

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Roehampton
Unit of Assessment: Panel D, UoA 30 History
Title of case study: The Centre for Hearth Tax Research: Enhancing public knowledge of the lives and homes of seventeenth century English households
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study details the impact of research conducted by the Centre for Hearth Tax Research in the preservation and presentation of historical data. Through the process of research, public engagement, and digital publications, the Centre for Hearth Tax Research has substantially increased access to the hearth tax for the benefit of a wide range of public users. This accessibility has been achieved firstly by the conversion of complex fiscal data into new formats, and secondly by an outreach strategy directed at local history and record societies, genealogists and family historians, and those interested in historic buildings. This research has had a significant impact in the following three ways: (a) preserving fragile records for the benefit of future generations, (b) the enhancement of public service provision in national and local archives, and (c) by widening access to the hearth tax as a resource.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The idea of unlocking the potential of the hearth tax was the vision of Professor Margaret Spufford FBA, founder of the project (retired 2001). In 'The Potential of the Hearth Tax Returns' (<i>The Local Historian</i> 30 (2000)), she noted 'we are attempting to analyse the densities of those taxed, and exempt from taxation, and the numbers of hearths on which they were taxed, and to produce maps for the 1660s or the 1670s for the whole of the country'. Spufford's idea was to widen study of the hearth tax into new areas so that it did not fall exclusively into the framework of historical demography. She noted 'we do not wish to count hearths without an awareness of the houses which contained them', and encouraged architectural historians to use hearth tax data in order to investigate the changing and diverse forms of building style and house use.</p> <p>Since Spufford wrote, the Centre, now directed by Dr Andrew Wareham, has been progressively delivering her vision. The major innovation has been to make the hearth tax available on-line, and to apply computing technologies to the entirety of the research and publication process. Under Wareham's leadership and on his initiative the project methodology has been further developed by moving away from publishing only the best surviving hearth tax return for each county, which had resulted in incomplete coverage. For example, the Kent volume, published in 2000, contained no maps and statistics for Canterbury or the Cinque ports, whereas, for the Westmorland, Essex, and London and Middlesex volumes, the approach was broadened beyond the E179 collection at the National Archives, to include documents held by other institutions, such as Latin documents in the Essex Record Office and the London Metropolitan Archives. This enlargement of the quantity of data has both enhanced the utility of the volumes to users, while also making the research process more complex. In a further development, Wareham's article on 'The hearth tax and Restoration London' (<i>The Local Historian</i> 41 (2011)) drew attention to the potential of hearth tax records for identifying the activities as well as the economic status of the poor and informal groups in preference to focusing upon the social world of the middling sort. In addition, through an analysis of empty properties, he analysed both the impact of the 1665 plague and new-building programmes in the City of London and the suburbs.</p> <p>Wareham directs the complete research process of producing the Hearth Tax volumes. He determines the selection of manuscript/s to be edited from the multiple incomplete and overlapping versions held at the National Archives and in local archives. He then controls and refines the research design for each volume, especially issues of aggregation of data between different manuscripts and within different sections of single mss, and addresses problems of missing data (extent, remediability, incorporation into statistics and maps). Finally, he edits the text, translating Latin tags, determining the location of places not included in 19th-century parish maps, and resolving transcription problems. Throughout this process, he directs a large collaborative team including transcribers, palaeographers, mappers and statisticians, who prepare the data, and co-ordinates and works with social and architectural historians, specific for each volume, to interpret the data. He co-edits the chapters produced and liaises with BRS/local history societies, who</p>

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publish the volumes.

The research programme of the Centre has resulted in the production of detailed county maps of hearth distribution; the analysis of tax assessments alongside the evidence of surviving houses; the uncovering of regional and sub-regional patterns and variations in the distribution of wealth and population; and the investigation of the varying social profiles of different areas within counties. In doing this, analyses have repeatedly tested the reliability of the hearth tax as an index of wealth, and the extent of local engagement in the Great Rebuilding. Major research findings demonstrate the variability within counties in the size and predominant patterns of housing, and relate these to both economic and topographical features.

3. References to the research

Articles:

M. Spufford, 'The Scope of Local History, and the Potential of the Hearth Tax Returns', *The Local Historian* 30 (2000), pp. 1-20. http://www.balh.co.uk/tlh/issue_volume_30_issue_4.html

A. Wareham, 'The hearth tax and empty properties in London on the eve of the Great Fire', *The Local Historian* 41 (2011), pp. 278-92. REF2.

