

Institution: Birkbeck, University of London

Unit of Assessment: 30 History

Title of case study: Gay history-making in the community

1. Summary of the impact

Dr Matt Cook's research on domestic queer cultures has enabled lesbian and gay organisations and individuals, as well as wider networks, to engage with oral histories and archival material and to explore the complexities within conventional ideas about histories of identity and community. His research has been influential in lifelong learning and in schools where it has supported the exploration of LGBT histories. He is increasingly called upon by the media, nationally and internationally, to discuss his research insights to various contexts.

2. Underpinning research

The impact of Dr Cook's work is underpinned by three research projects. *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885 – 1914* (Ref 1); *A Gay History of Britain: sex and love between men since the middle ages* (Ref 3), and *Queer Domesticities* (Refs 4, 5, 6 and a forthcoming monograph [2014]). Dr Cook's research forms part of a second generation of queer history writing, building on groundbreaking work within and beyond the academy by Jeffrey Weeks, George Chauncey, John D'Emilio, and Jonathan Ned Katz (amongst others). Their work is marked especially by a conjunction of historical and sociological perspectives; Dr Cook's has brought the field into closer contact with adjacent disciplines in the arts (especially literature and film). Public engagement and knowledge exchange is embedded in his approach to research. He shares work in development with relevant community groups as a way of nuancing his analysis and fostering an active engagement in the processes – not just the results – of research and analysis in history (Ref 5).

His first book offered a detailed examination of the intersection of London and queer history, showing how the capital shaped ideas of homosexual identity and community, and mapping the queer metropolis in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Ref 1). On the basis of this, he was approached by Greenwood Press to be lead author and editor on the non-academic reference work, *A Gay History of Britain* (ref 2). Aimed at a broad audience, this was the first work to trace shifts in experience, identity and community over such an extended period. Finally, research for *Queer Domesticities* was anchored in a series of case studies and explored the shifting relationship between homosexuality, home and family across the twentieth century (Ref 4, 5 & 6). It historicises and contextualises recent legal, social and cultural change and draws out shifting ideas and everyday experiences of home across the twentieth century. In this work, Dr Cook examined the intersection of public realms and public discourses with everyday lives and self-understandings – especially in his use of life writing and oral histories. He sought in such testimonies not only additional perspectives on pivotal events, but also a sense of intersecting identifications in the way queer men have thought about themselves, and their families, friendships and relationships. Dr Cook's research involves a reflexive approach to oral history in which participants revisit and comment on their testimony and its use. Engaging subjects with their own history deepens their purchase on the past and the ways it is represented.

Responding to Dr Cook's successful bid for an AHRC fellowship for the 'Queer Domesticities' project, Professor Daniel Healey noted, '[Dr Cook's] experience is closely focused on bringing scholarly research to wider communities and to communities which can "use" that research: policy makers, community groups, students, books to reach a broader readership. ... He is geographically and institutionally well placed ... to present this work to key community groups and

stakeholders, and he already has excellent experience in bringing his work to these groups.'

3. References to the research

1. *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885 - 1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2003)
Sales: 1,311 copies (submitted to the last RAE); reissued in paperback in 2008
2. '[A New City of Friends: London and Homosexuality in the 1890s](#)', *History Workshop Journal*, 56, Autumn 2003
3. *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men since the Middle Ages* (Greenwood, March 2007). 788 copies sold (submitted to the last RAE)
4. '[Families of Choice? George Ives, Queer Lives and the Family](#)', *Gender and History*, 20 Spring, 2010
5. '[Gay Times: Identity, Locality, Memory, and the Brixton Squats in 1970's London](#)', in *Journal of Twentieth Century British History*, 23, Spring 2012
6. '[Domestic Passions: Unpacking the Homes of Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon](#)', *Journal of British Studies*, 51, Summer 2012

Research grant

AHRC Research Fellowship: Jan-Dec 2012: Queer Domesticities: homosexuality and home life in twentieth century London. AHRC award: £55,000

4. Details of the impact

Dr Cook's research is embedded in his commitment to sharing his findings, insights and methods as he develops them. In his work on the post-war years, his use of oral history has enabled non-academics to explore the history of queer lives, networks and communities and has highlighted afresh the significance of locality, class, ethnicity, and gender. As co-director of the Raphael Samuel History Centre since 2008, Dr Cook has used his research to involve communities in the study of their histories, enabled people in the LGBT community and its wider periphery, in schools and lifelong learning, to explore and challenge constructions of queer histories. His research has also had a growing impact on media and wider public discourse.

The LGBT community

Since 2008, in LGBT History Month Dr Cook has organised well-attended and well-reviewed archive workshops (10 – 30 participants) which enable participants, most of whom have not studied history formally post-16, to use archival sources to reveal alternative histories. His research has provided the basis for strong relationships with a number of organisations with whom he has convened workshops, including the Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia and the Hall Carpenter Archives. His research has been influential in the development of the work of a number of LGBT organisations. For example, he gives annual lectures to the Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA), where he addresses audiences of 80 or more; one talk, on the History of Gay Families, led to an increase in the involvement of LGBT Parents/Carers in GALHA's work (Testimonial 1). He has helped the Pink Singers – London's LGBT community choir – in their successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for their oral history project. The choir's co-ordinator writes: 'That we are able to even undertake this project is due in no small part to Matt' (Testimonial 2). For Stonewall's 2009/10 oral history project on policing and housing, and Rukus! the Black LGBT Archive, he worked (respectively) as a steering group member and advisor. Age Concern's project worker with the older gay men's group, Opening Doors London, writes: 'Matt's talks are always popular with anywhere between 40 and 50 people coming to hear him speak His talks are stimulating and always get members talking about events THEY remember...He gives [them] a sense of pride in their own contributions and feelings of worth that their "stories" are of

value.’ (Testimonial 3)

