

Institution: University of Northampton
Unit of Assessment: 30 - History
<p>a. Context</p> <p>The University of Northampton's strategic plan, <i>Raising the Bar</i>, makes a strong commitment to purposeful research recognised for its originality and impact. This is evidenced in its status as the only UK institution to achieve Ashoka U Change-maker Campus designation. History research contributes to this wider strategy by pursuing a range of research-led activities that actively engage a wide variety of user groups and beneficiaries, both locally and nationally. These include local and national government (including the Home Office); the police; pressure and campaign groups (e.g. Show Racism the Red Card); country houses and heritage organisations (e.g. National Trust and English Heritage); Records Societies; historical re-enactment groups; museums and charities (e.g. Northampton Museum and Prostate Cancer Support), and the general public.</p> <p>The impact of our research comprises four main types: [1] providing a thorough historical context for the interpretation or presentation of aspects of heritage, e.g. for re-enactment groups; [2] informing government policy and practice at the local and national scale, e.g. through expert advice to ministers or training programmes for civil servants; [3] changed behaviour amongst the public, e.g. in visiting and experiencing country houses; [4] a heightened awareness and understanding of history and heritage amongst the public, e.g. through Local History Society talks; public history conferences, and support for HLF bidding by local organisations (e.g. Delapre Abbey Trust – recently awarded £3.6 million). Impact thus comes through the nature of our research and the approach taken by staff, all of whom seek to establish long-term and iterative relations with external organisations to achieve impact of real significance.</p>
<p>b. Approach to impact</p> <p>Engagement with users and beneficiaries</p> <p>All staff have actively engaged the public with their research through public lectures, mostly to local history societies across the Midlands, but also to national organisations, e.g. Royal United Services Institute (Beach, 2009); Tate Britain (McCormack (2012); Jane Austen Society (Stobart, 2013). In the period 2008-2013, history staff gave more than 200 talks to a total of over 5000 people – engagement with considerable reach. Partnering Northamptonshire Library Service, we have organised a number of public history days, e.g. 'House and Home' (2008) and 'Who were the Victorians?' (2009). This form of activity is easy to overlook, but is vital in tying the University to its region: linking cutting-edge research to non-academic audiences, and thus influencing their attitudes to history. It is central to the research culture of the history department. Staff have also been successful in drawing mixed audiences of academics, professionals and the public to more formal conferences, e.g. 'Populist Racism in Europe since 1945' (Feldman, now Teesside University, 2011), 'Soldiers and Soldiering in Britain 1750-1815' (McCormack, 2011), 'Consuming the Country House' (Stobart, 2012), and 'Genocide in Darfur and Beyond' (Berridge, 2013).</p> <p>Many staff have written articles for popular history publications, including <i>BBC History Magazine</i> (Stobart, 2011; Reinke-Williams, 2011), or have acted as historical consultants on TV and radio, e.g. Gray, <i>Mud Men</i>, History Channel (2010); Beach, <i>The Ark</i>, BBC (2013). Others have contributed to national TV and radio, including Jackson (<i>World This Week</i>, Islam Channel, 2012); Stobart (<i>You and Yours</i>, Radio 4, 2009; <i>Great British Food Revival</i>, BBC2, 2012); Gray, <i>Victorian Villains</i>, BBC (2013) and Feldman (over a dozen appearances on Radio 4, Radio 5, BBC Wales, BBC USA, RTE Ireland, CNN, and Radio New Zealand – see http://www.radicalism-new-media.org/index.php/rnm-media). All staff regularly contribute to local radio programmes.</p> <p>Staff members also engage a wider audience through interactive media to enhance the reach of our research impact. The department has a blog (http://blogs.northampton.ac.uk/history/) and twitter feed (@HistoryatNmpton), and McCormack, Jackson and Gray have their own history blogs. McCormack (in conjunction with Linch, University of Leeds) and Stobart have created social-network type websites for their AHRC projects to allow archivists, curators and others to respond to and feed into their research. McCormack's currently has 224 members and Stobart's has 73 (see http://redcoats.ning.com/ and REF3a). Jackson has established a high-profile web presence for the Radicalism & New Media (RNM) research group including a Facebook page (see REF3a). Sustained interaction with the public is also achieved through writing for newspapers and external websites. Berridge, for example, contributes to the <i>Sudan Tribune</i> and works with the <i>Rift Valley</i></p>