Edited Volumes: Eight volumes have been published to date, including

Ferguson, C., Thornton, C., & Wareham, A., eds. *Essex Hearth Tax Return Michaelmas 1670*, BRS Hearth Tax Series VIII, 2012.

'Note on understanding this edition', in *Essex Hearth Tax Return Michaelmas 1670*, ed. C. Ferguson, C. Thornton and A. Wareham (2012), pp. 107-16; see also translations of Latin tags concerned with the exempt and the poor at pp. 117-500.

Phillips, C., Ferguson, C. & Wareham, A., eds. *Westmorland Hearth Tax*, BRS Hearth Tax Series VI (Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society vol. 19, 2008).

Hey, D., Giles, C., Spufford, M. & Wareham, A., eds. *Yorkshire West Riding Hearth Tax Assessment Lady Day 1672*, BRS Hearth Tax Series V. 2007.

Green, A., Parkinson, E. & Spufford, M., eds. *County Durham Hearth Tax Assessment Lady Day 1666*, BRS Hearth Tax Series IV. 2006.

Indicators of Quality:

The Centre for Hearth Tax Research has received over £400,000 in competitive/peer-review funding since 2000, including the British Academy, AHRC, Heritage Lottery Fund.

For example, The Arts and Humanities Research Council (Award ref: AH/E008445/1) 1 October 2007-30 September 2010 *Amount awarded:* £87,700. Final AHRC evaluation 'good'.

4. Details of the impact

The Centre's hearth tax volumes, published in association with the British Record Society and local record societies, are **preserving fragile records for future generations**. Since 2008, the Centre has published three volumes for Essex, Warwickshire and Westmorland. Distributed by subscription, the Centre's research is directly delivered to at least 1800 lay members, the majority of whom are individuals committed to the history of their counties, such as members of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian Society, the Dugdale Society and the Essex Society for Archaeology and History. These editions are regarded as authoritative, and consequently users of the volumes have less need to consult the original documents that can be fragile or under restricted access in record offices. For instance, the Essex Record Office has seen a relative decline in the hearth tax documents Q/RTh 1-7 (1662-1672) being called up since the publication of the volume in July 2012. In addition, prior to publication users interested in exemption certificates need to search un-catalogued sets of E179 hearth tax documents, whereas each hearth tax volume published since 2008 has included an appendix which identifies the specific call-

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mark of each exemption certificate relating to at least the period of administration of the hearth tax return(s) and/or assessment(s) published in the hearth tax volume.

This research is also **enhancing public service provision at The National Archives**. As one of the main beneficiaries of our research, members of the medieval and early modern team draw upon the resources and publications of the Centre, when helping members of the general public with their research. The National Archive's *General Guide to pre-1689 Taxation Records* advises users seeking further information to utilise Hearth Tax Online, and staff refer readers to the short research guides published electronically by the Centre. In addition, Dr Adrian Ailes (principal records specialist), Mr Paul Carlyle (archivist) and Mr Peter Seaman (former senior archivist and senior research fellow of the Centre) give talks on the hearth tax and draw attention to Heath Tax Online at events attended by members of the general public (e.g. 'Cataloguing Day' and 'Thursday talks'). The reach of this work is extended through electronic means, the most recent example of which is a podcast of a lecture given by the National Archives <<http://tinyurl.com/q8xh86n>>, which was downloaded 7,614 times since April 2013.

The Centre also maintains direct contact with local communities, most notably by distributing hearth tax volumes through 36 local public libraries, whilst the 2012 Essex volume has also reached public libraries in Toronto, Canada, and numerous public libraries in the USA (worldcat). The Centre also uses digital communications and locally organised public events to engage members of the general public who might be visiting record offices. For instance, a mini-exhibition on 'Poverty in later Stuart Essex' held at the Essex Record Office between early July and September 2012 was curated by Ruth Selman (a Roehampton PhD student working on the hearth tax and poverty in Essex), and explained through images and artefacts the experience of being down and out in late seventeenth century Essex (see <http://tinyurl.com/o3ezvyt>). The exhibition was viewed by c. 1,875 visitors to ERO. News stories on 'Poverty in late 17th century Essex' have been published in the newsletter of the Friends of Historic Essex (circulation of c. 240, excluding copies in ERO) in the autumn 2011 and spring 2012 issues.

