

**Institution: University of South Wales**

**Unit of Assessment: D30**

**a. Context**

Historical research at the University of South Wales has impacted upon numerous groups in a variety of ways. Our core users have been museums and heritage organisations (such as St Fagans National History Museum and the Churches Tourism Network in Wales), charities with strong social missions (such as The Gateway Gardens Trust), community activist groups (such as the Penrhys Partnership), and providers of broadcast/online educational media (such as Green Bay Media, working in partnership with the Welsh Government). We have also cultivated media links as a means of disseminating research findings to a non-scholarly audience, whether through television and radio (from the BBC to MDR, the public broadcaster for central Germany), mass circulation magazines (such as the *BBC History Magazine*), newspapers (*The Western Mail*, the national daily for Wales), or online outlets (such as *WalesOnline*). We have also maintained public engagement through time-honoured means such as talks at museums, lectures to local history societies or branches of the Historical Association, or appearances at cultural events such as the Hay Festival.

Our principal form of impact is cultural. The generation of cultural capital has a special urgency in post-devolution Wales where issues of national identity and Wales's relationship to both the UK and supranational bodies has taken on increased relevance. The case studies presented here must be seen as part of a broader attempt to challenge older, inward-looking ways of understanding history and identity by emphasising transnational relationships. The case studies concern (i) the place of Wales in transatlantic slavery, and (ii) Welsh medieval Christianity and its places of pilgrimage within Latin Christendom as a whole. These interventions (and others) contribute to the education policies of the Welsh Government, the activities of heritage organisations (both government and third sector), initiatives in economic regeneration undertaken by local government and voluntary groups, and public discourse more generally. Our partners and/or clients include the Welsh Government, the National Museum of Wales, and 'social mission' charities.

Of course, historical research is not a one-size-fits-all enterprise; some projects have greater 'impact potential' than others. The case studies illustrate how taking advantage of the commemoration of the past has helped to deepen the impact of History at USW. The outstanding example here is that of **Evans**, whose research on Atlantic slavery gained momentum and a much heightened public profile following moves by the British government in 2007 to mark Britain's role in the slave trade. Other research projects, not offered as case studies, demonstrate how USW historians have achieved impact by intervening in current public debate. **LaPorte's** work on German communism, for example, has allowed him to participate in media productions that address how German communists, notably the communist leader Ernst Thälmann, were also victims of the Nazis, however much they were also anti-democratic. **LaPorte** was principal advisor and 'talking head' for the Central German Television documentary 'Ernst Thälmann: myth and reality' (2010). In a different register, **Gemie's** work on French Muslims has been presented to community groups and voluntary bodies within a context of acute public anxiety over Islamophobia, immigration and 'national values'.

**b. Approach to impact**

History's approach to interacting with user groups beyond academia evolved out of our pre-2008 public-engagement and knowledge-transfer agendas. Two areas of activity proved seminal. Firstly, the Centre for Modern and Contemporary Wales (2001-10) organised a series of public lectures, seminars and conferences, allowing USW historians to interact with the wider public, community activists, artists, and local MPs and AMs (Members of the Welsh Assembly). The Centre's Director, Professor Emeritus Gareth Williams, remains a prolific presenter on TV and radio, drawing upon his expertise in sporting and cultural life. Secondly, there was the role of Dr Ursula Masson

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(d.2008), co-founder of the Women's Archive of Wales (<http://www.womensarchivewales.org/>). Engaging with a non-academic public has been a key part of WAW's mission. This has taken many forms but their road shows, modelled on Antiques Road Show, using artefacts and their stories to explore the role of women in society, stand out. This engagement was furthered by Masson's role in the Women's History Network and Llafur: Welsh Peoples' History Society. Both organisations held regular public talks and events reaching the interested public, community groups and Welsh politicians at the local, Assembly and Westminster levels.