Impact template (REF3a)

Institute, and Jackson regularly writes for *Searchlight* and contributes to *Fair Observer*, *Re-Public* and the *Big Issue*. In these, staff draw on their research expertise to engage in current political and cultural debate. Jackson also has close ties with a number of anti-Fascist organisations, including *Searchlight*, Show Racism the Red Card and East Midland Community Contact Unit.

Wider engagement and impact has been integral to the research process on several projects. Gray's research on the histories of crime has involved: a series of public talks; a research-led 'popular history' text, *London's Shadows* (2010), which has sold c.2800 copies, and the ongoing development of a smartphone app that guides users around key sites in London's East End, providing them with key insights into historical events. Impact was written into the AHRC-funded research of McCormack (2010-11) and Stobart (2010-11). With McCormack, this involved on-going engagement with military re-enactors, an interactive website, and the establishment of a digital repository which makes archival findings openly available (hosted by Leeds University). Combined, these provide ways of enhancing the historical understanding of soldiering amongst a range of interest groups. For Stobart's project, strong working relationships with house managers were established from the start, ensuring effective pathways to impact in the form of reinterpretation of selected country houses. Producing research-led outputs aimed at visitors and responding to feedback allowed the project to make a significant contribution to the visitor experience (see REF3b). Similarly, Watley (a PhD student) held an oral history roadshow, 'Creating a Community, Making an Impact' (2011) to both disseminate his initial findings and engage the local Afro-Caribbean population as active participants in his research. Finally, Public engagement and impact of research undertaken by RNM research group reflects a strategic decision by the University and department to build on established expertise in political religions, fascism and Far Right movements. Financial support for research and public engagement activities (see section 3.2.3) has underpinned Jackson's significant and far-reaching work in offering training programmes, including 'Far Right Aware', which has recently gained Home Office Accreditation (see REF3b).

Identifying impact

Every effort is made to identify and document the impact of our research. This information is used, wherever possible, to inform research and enhance subsequent impact.

Public lectures, popular history writing and work with TV/radio impact directly through the activities themselves, although they also feed into the wider public interest in history. With the support of the University's press office, each event is logged, with estimates being made of audience size.

Similarly, usage of websites and numbers following blogs and twitter feeds are recorded to assess the reach of these media (in July 2013, the Department had 861 followers and McCormack 1358).

Much more important in assessing reach and significance is the feedback acquired from a range of beneficiaries of our research. At conferences organised by the History department, detailed feedback is gathered, partly to inform arrangements for subsequent events, but also on the ways in which the conference themes and departmental research have engaged participants, especially from outside academia. Within projects, the significance of research impact is identified and assessed through the construction of iterative feedback mechanisms. Two examples of our practices: [1] Stobart has established a programme of regular meetings with country house curators which provides detailed feedback on research impact. This is complemented by records of user numbers and feedback forms from visitors. Together, these are used to inform the ways in which his research is disseminated and utilised in the interpretation of country houses. [2] the website established by McCormack (and Linch) is used by its members (many from outside academia) to comment on research findings posted, pose questions and share research of their own. This process broadens the feedback and creates a cycle of research and impact.

Supporting impact: expertise and resources

All staff are encouraged to achieve impact from their research. Support is provided through a number of people and processes, including: [1] the School's Enterprise & Innovation Manager (EIM), who has been especially effective in extending the reach of the RNM group by establishing links with Local Authorities; [2] the University's Press Office, with which the department has close links, Gray, Jackson and McCormack having undertaken the media training provided; [3] administrative support in organising conferences which aim to engage non-academic as well as academic audiences; [4] a departmental blog which provides a centralised forum for engaging the public in our research and scholarship.