Schools, students and lifelong learning

Dr Cook’s research has enabled educational bodies to engage with LGBT history more effectively. Since 2009, Dr Cook has helped staff at the Hall-Carpenter Archive to develop their skills in engaging school students and adult learners with archival materials. The London Metropolitan Archive (LMA) has worked closely with Dr Cook for several years. He developed and hosted its popular Queer Histories Certificate of Higher Education course which attracted new users and raised awareness of the LMA’s collections. He is on the steering committee for LMA’s annual LGBT History and Archives conference. His research has led the Interpretation/ Development Team to re-visit collections and make new enquiries of the material, inspiring new public events. On the events steering group of the Bishopsgate Institute since 2008, his knowledge and understanding of gay history helped them increase their audience by over 500% over 6 years. According to LMA’s Principal Development Officer, Cook ‘inspired and highly knowledgeable presentations to conference audiences have been challenging, engaging and above all accessible for people with a wide range of interests and background knowledge. The evaluation feedback over the years has confirmed this with responses all being Good to Excellent.’ She adds that his ‘role has been very important to LMA over the years, enabling LMA to develop audience and engagement directly with/through Birkbeck and the Raphael Samuel History Centre. His input has also informed our practice with other HE institutions.’ (Testimonial 4)

As patron, since 2010, for Schools Out, a charity working in schools and FE colleges, Dr Cook has inspired school teachers and students to explore LGBT issues. In 2011 the Historical Association (HA) invited Dr Cook to record a podcast on Britain’s gay and lesbian history for their schools website and estimates between 10,000 and 12,000 downloads. Most of the users have been teachers, and history students between 16 and 21. The podcast was also broadcast by gay radio station Gateway 97.8. (Source 6)

Cook’s research was also instrumental in the successful application by History and Heritage Adult Learning London (HHALL) to the National Institute for Adult and Community Education (NIACE), winning £27,000 for a public Valentine’s festival ‘*Past Caring: A Celebration of Love in History*’ in February 2010. This week-long festival involved 16 events at archive and heritage institutions across London, attended by diverse audiences of over 500 people. The event report features a list of project partners (National Maritime Museum, Wiener Library, London Transport Museum, Geffrye Museum, Freud Museum, Hampstead Museum, London Metropolitan Archive, Gays the Word, London Review Bookshop. (Source 7)

The significance of Cook’s research is recognised by museum and heritage institutions. He gave the keynote for the ‘Gay Icons’ programme, 2009 at the National Portrait Gallery; he created the gay history strand in the National Trust’s phone app history tour of Soho London, which has received 8,000 downloads since its launch in 2012 (Source 8); and a National Archives podcast resulted in c.4,500 downloads between April 2011 and March 2013. Most recently, in June 2013, he led a discussion at the Geffrye Museum of the Home in anticipation of his forthcoming *Queer Domesticities* book. The event was fully booked at 100.

Media and public discourse

Dr Cook’s two books were listed in the top six ‘Gay London Reads’ in *Time Out*, 19 – 25 Feb 2009. He is a frequent participant in TV and radio news and documentaries, nationally and, increasingly, internationally. He appeared several times as a ‘talking head’ in the TV documentary, ‘Prince Eddy: The King We Never Had’, first screened on Channel 4 in 2005 but still available on Youtube. It was viewed over 13,207 times by 31/07/2013 (Source 9). He has been interviewed about his research for TV programmes including ‘Am I Normal?’ (BBC1 2008); and ‘Victorians Uncovered’ (Channel 4

Impact case study (REF3b)

2008), regularly repeated on History Channel. In 2012 he was interviewed for a six-part documentary on LGBT history in Europe for a student radio station in Norway, appearing in 3 of the 6 episodes (source 10). On Radio 4's *Today* (22 January 2013, with an estimated audience of 6.93 million), he participated in a discussion on history of transvestism. He also took part in a debate on gay marriage for the BBC World News TV channel's lunchtime (for Europe; early evening in Asia) news programme with an estimated global audience of 200 million (5 Feb 2013). Croatian TV, HRT (www.hrt.hr) interviewed Dr Cook to provide historical perspective on gay marriage and rights for documentary programme 'Parallels' (May 2013) with a viewing audience of 2 million (Source 11). He talked about his research on the community radio station Gaydio, which has a broadcast and online audience of up to 800,000 people (July 2013). A producer of BBC World News described him as 'a fantastic speaker with a balanced, well researched, original perspective of the gay marriage issue which helped push a lively debate and also educate our audiences around the world. Dr Cook presented his research in a very effective and engaging way and became involved in the debate with the other participants.' (Testimonial 5)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Testimonials

1. Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association (GALHA), Campaigns and Programme Coordinator (factual statement)
2. The co-coordinator of the Pink Singers (factual statement)
3. Project worker, [Opening Doors London](#) (factual statement)
4. Principal Development Officer, London Metropolitan Archive (factual statement)
5. Producer, BBC World News (factual statement)

Other sources

6. The resources on LGBT history published by the [Historical Association](#)
7. Available on request: A copy of the contract relating to the NIACE Transformation Fund grant of £27,183 to Raphael Samuel History Centre (Project Reference Number: M551 September 1 2009 - March 31 2010)
8. The [National Trust Soho](#) app can be downloaded from iTunes here. It also has a Facebook link. Dr Cook's role was to speak on Soho's rich queer history.
9. *Prince Eddie: the King We Never Had*, in which Matt Cook appears as a 'talking head' referencing his research, is available at several YouTube links including [here](#) and [here](#).
10. [Norwegian radio documentary](#): See episodes for October 14 & 28 and November 26 2012.
11. Invitation from TV journalist who interviewed Dr Cook for Croatian TV, available on request