

Institution: University of St Andrews 
Unit of Assessment: 30 – History
Title of case study: DOCUMENTING THE MIDDLE AGES ON TELEVISION
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Professor Bartlett has written and presented two television series on medieval subjects for the BBC: <i>Inside the Medieval Mind</i> (four one-hour episodes, BBC4, 2008) and <i>The Normans</i> (three one-hour episodes, BBC2, 2010). Already one of the world's leading medieval historians, he has taken his work to a much wider audience through these series. Impact in this case is primarily on cultural life, through the exposure of millions of viewers to a historical documentary about the Middle Ages. The BBC's estimate of their value is re-emphasized by the recent completion of a third series, <i>The Plantagenets</i>, to be screened in autumn 2013.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The main areas of Professor Bartlett's underpinning research are the history of medieval colonialism, of the British Isles in the period 1050-1300, and of medieval attitudes towards the natural and the supernatural. The main relevant publications appeared in the 1990s and 2000s, during which time he has been Professor of Mediaeval History at the University of St Andrews. His acclaimed book, <i>The Making of Europe</i>¹ argued that Europe was the product of a period of colonial expansion as well as the initiator of such expansion in the modern period (e.g. the European colonization of the Americas and Africa). The story of the Normans, from their origins as Viking raiders to their conquests in France, Britain, Italy and the Middle East, forms a natural part of this process. Norman expansion within the British Isles was one theme discussed in Bartlett's <i>England under the Norman and Angevin Kings</i>,² a volume in the highly prestigious <i>New Oxford History of England</i>. Other works, such as <i>Medieval Panorama</i>,³ have attempted broad structural analyses of the political and cultural world of the Middle Ages, while books such as <i>The Hanged Man</i>⁴ and <i>The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages</i>⁵ look at the nature of religious belief and cosmology in the period.</p> <p>A particular characteristic of Professor Bartlett's underlying publications is the combination of wide-ranging thesis and detailed case study. The examples and the case studies are often unfamiliar; they are based on a tremendous knowledge of familiar and unfamiliar primary sources, a knowledge in part derived from his activities as an editor of medieval texts. Unity is ensured by an ability to produce almost pointilliste characterisations of societies through a combination of multifarious examples, strong thematic argument, and powerful story-telling. This very unusual combination of characteristics helps to explain the success of transfer from page to screen.</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350</i> (Allen Lane, Penguin; London and Princeton, 1993; paperback, 1994; German translation 1996; Estonian translation 2001; Polish, Japanese and Spanish translations 2003; Russian translation 2007), 432 pp. Joint winner of the Wolfson History Prize for 1993. 2. <i>England under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075-1225</i> (OUP; New Oxford History of England, 2000; paperback, 2002), 772 pp.; highly prestigious series, by leading academic publisher. 3. <i>Medieval Panorama</i> (edited) (Thames and Hudson; London and Los Angeles, 2001) 336 pp. (also published in Dutch, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Russian and Spanish) (reissued in paperback as <i>The Medieval World Complete</i>, 2010); produced by leading publisher of such volumes which combine survey with original research and theses. 4. <i>The Hanged Man: A Story of Miracle, Memory and Colonialism in the Middle Ages</i> (Princeton UP, 2004; paperback, 2006; Swedish translation 2004; Finnish translation 2006) 168 pp.; a

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very well received micro-history of wide-ranging significance produced by a leading academic publisher.

5. *The Natural and the Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge UP, 2008) 170 pp. (simultaneous paperback; Swedish translation 2009); a very prestigious series of lectures, produced by a leading academic publisher.

4. Details of the impact

The purpose of Professor Bartlett's activities throughout has been to expose a wide audience to historical documentary about the Middle Ages and this has been achieved. Historical knowledge is of value not only for its intrinsic interest but also in shaping perceptions of humanity and society. A person with no knowledge of his or her past may be viewed as in some sense deficient; the same is true of society as a whole (on such impact, see e.g. Tusa, 'A deep and continuing use of History') (Source 10 below).

Professor Bartlett's prominence as a medievalist, together with the range and character of his work (see above, section 2), led to a telephone request from the Controller of BBC 4, asking him to write and make the series *Inside the Medieval Mind*, four one-hour episodes first aired in 2008. The response to this series led the former Controller of BBC4, now Controller of BBC2 to commission a series on *The Normans*, three one-hour episodes which first aired in 2010, for that **more widely viewed channel**. Its success has in turn led to the completion of a third series, on *The Plantagenets*, to be screened on BBC 2 in November 2013. The wide diffusion of the earlier series has led to the completion of a different version (formed of six linked segments) **specifically aimed at secondary schools**.

