

<b>Institution:</b> University of Warwick		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D26 - Modern Languages and Linguistics		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Performing Portchester's hidden stories		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2011 - 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Katherine Astbury	Professor of French Studies	October 1999-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2017 - 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>'The French Prisoners at Portchester have fitted up a Theatre in the Castle, which they have decorated in a style far surpassing anything of the kind that could possibly be expected. The Pantomimes which they have brought forward, are not excelled by those performed in London' (<i>Hampshire Telegraph</i>, January 1811).</p> <p>Forgotten for 200 years, the Portchester castle theatre has been brought back to life as a result of Astbury's research which has had a significant impact on the visitor experience, informed the work of the English Heritage interpretation and educational teams and provided a flagship model of collaboration with academia for them. Her research has also served as inspiration for an artist-devised sound installation and for the National Youth Theatre and is contributing to English Heritage's broader national strategy of engaging with diverse historical narratives in creative ways.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>The British public's knowledge of France during the period 1789-1815 is dominated by military history, particularly surrounding the Battle of Waterloo. Astbury's research gives us a richer appreciation of cultural responses to the Revolution and Napoleon. <b>Her findings show that even apparently non-political texts reveal how writers, artists, playwrights and musicians coped with the political and emotional legacy of the French Revolution and of Napoleon's regime</b> (3.1). She has also shown <b>how culture played an important part in shaping French debates about identity, nationhood and political legitimacy: it did not simply reflect political events but inflected the public sphere and influenced the calculations made by those on the political scene</b> (3.2; 3.5).</p> <p>Funded by two AHRC grants (standard research grant 2013-17 to investigate French theatre of the Napoleonic Era and follow-on funding 2016-17 for a project on Staging Napoleonic Theatre), Astbury's work on the aesthetics and politics of French theatre 1799-1815, a traditionally under-researched field of study, has revealed the deep connections between regime and performance, politics and play text (3.5; 3.7). Her research has revealed the significance of Portchester Castle's unique French prisoner-of-war theatre. Astbury and her team interpreted new archival material relating to the depot's commander, Charles William Paterson, acquired by the V&amp;A theatre collection in 2013. <b>They found that the prisoners had not only written their own plays in the style of the leading exponent of melodrama, Guilbert de Pixérécourt, but had constructed a fully functioning theatre</b>, including trap door, fly system for raising and lowering items on stage and the means to send a 'cherub' across to the boxes where the captain and his British guests sat (3.4 and forthcoming article in <i>Les musiques de scène de Diderot à Hugo</i>, ed. by Olivier Bara and Patrick Taiëb, Presses Universitaires de Rennes), features which confirmed 19<sup>th</sup>-century mémoires' descriptions of the theatre which had previously been thought to be fanciful boasting. By staging a play written and performed by the prisoners, Astbury revealed that they were exploiting the architecture of the ground floor of the keep to depict characters' escapes from unjust imprisonment and taking advantage of the acoustics of the space to create a radio play <i>avant la lettre</i> so that those prisoners held on the floors above could hear the actors and orchestra. This archival and practical evidence has revolutionised knowledge of the Portchester theatre and French prisoner-of-war plays.</p>		

Astbury is at the forefront of 'practice as research' into 19<sup>th</sup>-century French melodrama. The interaction of music, gesture and text is the hallmark of the genre but, as scores were not published, scholarship has often only considered the play text. Astbury has helped to restore the centrality of music in analysis of early French melodrama and has **found that melodramatic tableaux are dynamic and reactive not static when actors perform the text and its score together** (3.4; 3.6 and forthcoming article in *Ser prisionero de guerra entre la Ilustración y Napoleón. Una aproximación por casos particulares*, ed. by Evaristo Garrido Martinez, Silex Ediciones). This research underpinned the performance in situ of the French prisoner-of-war melodrama at Portchester Castle and one of Pixérécourt's *La Forteresse du Danube* (3.7) at the Georgian Theatre Royal.

