

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 30 – History</p>
<p>Title of case study: Transforming public awareness of the impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on British culture</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research at UWE Bristol has transformed public awareness of Bristol’s history and the impact of the Atlantic Slave trade in Britain, particularly in relation to the built environment, the evolution of racial attitudes and the continuing legacy of slavery. It raised consciousness about the connection between existing stately homes, public buildings and monuments and slavery generated wealth in Bristol, London and throughout Britain. It has stimulated and informed reinterpretations of English heritage and National trust properties and has been utilised in national website projects. Its findings also made explicit the link between Bristol’s social and cultural institutions and slavery-generated wealth.</p> <p>This research has also benefited the wider public by enabling the production of historically well informed teaching and tourist resources for Bristol. It has generated new museum exhibitions and informed the acquisitions policies of libraries and archives. It informed the content and interpretation, and acquisitions policies, of both national and local museum and stimulated the generation of websites, popular plays, artwork and literature.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Lead Academic: Dr Madge Dresser. When this research was undertaken she was a Principal Lecturer, Reader and then Associate Professor.</p> <p>The research was begun in 1997 and undertaken by Dresser whose publications and findings [see section 3] both before and after 2007 have continued to make an impact. Overall, this research sought to document the social and cultural impact of the Atlantic slave trade on Bristol, Britain’s second most important slaving port in the eighteenth century and to consider the links between Atlantic slavery and Britain beyond the city itself. It has demonstrated the extent to which Bristolians became involved in the establishment of both Barbadian and Virginian plantocracy, the role of religious groups in the city played in the abolitionist movement and the way slavery informed the nature of Britain’s historic relationship with Jamaica in particular. It has established heretofore unrecognised connections between Britain’s stately homes (Tyntesfield, Ashton Court et alia) and London commemorative statues and slavery generated wealth. It has informed the way that past is contested and commemorated by different parts of the British public today.</p> <p>Whilst acting as a consultant at Bristol Museum and full-time UWE academic, Dresser has undertaken extensive research in a variety of archives in the UK, the Gambia, United States (the Huntington Library, Library of Congress and various collections in Virginia and Rhode Island) and Australia, as well as in provincial record offices and libraries and private collections in Leeds, Bristol, Wiltshire, Somerset, York, London, Virginia and Gloucestershire. This was supplemented by research in museum collections, most notably within the Bristol Museum Service, the Empire and Commonwealth Museum, the British Museum and the De Witt Museum in Williamsburg, Virginia. Since the research grew out of her formal involvement as a consultant to the Bristol Museum Service, it benefited from curatorial advice and unhindered access to their collection of artefacts and artwork, including pieces collected through the Service from members of the African Caribbean community in the UK. As recently as 2012, she was awarded the Gilder Lehrman Fellowship to conduct further research on slavery at the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library at Colonial Williamsburg.</p> <p>Dresser’s research has pieced together fragmentary sources and interrogated records whose relationship to slavery has not been realised previously or which has been used to provide more narrowly economic interpretations of the subject. It utilised literary as well as economic and political sources and archaeological findings to provide a new approach to the subject which, though local in focus, was mindful of wider historiographical debates around the significance of the Atlantic slave economy, the ideological dimensions of pro- and anti- slavery campaigns and the significance of class, gender and race as analytical categories. It has established the</p>

pervasiveness of slavery's impact on the built environment, including Bristol and the West Country's stately homes and London's commemorative monuments.

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

1. Madge Dresser *Slavery Obscured: the social history of the slave trade in an English Provincial Port* (London and New York: Continuum: 2001) reprinted as *Slavery Obscured: the social history of the slave trade in Bristol*, (Bristol, Redcliffe Press, 2007). ISBN 978-0826448767 – **Available through UWE**
2. Madge Dresser and Sue Giles (eds.), *Bristol and Transatlantic Slavery* (Bristol: Bristol Museums & Art Gallery, 2000). ISBN 0-900199-46-6 – **Available through UWE.**
3. Madge Dresser, 'Set in Stone? Statues and Slavery in London', *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 64, 2007, pp. 162-99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbm032>
4. Madge Dresser, 'Remembering Slavery and Abolition in Bristol', *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 30, 2009, pp. 223-46. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01440390902818955>
5. Madge Dresser, 'Slavery and West Country Houses' in Madge Dresser and Andrew Hann (eds.), *Slavery and the British Country House*, Abingdon: English Heritage Publishing, 2013, ISBN: 978-1848020641, pp.12-29. – **Available through UWE.**
6. http://www.history.org.uk/resources/resource_223.html;
7. <http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/assets/edward-colston-bristol-slavery-trail-location-32>

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

The research laid the groundwork for a reinterpretation of the cultural impact of the Atlantic slave trade on British culture, especially in relation to the built environment, the black presence in England and racial attitudes.

Generating debate and informing the discourse around slavery, it established the extent of a Black presence in Bristol before mass immigration and assisted in forcing a furious debate from the 1990s onwards about the way prominent Bristolians such as the celebrated seventeenth century Philanthropist, Edward Colston, should be judged and commemorated. This has forced a recognition that Bristol's history needs to include a wider and diverse constituency including the descendants of enslaved Africans.

A dedicated, permanent and self-contained slavery section was installed at the new M-Shed museum in 2011 which derived from earlier exhibitions which **Dresser** had helped to initiate before 2008 and where again she acted as the main historical consultant. She helped to author displays and obtain artefacts for the exhibition and is also featured in one of the filmed displays. [Source 1].

