

Institution: University of Exeter
Unit of Assessment: History
Title of case study: Re-Presenting Heritage through Community Research: Poltimore House
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Professor Henry French's research into the use of landed property and the lives of the English gentry, undertaken since his appointment at Exeter in 2001, has contributed to a Knowledge Transfer Fellowship community engagement project. This project trained volunteer groups to explore the history and archaeology of the estate and gardens of Poltimore House, Exeter. By transforming the capacity of Poltimore House Trust (PHT) to run outreach activities, it significantly enhanced its educational work with young people and schools. By enriching the history of the estate's almost unknown gardens, it gave the PHT a beacon project to publicise and enhance its wider re-development plans. By training community volunteers in historical and archaeological research, it made public involvement central to interpretation of historic landscapes, creating a template of sustainable heritage research that can be applied elsewhere.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Poltimore House is a country house on the edge of Exeter, previously owned by the Bampfylde family, Lords Poltimore. The house, which contains elements from the Tudor period onwards, is now semi-derelict, and along with the surrounding grounds, once a garden and landscaped park, is owned a local charity, PHT which is dedicated to its renovation. The PHT knowledge transfer project utilised the research expertise of Professor French on patterns of landownership and elite political and cultural behaviour which allowed him to provide the social, economic and cultural context for archaeological research on the elite landscape at Poltimore house, and to guide PHT volunteers in archival research projects.</p> <p>Professor French has researched patterns of landownership and power relations among the English elite in a series of studies published between 2003 and 2007 (section 3 references 1, 2). His detailed study of landownership and economic change in an English village community, undertaken first with Professor Richard Hoyle of Reading University, and subsequently on his own (Section 3, reference 4) provided model for investigating the background of Poltimore house, by offering experience in the interpretation and analysis of a wide range of estate archives, such as rentals, surveys and maps. Furthermore, Professor French has studied processes of cultural reproduction among the landed elite through his most recent research into gentry social and gender identities (section 3 references 3 & 4). His research into the personal and estate correspondence of 19 gentry households from across England in the period 1670-1900 allowed him to guide PHT volunteers in analysing the composition and turnover of the household and garden staff at Poltimore, their geographical origins and career patterns from census, estate letters and newspaper sources. It also informed his work on the sale of the estate in 1923, for a public lecture for PHT volunteers and guides at a project open-day in June 2012, and the subsequent <i>Landscape History</i> article. All Professor French's publications listed in section 3 have been subject to external peer review. The outcomes of his AHRC project (AH/E007791/1) were graded as 'good', and his book on this project with Dr Rothery was reviewed recently in <i>American Historical Review</i> (vol. 118, no. 4, Oct. 2013, pp. 1247-9), and described as 'exemplary' in its use of estate materials to illustrate processes of cultural change.</p> <p>During the PHT knowledge transfer project Professor French worked alongside two archaeologists, Professor Oliver Creighton and Dr Penny Cunningham, providing historical knowledge and archival expertise that supported their archaeological investigations. Professor Creighton is an expert on landscapes of the social elite in the historic period, both urban and rural. He was co-director of a major AHRC-funded research project investigating the historic townscape of Wallingford in Oxfordshire AD 800-1300, giving him considerable experience of community archaeology training and field-work activities for mapping above- and below-ground archaeology that were applied to</p>

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the Poltimore project. In addition, he drew on Archaeology at Exeter's experience in community and schools-led surveying, field-walking, test-pitting, and find cleaning/identification archaeology through the Heritage Lottery-funded *XArch* project, 2004-8. Dr Penny Cunningham who had led the community archaeology events in *XArch* was employed as the KT Fellow at Poltimore to lead volunteer activities and public events, co-ordinate research projects and link to schools and the wider community.

Academic research on Poltimore House has led to a peer-reviewed, open-access journal article published by *Landscape History* in 2013, to disseminate findings about the function of academic research processes and presentation in building cultural capacity in the heritage/charitable sector.

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

Evidence of the quality of the research: this research was the result of external grant funding from the AHRC (final report grade 'good') and all the publications were peer reviewed.