Astbury has also worked extensively on using archival material to inspire creative outputs, from stop-motion videos of Waddesdon Manor's Revolutionary prints (3.3) to the Portchester sound installation as a stimulus for GCSE drama pieces, to the authentic costumes in the Portchester dressing-up box, and the National Youth Theatre's Research and Development Zoom sessions, thereby bringing research to new audiences who become co-producers of artistic responses to the culture of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras.

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

#### Research grants:

- AHRC follow-on funding: Staging Napoleonic Theatre (Ref AH/P00394X/1), PI **Katherine Astbury**, 2016-17, **GBP72,612**
- AHRC project: French theatre of the Napoleonic era (Ref AH/K000217/1), PI **Katherine Astbury**, 2013-2017, **GBP466,709**

#### Chapters in edited collections:

1. **Astbury, K.** (2012) *Narrative Responses to the Trauma of the French Revolution*. Legenda Main Series. Oxford: Legenda. ISBN 978-1907975424
2. **Astbury, K.** and Philp, M. (2018) *Introduction*. In: **Astbury, K.** and Philp, M., (eds.) *Napoleon's Hundred Days and the Politics of Legitimacy*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: 978-3-319-88903-0
3. **Astbury, K.** (2019) *Engaging Students in Research: Stop Motion Videos, Strip Cartoons and the Waddesdon Manor Collection of Prints*. In: Douthwaite Viglione, J., Sol, A. and Seth, C., (eds.) *Teaching Representations of the French Revolution*. New York: MLA, pp. 228-240. ISBN: 9781603294652

#### Articles in refereed journals:

4. **Astbury, K.** and Tisdall, D. (2020) *Sonorising «La Forteresse du Danube»: Functions of Music in Parisian and Provincial Melodrama of the Early Nineteenth Century*. *Studi Francesi*, 191 (LXIV|II). pp. 348-359. doi: 10.4000/studifrancesi.31171
5. **Astbury, K.** (2013) *Les mélodrames de Pixérécourt avant 1807*. *European Drama and Performance Studies* (1). pp. 89-106. doi: 10.15122/isbn.978-2-8124-1059-8.p.0089

#### Conference proceeding:

6. **Astbury, K.** (2011) *Music in Pixérécourt's early melodramas*. In: Hibberd, S., (ed.) *Melodramatic voices: understanding music drama*. Ashgate interdisciplinary studies in opera. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 15-26. ISBN: 9781409400820

#### Critical edition:

7. **Astbury, K.** (2016) *Pixérécourt's Forteresse du Danube*. In: Astbury, K., Cooper, B.T., Martin, R., Robardey-Eppstein, S., (eds), *Mélodrames. Tome III (1804-1808), Pixérécourt*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, pp. 263-411. ISBN : 978-2-8124-5110-2

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

##### Bringing the Portchester castle theatre back to life

Interpretation at Portchester Castle before 2017 concentrated on Roman and medieval history, overlooking the years when it served as French prisoner-of-war depot. The significance and rarity of its historic Napoleonic theatre was not understood nor valued. Astbury's research into this site led to English Heritage showcasing this research in innovative ways with the wider public. Under Astbury's instruction, the ground floor of the keep was transformed with a recreation of the prisoner-of-war theatre. Astbury advised on the design of the recreated theatre and provided original source information for the guide book, the website, the interpretation panels for the new permanent exhibition, and for the costume design for the dressing-up box, which has proved a great hit with visitors. As English Heritage's Property Manager explains: 'Visitors really engage with the space and love to get dressed up in the costumes provided and take a turn on the stage. It encourages impromptu performance and also the use of the *Roseliska* excerpts provided. It appeals to all age groups and visitor feedback is that it gives them a chance to get involved in something that is creative and also something that they wouldn't normally get the chance to experience. It then also causes them to reflect on something that they consider fun compared to the setting that it's in (a prison) compared to the daily life of those performing on the stage' (5.1). The theatre has also been used by schools and theatre groups, and community groups including nursing homes and the Scouts have expressed an interest in using the space for activities when it becomes safe to do so (5.1).