Impact template (REF3a)

In financial terms, the History department has secured over £20,000 from the University's REF Investment Fund specifically to support impact activities. This has played a key role in developing the interpretative app at Canons Ashby and gathering visitor feedback (see REF3a), and in underwriting conferences organised by Stobart (2012) and Jackson (2012, 2013). In addition to this, the School has invested c.£75,000 to support the establishment and activities of the RNM group. This money covered: the cost of employing part-time Research Co-ordinator; bringing the *Searchlight* archive to the University in 2012 and paying for a part-time archivist, and developing a high quality website (achieved in conjunction with Visiting Fellow, Dr Schekhovstov (2008-2013)).

c. Strategy and plans

As part of our overall research strategy, and in line with the University's strategic plan, we seek to enhance our engagement with external organisations and the wider public both as partners in and beneficiaries of research (see REF5). In doing this, we aim to increase the significance and reach of research impact, both regionally and nationally. Our plan for meeting these ambitions is fivefold.

1. *Raise our profile as a centre of research excellence in the social/cultural history of 18th-century Britain and the histories of ideology, intelligence and security.* Our research strengths and their impact will be better communicated by: [i] improved web pages to include clear profiles of research expertise and an interactive public-facing section (e.g. Q&As, resources); [ii] holding conferences that engage non-academics, e.g. on WWI (Beach), pressure groups (Jackson, Rothery)
2. *Strengthen and broaden existing areas of impact.* The focus of the RNM research group has been broadened by recent appointments (Beach and Berridge) which extend the strong reputation of the group amongst external organisations into areas of intelligence and security, especially in relation to North Africa. Similarly, our impactful research on consumption and country houses will be augmented by work on elite identities (Rothery) and military material culture (McCormack).
3. *Identify and build long-term relationships with key users for our research.* This involves: [i] enhancing our ability to secure multi-institutional or multi-disciplinary grants (see REF5), thus allowing us to broaden and deepen impact; [ii] drawing on the School EIM and building on existing networks to develop robust long-term partnerships with external organisations (e.g. through workshops and support for HLF bidding); [iii] maintaining an ongoing dialogue with beneficiaries by actively seeking and responding to feedback, and keeping records of any impact
4. *Integrate impact more thoroughly into the research plans of individual staff members.* This will be achieved in part through the wider drive to secure research income (REF5), with impact being written into grant applications from the outset. However, since much research will continue to take place outside this, the process of setting personal objectives through the PDR process will incorporate goals for research impact as well as income and outputs.
5. *Engage more fully in new media and open access resources.* A number of staff are very active in various forms of new media (e.g. Gray, Jackson, McCormack) and we will encourage this further through training programmes. In particular, we will support initiatives to create new forms of dissemination (e.g. the construction of apps – Gray, Stobart) and the publication of research findings and resources through open access forums (e.g. the University's NECTAR repository).

d. Relationship to case studies

The selected case studies represent two models of achieving research impact, both of which are pursued by the department (see 3.3). 'Consumption and the eighteenth-century country house' shows the benefits of developing impact as an integral part of a research project. The wider significance of the research was recognised from the outset and relations built with partner organisations and users from an early stage. Impact thus becomes a central element of the process of carrying out as well as disseminating the research. 'Radicalism and New Media' demonstrates the potential to build post-hoc on excellent historical research to inform current policy and practice. The original research is important here, but so too is the willingness and ability of academics to tailor their knowledge to contemporary concerns. Both case studies reflect our wider approach in that they involve sustained engagement with a variety of agencies and individuals at the local and national level, and a real commitment to ensure that impact is felt by 'end users' – i.e. the public. Both make use of the range of media identified in Section 3.1 to achieve their impact: websites, conferences, broadcast media, publications and face-to-face meetings.