

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Birkbeck, University of London
Unit of Assessment: 28
Title of case study: Re-shaping Approaches to LGBT+ History in the Museums, Archives and Heritage Sectors
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003-2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Cook's research has preserved, democratised and revitalised LGBT+ heritage. His guidebook, <i>Prejudice and Pride</i>, was central to the National Trust's flagship project of the same name, broadening access to LGBT+ heritage. The 2017 Pride and Prejudice programme drew over 350,000 visitors and the NT saw a huge growth in membership and income in that year. It inspired the Trust to fully incorporate its LGBT+ heritage and other obscured elements of its identity into future programmes.</p> <p>Cook has improved access at the Brighton Keep, West Yorkshire archives and community history archive projects in Plymouth and Hampshire. Key exhibitions at the Islington Museum were refurbished, recovering and rejuvenating important but neglected histories. His work with Duckie, a queer club and community heritage organisation, has bolstered a vital cultural hub, created new jobs, and secured listed status for its base, The Royal Vauxhall Tavern – the first site in the country to be protected because of its significance to LGBT+ heritage. His <i>Queer Domesticities</i> inspired a new series of equality networks at the UK's foremost Architectural History society and influenced award-winning literature, a new play, and acclaimed 2017 film <i>Queerama</i>.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Cook's research focuses on the significance of locality in understanding LGBT+ identities and community formations. His book, <i>Queer Domesticities</i> (REF4) and associated essays examined queer home-making across the twentieth century and what he has defined as the dance of queerness and normality in domestic contexts. REF4 drew on the material culture of people's homes, oral history, and local archives, and was the culmination of a programme of research that Cook developed in early book projects such as <i>London and the Culture of Homosexuality</i> (REF1); <i>A Gay History of Britain</i> (REF2), and <i>Queer 1950s</i> (REF3).</p> <p>Cook's work explores the way that immediate localities modulate the experience and understanding of sexual identity and community, often nuancing sweeping national accounts of LGBT+ history. This has been the core premise of Cook's AHRC-funded 'Sexualities and Localities' research project, undertaken with co-investigator Professor Alison Oram (Leeds Beckett), which has resulted in a range of outputs including journal pieces (such as 'Local Matters' (REF6), forthcoming co-authored book (MUP), collection of essays (Bloomsbury) and queer sourcebook aimed at a popular audience (MUP). The project brought the queer histories of Leeds, Plymouth, Brighton and Manchester into comparative perspective, showing how a range of factors – geographical position, size, local economy, topography, demographics, local government and policing, subcultural and cultural reputation and history - shaped local queer life and experience in the period from 1965 to 2010. In witness seminars and outreach and dissemination events, Cook used his research alongside archival materials to prompt discussion and recollection, and to showcase local LGBT+ related resources. The project also assembled over 120 extant oral histories and 10,000 pages of scanned documents from collections across the country, bringing them into comparative perspective in the project's various outputs. In this way it brought new material to light and revived existing collections that would otherwise have remained underused.</p> <p>Cook brought these and similar community collections into further conversation with media and government records in his related work on the emotional landscape and localised experience of the AIDS crisis in Britain in four piece, including "Archives of Feeling": AIDS in the UK, c.1987' [REF5]</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>REF1. Cook, M., <i>London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914</i> (Cambridge University Press), 2003</p> <p>REF2. Cook, M., Mills, R., Trumbach, R., and Cocks, H., <i>A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages</i> (Greenwood World Publishing), 2007</p>

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REF3. Bauer, H., and Cook, M., *Queer 1950s: rethinking sexuality in the postwar years*.

Genders and Sexualities in History (Palgrave Macmillan), 2012

REF4. Cook, M., *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London* (Palgrave Macmillan), 2014

REF5. Cook, M., "Archives of Feeling": the AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987', *History Workshop Journal*, 83 (1), pp. 51-78 (2017) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbx001>

REF6. Cook, M., 'Local matters: queer scenes in 1960s Manchester, Plymouth and Brighton', *Journal of British Studies* 59 (1), pp. 1-25 (2020) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/jbr.2019.244>

4. Details of the impact

The National Trust is perhaps the most significant charity and heritage organisation in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. One of the UK's largest landowners, its properties include more than 500 historic houses, castles, gardens, parks and nature reserves. Cook's relationship with the NT began in 2012 when he took part in the Trust's award-winning 'Soho Stories' app <https://www.nationaltrustjobs.org.uk/our-stories/soho-stories-wins-gold>.