Astbury's input has completely changed how visitors experience the site. In interviews, visitors to the castle felt that the recreated theatre helped them to understand more effectively the way that the space was used: 'so many places just go, "*and this room would have this*", but you can't physically imagine what it looks like, so actually having it visually displayed, you kind of get ... the sense of scale as well' (5.2). The ground-floor theatre is now a multi-functional performance space, used by the Education team and the local community long term.



*The ground floor of the keep before (left) and after, with its new theatre space*

The new permanent exhibition was launched in July 2017 with a public performance of the POW's melodrama, *Roseliska*, produced by Astbury and utilising her broader work on melodrama. It was declared 'a triumph of your applied research' by English Heritage's Senior Properties Historian (5.1). Music from it is now a part of the site audio guide and visitors are able to act out extracts from the play in costume on the stage. Audience feedback on the performance enthusiastically commented on how it was 'moving', 'enthalling', and they fully endorsed this way of 'bringing history to life', giving a 'fresh experience' of a site many thought they knew well. One commented 'I was blown away by the experience – hadn't expected it to be so immersive and evocative of the prisoners' experience here' (5.3). *Roseliska* went on to win the Association for Heritage Interpretation Discover Heritage award in the Events and Activities category in 2019 'for in-depth research, a partnership between the heritage sector and academia, the revelation of an unknown history and creative imagination' (judges' verdict, 5.3).

### Transforming the visitor experience of the castle

Portchester's Property Manager outlined the difference that Astbury's research has made to Portchester Castle: following the installation, the average visit time duration increased from 45 minutes to 90 minutes, and visitor numbers saw an increase of 3.6% over anticipated numbers. Furthermore, English Heritage 'saw a marked change in the diversity of visitors to site' (5.1).

The powerful effect of music and the French language on the audience who watched *Roseliska* in 2017, and the discovery of a Portchester connection to another prisoner-of-war play manuscript – about the black revolutionaries of Saint-Domingue, whose fictional exploits mirrored those of real-life prisoners of war from the Caribbean held at Portchester in 1796-97 – led Astbury to collaborate on an artistic sound installation to allow visitors to hear sounds from the castle's time as POW depot. This included extracts from the prisoners' plays, letters by and about some of the female black revolutionaries housed at Portchester and the entry registers containing the names of the 2,000 prisoners from the Caribbean. Internationally acclaimed sound artist Elaine Mitchener used Astbury's research to create a temporary sound installation, [Les Murs Sont Témoins | These Walls Bear Witness], which ran between July and November 2019 in the keep at Portchester. It recounts the castle's story as a building of incarceration, creativity, and freedom.

Mitchener described how the research 'deepened my understanding and provided further inspiration towards the work...it was exciting to rediscover this period in a new and culturally relevant way' (5.4). She noted the importance of bringing the story of the Caribbean prisoners to a wider audience, because 'the story is relevant in helping our understanding of black and brown people's part in shaping European history outside of the slave trade. This work isn't about victims but freemen and women and their tremendous sense of self against the odds' (5.4). Feedback indicated that 'it added real, immersive value, and showed a unique perspective to the castle's history' (5.5). The installation was shortlisted in the Contribution to Heritage category at the Heritage Awards 2020 and featured in the winning English Heritage podcast series, *Speaking with Shadows* (5.5).

The Head of Learning at English Heritage has highlighted the significance of the installation for the institution: 'What was particularly ground-breaking ...was its use of primary source material which was unknown outside of academic spheres and its commitment to helping people develop a personal connection to archives'. For her, the sound installation was an 'incredibly important artistic intervention for English Heritage' because the research 'provided an important framework for the way in which heritage institutions, like English Heritage, can begin to explore underdeveloped, under-told, "hidden" narratives and difficult histories, such as those of the black Caribbean prisoners of war held at Portchester' (5.1).

