

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Oxford</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UOA30</p>
<p>Title of case study: Everyday life and accidental death in sixteenth-century England</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Despite the great public appetite for knowledge about life in Tudor England, until Steve Gunn undertook a huge study of coroners' records, we knew very little about how people lived - and died. Some of his findings shine new light on famous figures, such as the family of William Shakespeare. Others show how ordinary people lived - at work, at home, travelling or relaxing. They reveal the similarities and contrasts between dangers faced by our ancestors and those in modern life. The research has inspired enormous public interest, and it has also provided a historical perspective for organisations concerned with the implementation of health and safety policy.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) Research into coroners' inquests on accidental deaths has been conducted in two phases by Steven Gunn; and in the third phase, in progress with ESRC funding, by Gunn and Tomasz Gromelski, post-doctoral researcher. Both have been employed by the University of Oxford throughout. The first, conducted between 2002 and 2009, examined inquests on deaths caused by archery practice and by firearms in order to investigate the supposed decline of archery practice in sixteenth-century England. The ensuing article argued that archery practice was widespread, but did indeed decline from the 1540s: a concomitant rise in firearms accidents suggested that the increasing popularity of guns offered a partial explanation. The second, a pilot project undertaken in 2009, analysed all inquest reports for 1558 in order to demonstrate the possibilities of widening the scope of the research by studying all accidents. The third phase is currently (2011-15) examining all 9000 or so inquest reports filed for the sixteenth century.</p> <p>48% of deaths in 1558-60 were by drowning, and this central finding has been the focus of an article and podcast for <i>BBC History Magazine</i>. The reasons for the contrast with modern experience (2% of accidental deaths in 2010) have been explored in detail. Few people could swim, yet many worked near water, in mills and on boats, washing and watering animals. There are illuminating contrasts by age, wealth, gender and geographical location. For example, women drowned in large numbers while fetching water from slippery rivers and deep pits. Sports also claimed a number of victims: football followed archery as the next most dangerous leisure activity, but there were many others. The inquest reports illuminate how sports were conducted and when and where they were most prevalent. Articles on sporting accidents and on children's games have emerged from this research. Finally, the reports on work, investigated for a conference lecture, show that many occupations that are considered dangerous now were also dangerous then – building, farming, mining – but again reveal important regional, age and gender variations.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references) 3.1 Steven Gunn, 'Archery practice in early Tudor England', <i>Past and Present</i>, 209 (November 2010), 53-81. DOI 10.1093/pastj/gtq029 (peer-reviewed journal article)</p> <p>The following articles arose from research conducted under a competitively awarded grant of £349,347.63 from the ESRC (reference RES-062-23-2819) for 'Everyday life and fatal hazard in sixteenth-century England' for the period 1/04/2011-31/03/2015 (PI: Steven Gunn). All are available on request:</p> <p>3.2 Steven Gunn, Tomasz Gromelski, 'Drowning in Tudor England', <i>BBC History Magazine</i>, 12/13 (December 2011), 46-9.</p> <p>3.3 Steven Gunn, Tomasz Gromelski, 'Toys and games that killed in Tudor England', <i>BBC History Magazine</i>, 13/13 (December 2012), 37-40.</p> <p>3.4 Steven Gunn, Tomasz Gromelski, 'For whom the bell tolls: accidental deaths in Tudor England', <i>The Lancet</i>, 380 (2012), 1222-3.</p> <p>3.5 Tomasz Gromelski, 'Życie i śmierć w Anglii Tudorów', <i>Mówią wieki</i>, 3/13 (2013), 24-7.</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

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

The dissemination of this research in many different media has stimulated public interest in sixteenth-century history in Britain and abroad and changed people's understanding of diverse aspects of early modern life.

Public debate on one famous accidental death, that of **Amy Robsart**, wife of Queen Elizabeth's favourite Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, was enhanced by the discovery, during phase one of the research, of the previously unknown coroner's inquest into her death, revealing that she was found with two 'dyntes' in her head as well as a broken neck. This was used by Steven Gunn's former graduate student Chris Skidmore MP in his *Death and the Virgin: Elizabeth, Dudley and the Mysterious Fate of Amy Robsart* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2010), one of the *Independent's* books of the year for 2010 and highly commended in the John Rhys Llewellyn Prize. Reviews often stressed the central importance of the discovery of the coroner's inquest, describing it as 'a dramatic new discovery' (John Guy) and Skidmore's use of it as a 'great coup' (Sarah Gristwood) (5.1). The book's publication resulted in two documentaries including interviews with Gunn about the discovery: *Revealed: The Virgin Queen's Fatal Affair* (Quickfire Media, shown on Channel 5, 18/11/2010, attracting 676,000 viewers (5.2)); *Secrets of the Virgin Queen* (National Geographic TV, shown on 25/01/2011; shown on History Channel, 23-24/9/2011).