Professor Bartlett's research has reached **ever-widening audiences**. His work on the natural and supernatural in particular underpins *Inside the Medieval Mind*: organized around the broad themes of "Power", "Sex", "Belief" and "Knowledge", it discussed medieval views of issues such as miracles, the way medieval people thought about the physical world and the nature of human society. *The Normans* was informed in part by his earlier work on medieval colonialism and conquest, in part by his *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*. The originality of the research in primary sources was evident for example in the frequent use of quotations from chroniclers, theologians, and others in *Inside the Medieval Mind*. Some of the methods used, including what amounts to on-screen footnoting, have been adopted in other historical documentaries.

The BBC assesses its programmes through **viewing figures, impact groups and reviews**. They were very happy on all three counts. The Controller of BBC4 said: *I'm delighted by the success of 'Inside the Medieval Mind'. Just as the 1.4m viewers who recently watched 'Steptoe and Son' showed that the channel can deliver record breaking audiences for drama, this demonstrates that the channel can attract equally high audiences to the very best of intelligent, public service broadcasting* [S1]. *The Normans* was mentioned by the BBC Director General in his James MacTaggart Memorial Lecture at the 2010 Edinburgh International Television Festival: *[Audiences] want the best and they want it all year round, which is why nowadays at the BBC we play pieces like Sherlock, The Normans and Rev in high summer* [S2]. Viewing figures for both series were high. *Inside the Medieval Mind* was watched by over three times the average for that BBC 4 slot. *The Normans* attracted around **three million viewers** (*Guardian*, 5 August 2010) [S3] and the BBC has since taken this figure as a **benchmark for documentaries**. Both series have been repeated and broadcast via satellite in eastern Europe and Scandinavia, and are still more widely viewed on-line.

The documentaries were also widely and very favourably reviewed in the Press [S4]:

Inside the Medieval Mind: *four corking documentaries* (*Guardian*, 17 April, 2008); *Bartlett has been – or, rather, has been allowed to be – a tremendously thoughtful, provocative and entertaining guide to the period, and this has been one of the most enjoyably intelligent things I can remember in, gosh, years* (*Independent*, 9 May, 2008).

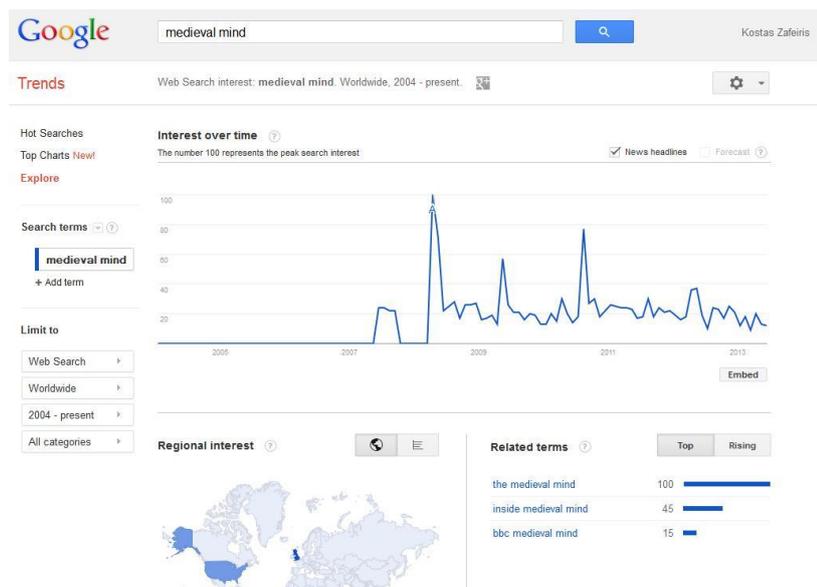
The Normans: *excellent television that educates, enlightens and entertains* (*Observer*, 1 August 2010); *stirring and atmospheric* (*Metro*, 4 August 2010); *telly education at its best* (*Independent*, 5

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August 2010); *riveting* (*Times*, 5 August, 2010); *a splendid programme* (*Guardian*, 5 August, 2010); *one of those history things that give you hope* (*Observer*, 8 August 2010); *rivetingly good* (*Sunday Telegraph*, 8 August 2010); *superlative history* (*Observer*, 15 August 2010); *erudite and accessible* (*Daily Mail*, 15 August, 2010); *gripping television* (*Daily Express*, 19 August 2010).

