (Channel 4, first broadcast January 27<sup>th</sup> 2013, audience 1.88 million). This programme was centred on the restoration of a 19<sup>th</sup> century farm and piggery in the village of Egmonton, Nottinghamshire. Dr Verdon assisted the researcher in putting together the history sequences in the early stages of the programme, offering advice on the types of sources to consult when researching farm/agricultural history, and analysing the content of these sources. Dr Verdon went on to feature in the programme as an 'Historical expert', guiding the presenter through the census returns for the farm between 1851 and 1911, outlining how the farm family household, including living-in farm servants, changed over time (Reference 1). She then assisted with the 'fact checking' after the filming. The programme researcher commented that Dr Verdon '*ensured the accuracy of the historical claims made in the programme*' and helped '*shape the content of the history sequences*' (Source 5).

Sunday Supplement (BBC Radio Wales, first broadcast July 7<sup>th</sup> 2013, audience 22,000). This is the flagship weekly politics show on BBC Radio Wales, which reviews and previews the key issues in politics relating to the region. Dr Verdon was interviewed by the presenter on the history and role of the Agricultural Wages Board, to provide context to the Welsh assembly's debate on whether to reform the Board after it was axed by the UK government in 2012 (Reference 3). Prior to appearing on the show she provided the producer with an in-depth history of the AWBs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was then used to inform the direction of the live broadcast (Source 2).

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

##### **Individuals who can be contacted to corroborate the case study:**

1. Museum Curator, Museum of English Rural Life
2. Producer, Sunday Supplement

##### **Individuals who have supplied statements to the HEI, which are available on request:**

3. Associate Director, War Horse
4. Producer and Director, Wartime Farm/Lion TV
5. Researcher, Restoration Man/Tiger Aspect Productions

##### **Websites:**

6. This webpage gives details of the exhibition 'Land Ladies: Women in Farming, 1900-1950' at MERL. <http://www.reading.ac.uk/merl/whatson/exhibitions/merl-landladies.aspx>
7. Further details of the case studies MERL used to forge links between academic researchers and the museum's public programme can be found here: <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/case-studies/research-on-show>.