- 1) H. R. French & R. W. Hoyle, 'English Individualism refuted – and reasserted: the land market of Earls Colne (Essex), 1550-1750', *Economic History Review*, LVI, 4, (2003).
- 2) H. R. French & R. W. Hoyle, *The Character of English Rural Society: Earls Colne, 1550-1750* (Manchester U.P. 2007).
- 3) H. R. French & M. Rothery, *Man's Estate: Masculinity and the Landed Elite in England, c. 1660-1900* Oxford U.P., (2012). Research funded by AHRC Standard Research Grant AH/E007791/1, £370,041 2007-2010.
- 4) British Academy Small Grants Award SG-091025 'Landlords, Tenants and Paupers? Rural Society and the "Tripartite Model" in Eighteenth-Century England: a case study', awarded 02/10, funding one 0.4 researcher for 4 months - £4,877.
- 5) AHRC Knowledge Transfer Fellowship Award AH/H03806X/1, 'Community and Landscape: Transforming Access to the Heritage of the Poltimore Estate', (PI Oliver Creighton) funding KT Fellow (Penny Cunningham), and 5.6 hours/week funding over 24 months for CI (Henry French); total AHRC contribution = £154, 924, 2010-12.
- 6) O. Creighton, P. Cunningham & H. French, "Peopling Polite Landscapes: Community and Heritage at Poltimore, Devon", *Landscapes*, 34, 2 (2013) – available via Open Access. http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rlsh20/34/2#.UoDbNSe7S_8

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

Poltimore House is an emotive site with strong bonds to the city of Exeter. Until 1921, it was a country house, the home of the Bampfylde family, Lords Poltimore. Thereafter, it was a private school, and an NHS hospital, before suffering serious fire damage in 1988. After a further decade of neglect and vandalism it was acquired in 2000 by a charity, the PHT, whose aim is its long-term preservation and re-use. In Feb. 2009, the PHT approached the University of Exeter for academic guidance and to help prepare a *Heritage Lottery Fund* bid. It quickly became clear that instead of academics supplying ready-made expertise, the site and PHT's 300-strong volunteer base offered an opportunity to engage more fully by creating a group of volunteer researchers who could recover and take ownership of the house's past. This collaboration resulted in a successful AHRC Knowledge Transfer grant award in April 2010.

Between Aug. 2010 and July 2012 the project focused on two elements:

- a) Working with volunteers to trace the history and evolution of the Poltimore House gardens and estate landscape primarily through detailed documentary research and map analysis on the 18th and 19th centuries. For instance, in 3-monthly project workshops Prof. French introduced volunteers to the wider historical context of their detailed analyses of nineteenth-century census records, and their findings from surveys of nineteenth-century newspapers, maps and the 1910 Estate Duty Act valuation.
- b) Leading teams of volunteer, non-professional researchers in methods of archaeological research (field-walking, geo-physical surveying, landscape archaeology), to assemble a longer, archaeological time-scale for the estate's development.

All the activities described below took place between 2010 and 2012 unless otherwise specified.

Working alongside PHT, **the project developed on-site educational activities** with primary and secondary schools in East Devon, plus A-level students from Exeter College (the main tertiary college in Exeter). During the course of the project 721 school pupils from seven partner schools in Devon participated in 18 training and outreach events mapped to the National Curriculum. Events included on-site training workshops on masonry recording, archaeological survey, landscape analysis and visits to schools and a film made by Broadclyst Community Primary School (Section 5 reference 3). These sources, objects and resources have enabled PHT's Volunteer Manager to provide on-site School visits, and continued curriculum engagement with Broadclyst Community Primary School in 2012-13, allowing pupils to produce artwork for PHT's new on site information boards (Section 5 reference 2).

The project contributed significantly to PHT's future development plans. The project team emphasized PHT's most accessible (but unknown) legacy, the gardens and the estate history. This enabled PHT to use this resource as a beacon project in its successful HLF bid, *Access, Interpretation, Learning and Archives* (Section 5 reference 2). This funded rebuilding of a service wing of the house, creating a base for the PHT, and a first stage towards its wider re-development plans for the site within Exeter and East Devon Growth Point. Archaeological fieldwork in the environs of the house revealed a number of formerly hidden landscape features, such as an Edwardian Chinese Garden, which were surveyed in detail, for inclusion into new reconstructions and phased plans 'to support their long-term preservation by the PHT' (section 5 reference 2). Detailed sub-surface archaeological reports on the park and gardens will inform the PHT's future management strategy, and enable scheduling of the garden and park, as housing and business development expands around the site as part of the East Devon Growth Point.