Public understanding of the life of **William Shakespeare** and its relation to his works was increased by a second discovery, that of the inquest report of the death of a two-year-old girl called Jane Shaxspere at Upton Warren, about twenty miles from Stratford, in 1569, when William Shakespeare, who may have been her cousin, was about five. Like Ophelia, she was drowned while picking flowers. The story spread mainly from the BBC website (estimated readership 19.79 million), where it first ran on 8/06/2011 and had been shared 1,603 times by 20/6/2011, but was also carried by AFP and Reuters. By noon on 9/06/2011 Google news showed 246 websites reporting it, including news and cultural sites in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar and the USA, as well as some major UK sites (Channel 4, estimated readership 3.06 million; Guardian, 4.30 million; Telegraph, 4.24 million, Yahoo, 20.15 million (5.4)). On 11/6/2011 it was posted as a pond safety feature on the website of Swell UK, 'one of the UK's leading retailers of aquarium, pond and water gardening supplies' (5.5). Newspapers also carried the story on 8/6/2011: *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Mail*, and *Metro* (estimated readerships respectively 2.8%, 2.2%, 1.1%, 8.9%, 7.1% of national adult population).

Responding to **public interest** in the initial story, the BBC website followed with a more general story on what can be learnt from coroners' inquests on 14/6/2011, '10 strange ways Tudors died' (5.3). This spent 22 hours amongst the ten most read stories on the BBC site and was for 18 hours the most shared story on the site, having been shared 5519 times by noon on 20 June. It spread to websites in Argentina, Poland, Spain and the USA. It provoked wide comment on Twitter, with 401 posts between 14/6/2011 and 10/5/2013 including 'Fascinating stuff' and 'Macabre but irresistible' (5.6). This coverage led to interest both in the Shakespeare connection and in the wider project from radio programmes, newspapers and magazines. On 8/6/2011, the BBC Radio 4 Today programme (estimated listeners 7.18 million) carried the story at 8.08am, and interviews followed that day for BBC Radio 4 News, BBC Radio Oxford breakfast show, BBC Radio Scotland Newsdrive (estimated listeners 8.7% of national adult population), and BBC World Service (estimated weekly listeners 188 million), the last repeated in several programmes on 8-9/6/2011. Interviews followed on 9/6/2011 for Radio New Zealand Morning Report (estimated listeners 14.3% of national adult population) and Newstalk Ireland's 'Moncrieff!'. *The Oxford Times* carried an extensive interview feature on 23/6/2011, as did *The Lancet* on 28/1/2012. *BBC History Magazine*, August 2011 (estimated readership 0.5% of national adult population), carried a news item on the discovery, as did *BBC Who Do You Think You Are Magazine*, August 2011.

Public understanding of the historical lessons to be drawn from a wider range of accidents was stimulated by further publications and news stories. Several accidents drawn from this research were used by Ian Mortimer in his *Time Traveller's Guide to Elizabethan England* (2012) (pp. 327, 331, 335, 386-7), which reached number 5 in the Sunday Times' non-fiction best-sellers list. Two

Impact case study (REF3b)

articles by Gunn and Gromelski in *BBC History Magazine* (3.2, 3.3) focused on drowning and children's toys and games and were supported by freely available podcasts on the magazine's website (5.7). Public interest in the research in Poland was developed by a general article in the popular history magazine *Mówią wieki* (3.5). Research on sport, in particular football, attracted attention from newspapers, and stories ran in the *Times* and *Telegraph* on 17/12/2011 as well as on the *Daily Mail* website (5.8). This led to interviews on two radio programmes with different listener demographics from those stations which had previously considered the research, Talksport FM (Hawksbee and Jacobs show, 20/12/ 2011) (estimated listeners 2.1% of national adult population) and Italk FM (Maurice Boland show, 19/12/2011). Football, archery and bell-ringing accidents were featured on *Have I Got News for You* (BBC1, 23/12/2011), attracting 6.11m viewers (5.9). Archery deaths appeared in *Horrible Histories* 'Stupid Deaths' section (BBC 1, 9/4/2012), subsequently posted on YouTube (in three versions totalling 65,193 views by 15/7/2013) (5.10).

Current debate on **health and safety policy** was equipped with historical perspective by the article in *The Lancet* (3.4) exploring what the coroners' inquests can tell us about understandings of health, illness and death in the past, and by a press release about sixteenth-century work accidents. The story about work-related accidents was covered by the *Daily Telegraph* on 5/4/2012 and on the BBC website (5.3) with the story 'Summer was the most dangerous time for Tudors', which was widely shared and tweeted. Organisations and individuals concerned with contemporary health and safety issues tweeted or used it on their websites to give historical context to their policies or campaigns. These included the NHS Health Improvement Network, the Health and Safety Executive of Indonesia and GK First Aid Training. The Farmer's Guardian website linked the story to their Farm Safety Charter campaign to cut accidental deaths in modern farming, and Karen Thompson (a legal executive in the personal injury department of Blake Laphorn solicitors) reflected in her blog on the parallels between sixteenth-century accidents and modern mishaps with potholes and cracks in the pavement (5.6, 5.11).