Dresser's research has fed directly into the way the history of Atlantic slavery has been articulated to a wider public on The National Archives website, including one of its Readers' guides. [Source 2] Her contribution as a member of the advisory boards of the Legacy of British Slave-ownership Database project since 2008 and on the advisory board of the AHRC project 'Historicising and reconnecting rural community: Black presences and the legacies of slavery and colonialism in rural Britain, c.1600-1939' has also had an impact as these projects have changed the terms in which slavery heritage is discussed and researched and Dresser's research has contributed to this change. [Source 3]

As a result of her research, English Heritage asked Dresser to mentor a researcher commissioned to investigate slavery links to their own properties. This precipitated a close relationship with English Heritage and a looser one with the National Trust resulting in 2009 in a joint conference of heritage professionals, user groups and academics which attracted over 100 delegates (Interview with a member of the Black and Asian Studies Association at the Conference led to a jointly published book and web resource co-edited by Dresser and published in June 2013. [Source 5]

By articulating in a dispassionate and fair minded way how networks of merchant families were

embedded in Bristol's Atlantic slavery economy, Dresser's research also directly influenced the Society of Bristol Merchant Venturers' decision to put on permanent loan to the Bristol Record Office their world class archive documenting the Society's links with slavery since the seventeenth century. It affected the way slavery records were acquired, catalogued and featured by the Bristol Record Office. [Source4]

Dresser's independent slavery research, and her continuing collaborative work with the Ethnography Curator at the Bristol Museum Service, fed into nationally and internationally funded websites, including Anti-Slavery International's website and the Port Cities website and Lottery funded projects such as the Sweet Heritage project, aimed specifically at young people. [Source 6]

Dresser's research continues to affect Bristol Museum and Archive Services' collections and acquisition policies. It has also inspired a number of community and family histories and creative projects, including Sweet Heritage, and in 2008 generated seven short plays about slavery in Bristol by seven writers from across the UK, including Sandi Toksvig, Mustapha Matura and Dresser herself. [Source 7] In addition, her research inspired a popular book published by Bristol City Council's Race Forum in 2010. [Source 8]

Having previously influenced the national commemoration of the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 2007 Dresser's research subsequently generated a much replicated Bristol slavery trail, sold at the City Museum [M-Shed], and which has appeared in a variety of guises on various websites. The Bristol Slavery Trail page received 865 hits accounting for 0.9 per cent of overall traffic of the VCH Explore website for that period and ranked as the third most visited page on the site. The Bristol Slavery Trail has been used by teachers on the Historical Association site 'Bristol and the Slave Trade: a virtual slavery trail for school children and their teachers' while the Bristol Radical History Group has utilised the research to produce a pamphlet on the Abolitionist Thomas Clarkson for public consumption. [Source 9]. Such that a plaque has been installed in the city commemorating a public house with anti-slavery associations; a ceremony at which Dresser officiated. [Source 10]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 1.1 [Public Engagement Website - Creating the M-Shed](#)
- 1.2 Email from Director – National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement. 25 September 2013. – **Available through UWE.** [1 on REF portal]
- 2.1 TNA (The National Archives) website: British transatlantic slave trade: *Slavery Obscured* cited in the on-line guide for researchers and Dresser credited for her contribution to the construction of the guide. [Link](#) - **Available through UWE.**
- 3.1 Legacy of British Slave Ownership Project: [Link](#). Website relating to the Arts and Humanities Research Council [AHRC] project on public memory and slavery in rural areas in Britain citing Dresser's and Hann's *Slavery and British Country Houses* book – **Available through UWE.**
- 3.2 Email from the Deputy Director, Institute for the Study of Slavery dated 2 August 2013 and attachment. [2] – **Available through UWE.**
- 4.1 Emails from Archives Manager, Bristol Record Office, 26 September 2013. – **Available through UWE.** [3]
- 5.1 Email from Head of Social Inclusion and Diversity, English Heritage. 1st October 2012. – **Available through UWE.** [4]
- 6.1 Sweet History media Project on Slavery: 'We would like to acknowledge the support of Madge Dresser, University of the West of England and Mark Horton, University of Bristol, for their contribution to this project'. [Link](#)– **Available through UWE.**
- 7.1 Leaflet of Commissioned Plays performed by Show of Strength Theatre groups [Link](#)– **Available through UWE.**
- 8.1 Email dated 25 May 2012 from the Head of the HLF-funded Bristol Black Archive

Impact case study (REF3b)

partnership and the Black-led consultancy firm in Bristol 'First Born Creatives', attesting to the impact Dresser's research has had on his publications and the Black Archive partnership work. – **Available through UWE.** [5]

- 9.1 Bristol Slavery trail used by teachers on the Historical association site: 'Bristol and the Slave Trade; a virtual slavery trail for school children and their teachers', – **Available through UWE.** [Link](#)
- 9.2 Bristol Radical History Group pamphlet, *Cry Freedom, Cry Seven Stars: Thomas Clarkson in Bristol 1787* (2010). – **Available through UWE.**
- 10.1 Photo of the unveiling of a plaque in Bristol honouring anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Clarkson at which Dresser officiated as a result of her research. This has an impact on the way the city is represented to the public and came with an accompanying pamphlet: [Link](#)