### Informing the work of the interpretation and educational teams at English Heritage

Astbury has significantly extended educational provision at Portchester. Before her collaboration with them began, there was no programme of activities for secondary school pupils. Astbury has spearheaded an extension of the Portchester education programme to include regular workshops with A-level drama students and site visits for GCSE drama students as a stimulus for artistic creation. The project is also helping to meet English Heritage's corporate priority of telling diverse histories. English Heritage's Education Visits Officer called Astbury's workshops 'accessible and exciting' and affirmed that they had enabled English Heritage to 'to interpret a site and a site's history in a new way and kept us relevant. Your research has also given us the opportunity to work with college and 6<sup>th</sup> form students from various backgrounds that we wouldn't normally have' (5.1).

Furthermore, in 2020 volunteers and site staff at Portchester were trained by Astbury to better understand the prisoners' theatre so that they can answer visitor queries and extend the primary school's programme to include discovery days about the theatre and the Caribbean prisoners. Training was based on melodrama workshops Astbury developed for a Portchester Castle family



weekend in August 2017 which 'added a different, fresh dimension to our event' according to Portchester's Property Manager (5.1). Astbury is also significantly involved in developing a creative programme that can be used across English Heritage properties in the whole of the south of England. The Education Officer for the South of England is working with Astbury whose 'enthusiasm, knowledge and passion are invaluable' to realise 'the potential for both subject-specific work in Drama and History but also cross-curricular work involving English, MFL and art and design departments' (5.1).

### **Providing a flagship model of collaboration with academia for English Heritage**

The performance of *Roseliska* and the sound installation have informed English Heritage's policy on creative programmes. Astbury's collaboration is seen by the organisation's Head of Learning and Interpretation as 'a key relationship for English Heritage'. It is being promoted as a flagship model of engagement with research: 'These projects have helped to demonstrate to English Heritage and to the wider heritage and culture sector, the outstanding value and potential of academic collaboration and the potential impact of academic research on the heritage sector. What's more, by producing these creative outputs with Prof Astbury, we hope to demonstrate the wide-ranging nature of heritage and history and the ways in which people can discover, engage and learn about the past. The model of collaboration which we have developed with Prof Astbury is one we are actively seeking to replicate on other projects across English Heritage as we consider it a paradigm of best practice and a beacon of what such a collaboration can achieve' (5.1).

Summer 2020 saw a further development of the collaboration between Astbury and English Heritage, with a co-conceived project *Freedom and Revolution* in conjunction with the National Youth Theatre (NYT), reinterpreting the prisoners' play about revolution in the Caribbean. A new production is currently in research and development as part of English Heritage's award-winning national youth engagement programme Shout Out Loud. The Associate Director of the National Youth Theatre sees Astbury's research as crucial to the project: 'the NYT creative team and actors have been offered the magical key of facts and knowledge that can unlock the creative process with true understanding. This subject matter within Freedom and Revolution, at this time is hugely important and our relationship with Kate has been and will continue to be essential to ensure untold stories are illuminated and celebrated' (5.6).

The team behind the performance reflected on its development in an online discussion organised by Astbury in November 2020 as part of the Being Human Festival of the Humanities. The Assistant Director described how they were bringing to life one of history's overlooked stories: 'black women are usually missing from this history...so much of [black history] is centred around just Windrush and slavery' (5.7). The team, along with a group of past NYT actors, spent a week engaging with the research and Mitchener's sound installation. On seeing the work produced at the end of the week, Mitchener saw 'a marked change in how they were so confident with their voices...It was a very transformative week, and life enhancing week for me I know, and I'm sure for them'. She summed up her hopes for the legacy of the project: 'I think it will be carried through each and every person who is involved in the project, that they continue talking about it. That's what keeps the history alive' (5.7).

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

1. Statements from EH staff: Property Manager; Senior Properties Historian; Head of Interpretation and Learning; Education Visits Officer; Education Officer for South of England
2. Portchester Keep Redesign Visitor Feedback
3. Feedback from *Roseliska*: Audience Feedback Cards and AHI Judge's Comments
4. Statement from Sound Artist
5. Sound Installation Responses: Feedback cards, UK Heritage Awards 2020 Shortlist, Podcast Episodes
6. Statement from NYT Associate Director
7. Transcription of Being Human Online Discussion (17 November 2020)