Evidence of cultural, educational, and other impact is further apparent from the active engagement of viewers, large numbers of whom have written to professor Bartlett (a selection of emails is on file) [S5]. *The Normans* is **available commercially on DVD**, while *Inside the Medieval Mind* can be purchased through the Open University, which jointly commissioned the series: http://content.yudu.com/Library/A1tror/OUWBroadcastCatalogu/resources/index.htm?referrerUrl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ouworldwide.com%2Ftv_buyer.asp. On Amazon.co.uk, *The Normans* DVD has had 32 customer reviews and an overall 4.5* rating (out of 5) [S5]; in Germany, Amazon.de gives it a 5* rating. In the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), the DVD of *The Normans* has been rated by 39 users, and it has an average of 8.2 (out of 10); one user review says *Well researched and highly recommended. There's [sic] not enough of these tremendous programmes on TV today* [S6]. *Inside the Medieval Mind* has been rated by 70 users, and it has an average of 7.8 (out of 10). On *Youtube*, a site including the 'Sex' episode of *Inside the Medieval Mind* has over 100,000 hits, whilst others are over 10,000. The popularity of 'Sex' is not an accident produced by people seeking something less academic, as it is outdone by the segment on the Battle of Hastings from *The Normans* (e.g., on one site, **over 130,000 hits**) [S7].

Google trends showed a peak of interest in 'the Normans' when the series was broadcast. Likewise, for Professor Bartlett's other series, there is a spike in searches of the term 'medieval mind' in April 2008 (that this is linked to Bartlett's documentary is supported by analysis of subsidiary search terms) [S8].



The blog 'HBB Free Music' has a presentation of the documentary. Its conclusion reads: *Inside the Medieval Mind is one of the best introductions into the world of thought of an often misunderstood period - misunderstood because it is so foreign to our own way of thinking at the beginning of the 21st century, more than half a millennium after the Middle Ages gave way to the Modern era* [S9]. Equally well encapsulating the cultural and educational impact of the series, and completing the loop between impact and underlying research is an Amazon reviewer who advised viewers of *The Normans*: *having seen this, read his 'The Making of Europe' which helps to show the continuity between Norman colonisation of Europe and the cultural, ideological and political roots of Europeans colonisation of the world in later times* [S5].



5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1: Controller of BBC4 interview, on high viewing figures for *Inside the Medieval Mind* (quoted in section 4): <http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/viewers-get-inside-the-medieval-mind/1167863.article> (accessed 17 April 2013).

S2: BBC Director General speech on reasoning behind scheduling of *The Normans* (quoted in section 4): http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/speeches/stories/thompson_mactaggart.shtml

S3: Verification of figures of 3 million viewers for *The Normans*:
<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2010/aug/19/raoul-moat-channel-4>;
<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2010/aug/05/bbc2-the-normans-tv-ratings> (accessed 27 Sept. 2013).

S4: Press reviews, of *Inside the Medieval Mind* and *The Normans* showing critical reception (quoted in section 4): *Guardian*, 17 April, 2008; *Independent*, 9 May, 2008 (<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/reviews/last-nights-tv-midnight-man-itv1-br-inside-the-medieval-mind-bbc4-824256.html>), 5 August 2010; *Observer*, 1, 8, 15 August 2010 (<http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2010/aug/08/minnie-driver-james-nesbitt-alicia-douvall>); *Metro*, 4 August 2010; *Times*, 5 August, 2010; *Guardian*, 5 August, 2010; *Sunday Telegraph*, 8 August 2010; *Daily Mail*, 15 August, 2010; *Daily Express*, 19 August 2010.

S5: Audience reception is shown by Amazon ratings and specific reviews of the DVD version of *The Normans* (quoted in section 4): <http://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B003QP2TWS> (accessed 25 Sept. 2013) and by viewers contacting professor Bartlett in person by email (on file).

S6: IMDb ratings and reviews of *The Normans*, showing audience reception of DVD version (quoted in section 4): http://www.imdb.com/name/nm2996960/?ref=fn_al_nm_2 (accessed 25 Sept. 2013).

S7: *Youtube* hits on selected portions of *Inside the Medieval Mind* and *The Normans*, showing active engagement by viewers (cited in section 4): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0iIBni5asI>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qM-sIEErFtM>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLy1LskT6Y8> (accessed 25 Sept. 2013).

S8: Google trends for 'Medieval mind' and 'Normans', showing viewers seeking further information following broadcast of the programmes (quoted in section 4): <http://goo.gl/HGthBK> (accessed 25 Sept. 2013); <http://goo.gl/tsf0qgB> (accessed 25 Sept. 2013).

S9: HBB Free Music, showing audience response to *Inside the Medieval Mind* (quoted in section 4): <http://hbbthinktank.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/inside-medieval-mind.html> (accessed 17 April 2013).

S10: J. Tusa, 'A deep and continuing use of History', in *History and the Media*, ed. D. Cannadine (Basingstoke, 2004), 124-40 (referred to in section 4).