Public involvement in research was built into the processes of research training and project co-ordination among PHT volunteers and Poltimore village residents, including documentary research, field-walking, archaeological surveying, geo-physical surveys, and finds identification (Section 5, reference 7). PHT's partnership with the social enterprise Forward25 provided placements and workplace experience for young local unemployed people (Section 5, reference 5). The project 'made sure volunteers gained new knowledge and understanding of the processes involved in landscape history' (section 5 reference 2). It also created a template of sustainable public participation, research-skills training and volunteering that can be applied elsewhere in a climate of long-term declines in public funding and professional skills shortages in local government. Since the end of the project in Aug. 2012, volunteers have continued historical and archaeological research, through a research group (Poltimore Estate History & Archaeology Group, PEHAG) founded in October 2012, which was turned into a formally-constituted historical society in Oct. 2013 (Poltimore Estate Research Society, PERS), affiliated to PHT. Project participants have become a group of skilled volunteer researchers, who can take forward further investigations into the history of the estate, house and gardens.

The project increased public access to Poltimore House and its grounds. Before the project started Poltimore House was open one afternoon a month between March to October. As the project built capacity in the form of trained volunteers, Poltimore House has been able to open twice a week between March and October, significantly improving access to the grounds and has made 'a significant difference to the condition of the parkland' (section 5 references 2 & 7). The project stimulated public interest in the neglected historic landscape at Poltimore, by making techniques of landscape research more widely accessible. During the course of the project 2,127 members of the public participated in 86 training and outreach events (including flagship launch events and an end-of-project symposium), two project open events and other 'local history days' (section 5, references 6 & 7).

The project made the history of Poltimore house publicly accessible with information about the heritage of the estate presented to the general public through the creation of a specific project website (Section 5 reference 1), which contains 101 documents, photographs and analyses of census, newspaper and mapping evidence undertaken by project volunteers. For example, volunteers trained in analysis of the censuses have undertaken detailed reconstruction and

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presentation of life in Poltimore village in the nineteenth century (section 5, reference 7). A public exhibition was held at Poltimore to mark the conclusion of the project in July 2012 (section 5, reference 7). PERS have now taken over the website in 2013 in order to continue its development. The project created new archaeological find collections for PHT, moveable on-site displays and five permanent on-site visitor display boards to present new interpretative materials about Poltimore, its gardens and estates, incorporating the work of school children and volunteers involved in the project, and leaflets providing key information and maps. These have been built into on-site presentations at open days by volunteer guides, and a new guidebook to be written by the volunteers (PERS), sold to raise funds for the PHT. Material from the project will be incorporated into a new volume on the history of Poltimore House (J. Hemming, *The House That Richard Built*), published by PHT in November 2013 to raise funds.

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

1. Project website <http://elac.ex.ac.uk/poltimore-landscapes/>
2. Letter from the chair of Poltimore House Trust
3. A record of Broadclyst Primary School's involvement with PHT including a film made by the pupils: (<http://elac.ex.ac.uk/poltimore-landscapes/page.php?id=152>)
4. Letter from the Poltimore House Trust, PHT Volunteer Manager
5. The website of Forward25: www.forward25.com/
6. Poltimore Landscape's volunteer blog: <http://elac.ex.ac.uk:8080/poltimorecommunity/pg/blog/lq287/read/1710/archaeology-display-for-the-annual-heritage-open-weekend-at-poltimore>
7. Activities of the Poltimore project publicised via the local newspaper. (a) volunteers recruited: <http://www.exeterexpressandecho.co.uk/Walkers-wanted-help-historic-house/story-13334380-detail/story.html>; (b) exhibition advertised: <http://www.exeterexpressandecho.co.uk/Exhibition-looks-Poltimore/story-16581494-detail/story.html> (c) open day reported: <http://www.exeterexpressandecho.co.uk/Poltimore-opening-work-starts-repair-roof/story-13229881-detail/story.html>