Finally, a series of public lectures delivered by Dr Gunn between February and June 2013 stimulated the **enthusiasm for understanding history** of a wide range of individuals. These lectures addressed audiences of between 50 and 200 members of the public of a variety of ages, ranging from children at Stowe School and undergraduates at Bristol University to adults of working and retirement age at the Winchester and Beckenham and Bromley branches of the Historical Association, the Lincoln branch of the Workers' Educational Association and the BBC History Magazine 'Talking Tudor' public history day. The impact of these lectures on individuals is best shown by questionnaire returns. At Lincoln, for example, 51 people returned questionnaires. Of 48 who gave their employment status, 9 were employed or self-employed, 39 were retired and only one was a member of staff or student at a university. The average rating given on the question 'To what extent did the lecture increase your awareness of everyday life in the sixteenth century?' was 4.1/5. 27 commented on particular aspects of daily life on which their perspective or opinion had been altered, such as the prevalence of drowning (2), the variety of leisure activities (3), the lives of children (2), guns and traffic (1 each). 28 specified aspects of daily life about which they would have liked to hear more, such as women's lives and the importance of the landscape, thus helping to shape the future focus and presentation of the research. 28 said they would take action as a result of the talk, such as attending more history lectures or joining a local history group (14), reading more about the subject (7), or being more careful of their own safety (2). At the BBC History Magazine event, with a more varied audience (including 21 employed, 1 unemployed, 22 retired, 5 university students and staff and 8 school students), 59 questionnaires were returned. The average score on increased awareness was 4.3/5 and 29 intended to take action. This included reading more about Tudor life (16), attending more history lectures (4), reflecting on present safety measures (4) and, in the words of a school student, 'studying ordinary people as well as monarchs'. Four, including a primary school teacher, a secondary school teacher and a National Trust volunteer, said they would pass on what they had learned to others. A broader view of the lectures' impact can be gained from the Lincoln group's website, which commented: 'On Saturday 2nd March 2013 Dr. Steven Gunn of Merton College, Oxford enthralled almost 100 people at St. Hugh's Church Hall, Lincoln with a description of his cutting edge research on Tudor Coroner's Reports. He very kindly tailored the information to the Lincolnshire taste and talked on

Impact case study (REF3b)

Everyday Life and Accidental Death in Tudor Lincolnshire. The afternoon was extremely informative and thanks to Dr. Gunn's sharp sense of humour very entertaining. ... The Lincoln learners are certainly looking forward to more of the same in the future' (5.12).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 Reviews of *Death and the Virgin*: John Guy, *The Sunday Times*, 14/3/2010; John Hinton, *The Catholic Herald*, 9/4/2010; Sarah Gristwood, *The Guardian*, 17/4/2010:

<http://chrisiskidmore.co.uk/reviews.html>.

5.2 *Revealed* viewing figures: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/nov/19/beenys-restoration-nightmare-tv-ratings>

5.3 BBC website stories: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-13682993>;
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-13762313>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-17601616>
[5 pm 4/4/2012](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-17601616).

5.4 Sample websites for Ophelia story: <http://www.channel4.com/news/was-shakespeare-heroine-based-on-bards-cousin>; <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/8561393/Shakespeare-link-to-childs-death.html>; <http://uk.news.yahoo.com/oxford-academic-finds-tantalising-clue-ophelia-143529932.html>; <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/926955-morte-de-prima-pode-ter-inspirado-ofelia-de-shakespeare.shtml>;
<http://www.shanghaidaily.com/nsp/World/2011/06/09/Reallife%2Blink%2Bfound%2Bto%2BHamlet%2Bheroine/>; <http://www.n-tv.de/panorama/Wie-Shakespeare-auf-Ophelia-kam-article3527331.html>; <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/oxford-academic-finds-tantalising-clue-to-ophelia/157831-40-103.html>; <http://www.ibna.ir/vdcf0edymw6dxma.r7iw.html>;
http://kultura.gazeta.pl/kultura/1,114628,9748923,Intryga_sprzed_500_I.

5.5 Swell UK pond marketing: <http://www.swelluk.com/news/800574851/pond-incident-played-role-in-shakespeare-character-creation>

5.6 Twitter response to BBC website stories: <http://topsy.com/www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-13682993>; <http://topsy.com/www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-13762313>;
<http://topsy.com/www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-17601616>

5.7 History extra podcasts, 22 December 2011, 10 January 2013:
<http://www.historyextra.com/podcasts>

5.8 Football accidents story: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2075065/More-people-died-playing-football-SWORD-FIGHTING-Tudor-times.html>

5.9 *Have I Got News for You* viewing figures: printout of relevant data from Christmas 2011 top 30 Programmes from the website <http://www.barb.co.uk/>, available on file.

5.10 *Horrible Histories*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6geFUQOEa8>;
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZAO-WRqNQk>;
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekUa946V8xw>

5.11 Work accidents story: <http://www.farmersguardian.com/home/latest-news/research-shows-farming-was-deadliest-industry-in-16th-century!/46113.article> 3 pm 5/4/2012;
http://www.blclaims.co.uk/blogpost/oh_to_have_been_a_lawyer_in_tudor_times

5.12 Lincoln WEA: <http://www.weaeastmidlands.org/new-lincoln-branch-kicks-off-with-anne-ward-memorial-lecture>; event feedback questionnaires from Lincoln WEA and BBC Talking Tudor sessions available on file from Dr Gunn.