The Centre for Hearth Tax Research is also dedicated to **widening access to non-academic historians** to the research. The principal means of public engagement is through the Hearth Tax Online. Launched in December 2009, the website provides access to the Centre's research, including transcriptions, introductions, analyses, maps and indexes. Reaching national and international audiences, Hearth Tax Online has stimulated considerable public interest and has attracted 35,000 individual visitors since 2010. A Hearth Tax Online weblog provides an additional forum where the Centre publishes excerpts from transcripts, initial research findings and details of future research. Since July 2011 a total of 17 data releases have been viewed 4,226 times, including during the 2012 Olympics, when releases relating the Olympic venues at Stratford and Wimbledon were made based on recent research. Hearth Tax Online also fosters direct collaboration between the public and Centre staff who are then able to enter into more detailed correspondence.

The impact of the hearth tax research, and its online presence in particular, is confirmed by its reception among specific audiences. For example, the BBC's popular family history magazine *Who Do You Think You Are?* explained how the hearth tax could be used to unearth seventeenth century ancestors (Oct 2010) as well as listing Hearth Tax Online as its "Top Tip" and rating it as the twelfth most important website for 2011 (Dec 2010). More significantly for research on documents, which would be regarded as obscure without the Centre's work, is the use of its research in lifestyle magazines; an article on 'Artisan Arcadia' in *Country Life* used hearth tax data - provided by the Centre - to discuss interior design.

These digital publications also stimulate more formal public engagement with the hearth tax and the Centre, through demand for workshops, seminars and talks, which complement the service. Before 2006 the Centre had not held any public events at the University of Roehampton, but since then an event has been held annually. Since 2008 these events have averaged fifty attendees each year. The topics covered included 'Charity and community', 'North and South: wealth and poverty in later Stuart England', and 'Life and living in later Stuart London'. In recent years the Centre has increased accessibility by giving talks to non-academic organisations, including the Dorset History Forum, the Friends of Historic Essex (FHE) and the Society of Genealogists. The

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focus of presentations has been to provide insights into a range of social and cultural themes, including poverty, employment and house architecture through the research. For instance Dr Wareham presented a talk on 'Researching house history from the hearth tax' at an event organised by FHE on 14th July 2012.

In 2011, the Centre organised its first workshop which was directed at non-academic users of the hearth tax, and was focused upon members of the general public living in the Woking area of Surrey. Leaflets were distributed at the Brooklands Museum, Elmbridge Museum, the Lightbox, and the Woking Family History Centre. This workshop on 'Early Modern Ancestors' combined talks and training sessions connected to reading and understanding hearth tax records, and was attended by 30 people from outside higher education, who appreciated the teaching in small groups and the insights offered by members of the Centre, including the guidance offered by three of the Centre's senior research fellows (Dr Catherine Ferguson; Dr Elizabeth Parkinson; and Peter Seaman). The workshop was very well received, with feedback indicating that 100 per cent of those who attended the event considered it to have 'significantly' (43 per cent), 'considerably' (14 per cent) or 'greatly' (43 per cent) benefitted or impacted directly their work and interest in family history research.

The work of the National Archives and the Hearth Tax Online is complemented by this public engagement, the public benefits of which continue to be felt by a wide range of users.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact**The National Archives, Kew:**

- 1) Principal Records Specialist, Advice and Records Knowledge Dept., The National Archives.
- 2) <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/taxation-before-1689.htm>

Evidence of Public Engagement and Use of Resources:

- 3) Hearth Tax Online, 35,000 visitors since 2010:
<http://www.hearthtax.org.uk>

- 4) Hearth Tax Weblog, 4,226 visitors:
<http://hearthtax.wordpress.com/>

Exhibition and Event Feedback:

- 4) 'Poverty in later Stuart Essex' exhibition at the Essex Record Office from 14/7/2012 to 31/9/2012 attended by c. 2250 members of the general public as they entered the reading room.
- 5) <http://www.essexrecordofficeblog.co.uk/down-and-out-in-thaxted-and-barnston/>
- 6) 'Early Modern Ancestors' workshop feedback, 18th June, 2011.

Independent Media Recognition:

- 7) *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine*, Oct 2010, pp. 66-88; Dec. 2010, p. 18.
- 8) *Friends of Historic Essex Newsletter*, autumn 2011 and spring 2012.
- 9) 'Artisan Arcadia' in *Country Life* 28 March 2011, pp. 60-65:
<http://www.countrylife.co.uk/property/article/529824/Country-house-histories-The-Hearth-Tax.html>