At the centre of the Unit's approach to impact is raising the profile of colleague's research. This was supported by the Unit's involvement with History Research Wales (HRW), which was founded in 2008 as a response to developments in research in Wales and at the UK level among the St David's Day Group of leading Welsh universities. HRW serves as an organisational hub, connecting historians in Wales with audiences and user groups beyond academia; it also facilitates cross-institutional collaborative research through the allocation of seed-corn funding for specific projects. The associations being forged in order to further develop impact beyond 2013 include links with the History of Wales Public Engagement Group, the Historic Environment Group that advises the Welsh Government's Minister for Heritage, branches of National Museum Wales (the St Fagans National History Museum and the National Waterfront Museum at Swansea), the National Trust, Cadw, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, as well as BBC Wales. Media links have been actively pursued. One high-profile outcome has been successive series (2010 to the present) of articles by HRW historians in *The Western Mail*, three of which have been reprinted in book form with the Gomer Press. Here, articles by **Evans** (slavery, the copper industry), **Croll** (crime and poverty, working-class leisure) and **Gray** (religious identity) have elicited positive public responses – both in their print incarnations and as podcasts carried on *WalesOnline*. HRW is also now a regular presence at the Hay Festival, where USW historians have featured in forums with leading figures in Welsh political life, including the Education Minister.

Our impact strategy at Unit level requires any application for internal seed-corn funding to be accompanied by detailed plans for developing links with the media, museums, community organisations, businesses and such other potential links users as may be appropriate for the specific project. For example, several colleagues have contacted high-profile, wide circulation magazines (e.g. *BBC History Magazine*). Such an approach enabled **Reid** to make several contributions to *BBC History Magazine* (about the changing commemoration of the two world wars and displaced persons in World War Two). **Reid's** enhanced profile as a subject expert led in turn to an invitation to advise the 'Friends of the National Army Museum' and to join the Council of the Army Records Society, which brings together senior military personnel and academics.

### c. Strategy and plans

As a discrete Unit within the University's Humanities and Social Science Research Institute (HUMSOC), an Impact Working Group (IWG) – comprising **Evans** and **LaPorte** – has been set up to take the advice of academic and professional staff from the 'central' University level downwards. The IWG will be the key forum at Unit level for providing strategy advice beyond 2013 and will, as appropriate, form 'impact clusters' wherever research has broadly similar opportunities for impact.

At present, the IWG has identified a number of key up-and-coming projects with the potential for impact beyond 2013. One potential 'cluster' will target engagement among the wider interested public, politicians at the local, municipal and National Assembly levels and community-based user groups, as well as the print and broadcast media. Examples of this type of project are Croll's research on leisure and tourism in Wales, which has already attracted media interest; and Jones' work on the Church of England and sexuality, which has had an audience among campaign groups. Another emergent 'cluster', which has already gathered momentum, is grouped around digital heritage. There are two streams feeding into this grouping, both of which aim to achieve educational and media impact as well as establishing links with local businesses. Firstly, there are Ray Howell's ongoing projects on Roman and Ancient Britain, which have generated considerable BBC and print media interest. Secondly, there are the digital heritage projects led by Durrant and

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Finucane, who have collaborated with the heritage industry, local business (Living Data) and Welsh HEIs in order to advance ways of working towards improving digital heritage in Wales, for example through workshops organised by the AHRC-funded “Linking the Chain” project. Their collaborations with St Fagans National History Museum includes a European Social Fund/KESS supported PhD project (‘Interpreting Household Space in Early Modern Wales’). A key aim of the wider remit of these projects is the development of hand-held applications to enhance the general visitor experience, including providing greater access to heritage sites for the disabled and elderly.

These ‘clusters’ and Reid’s ongoing research on the First World War, have significant impact potential that USW historians will seek to exploit fully.

**d. Relationship to case studies**

The two case studies presented below are exemplars of USW historians’ ability to convert high-quality research into public, educational and policy impact. Firstly, they indicate an ability to develop links with public bodies, heritage agencies and media organisations outside academia. Secondly, they demonstrate not just a proactive agility in putting historical research at the disposal of a range of user-groups, but a determination to shape how the past is presented, curated, or used to inform policy decisions. **Evans** cases study exemplifies the evolution of the Unit’s approach from the pre-2008 knowledge transfer and community engagement strategy to its present work within HRW, which has also aided the dissemination of his – and other Unit members’ – research. Working proactively to increase his public profile over the past decade, **Evans** was well placed to play a significant role in the commemoration of slavery in Wales. A parallel strategy was deployed by the pre-merger HEI the University of Wales, Newport. **Gray’s** case study illustrates how raising her profile through sustained work with museums, church heritage and tourism projects and community regeneration facilitated her response to opportunities to reach a wider public audience.