Subsequently, the Trust commissioned him to co-author (with Alison Oram) a guidebook on its LGBT+ heritage, published in 2017 to mark 50 years since the UK's partial decriminalisation of homosexual acts. The guidebook was a major milestone for LGBT+ representation in the heritage sector, focusing on many well-known figures and the grand houses they lived in, but also reflecting on the gaps in our knowledge about working-class queer lives associated with places like the cramped back-to-back terraces in the centre of Birmingham which are also in the Trust's care. (2018;

<http://queerbeyondlondon.com/tag/back-to-backs/>). Cook and Oram's guidebook formed the bedrock for 'Prejudice and Pride', a year-long project that the Trust held in 2017. Prejudice and Pride was the first in a three-year series of 'Challenging Histories' programmes, followed by the commemoration of female suffrage and of Black history, including the connections of NT properties to the slave trade. These also included guidebooks and podcasts like those in which Cook participated, creating 'a consistently enhanced perception that the Trust tells cogent stories about our diverse cultural heritage' (1). Over 350,000 people visited associated exhibitions and events, while a podcast, including interviews with Cook, was downloaded over 16,000 times. The project received overwhelmingly positive feedback and reviews (1), as well as sparking controversy and debate about the role of the NT.

The initiative also had an impact on the NT's staff and volunteers who participated in Prejudice and Pride. Independent research commissioned by the Trust showed that 'volunteers at participating places were more likely [...] to agree that equality and diversity is a core purpose' of the NT. Volunteers organised 32 of their own LGBT+ themed events at different properties (29 more than in the previous 5 years combined) and revised their commentaries in line with the guidebook and the further research it inspired. 300 NT staff and volunteers represented the NT in 17 Pride festivals nationwide (1). The Trust established a 'long overdue' LGBT+ staff and volunteer group to continue the programme's legacy and signed up as a Stonewall Diversity Champion, demonstrating its commitment to providing 'an inclusive place to visit, to volunteer, and to work'. Cook and Oram's guidebook was a central component of Prejudice and Pride. It received widespread attention in national media - including *The Daily Mail*, *The Telegraph*, *The Metro*, and *The Guardian* - blogs (1), and on social media. The guidebook remains available at every NT property and is a significant and lasting artefact of the campaign.

The programme coincided with an unprecedented growth in membership for the NT. From 2017 to 2018 the organisation grew its membership from 5,200,000 to 5,600,000; acquiring an extra [GBP10,000,000 spending power, equivalent to the NT spending over GBP400,000 daily on its sites](#) (1). Prejudice and Pride inspired the NT to broaden its appeal: Sharon Pickford, Director of Support and Revenue, noted that 'we know there are many more people who may like the opportunity to access and enjoy what we have to offer' (1).

Duckie: Since 2015, Cook has acted as an advisor to Duckie, a club and performance collective that organises major LGBT+ history events in the capital and beyond, attracting live audiences of over 28,000 a year. Duckie first invited Cook to consult on their recreation of Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball. The project ran from November 2015 to August 2016 and involved collaborators from higher education, arts, heritage and business. Its outputs

included an exhibition in London and Brighton, a series of workshops and discussions, a 16-page broadsheet publication and its headline event: a recreation of the interwar costume ball, held in Summer 2016 (2). Cook's involvement was fundamental, helping Duckie to develop a network of academics with expertise in LGBT+ history, introduced them to relevant archives and institutions (including the Bishopsgate Institute (BI), where the ball was held), and advised on and supported the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) application, securing funding of GBP78,800. The project recruited a 1.0FTE Archive Researcher to facilitate its work and 50 volunteers who were trained in heritage interpretation. Over 400 people attended the workshops and talks hosted across the project, including a discussion event at the company's home base, the Royal Vauxhall Tavern. Approximately 1,200 people attended the ball over its two-night run. The broadsheet was distributed to approximately 3,000 readers and a new archive was established within the BI's LGBT+ collections.

The ongoing impact of this project is substantial. Further projects have attracted additional funding, bringing the grants and commissions income that Cook has helped to secure for the organisation since 2015 to [redacted]. This has helped to make the Archive Researcher post permanent and allowed Duckie to develop and expand its innovative model of working, where 'experts and academics work alongside artists and volunteers to create accessible, academically rigorous experiential events, bringing the past to life to make sense of the present and protect the future' (2). Subsequent events built on the framework Cook helped to develop, including 50 Queers for 50 Years, a street parade and party held in Hull in 2017; and Princess, an ongoing project (partially delayed due to COVID-19), which focuses on the eighteenth-century queer history and which includes a roster of diverse events through 2021. Because of Cook's 'significant impact [...] Duckie now has a strong position within the heritage sector' (2). This is particularly important because the organisation has been successful in attracting 'audiences that have not engaged with queer culture or heritage in the past' (2). A participant in the Lady Malcolm project attested, 'I'm not normally into historical stuff, I don't really feel like it is my world, but this was so brilliantly done... I felt like I had a place there' (2). The legitimacy that Cook's work has brought to LGBT+ histories can further be seen in the fact that in 2015, Duckie's home base, the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, became the first site in the country to be listed by Heritage England for its significance to the LGBT+ community. The application was based in part on Cook's research and input.

Regional Heritage and Archives: Cook's work with large organisations has been complemented by his wide-ranging engagement with smaller heritage groups, consolidating his position as an expert on queer histories and helping to foreground LGBT+ histories across the sector and the country; the geography of his impact is impressive.

Cook's AHRC-funded 'Sexualities and Localities' project drew on LGBT+ collections in local archives nationwide, often impacting the archives themselves. The Brighton Keep archive, which contains the collections of the East Sussex Record Office, Brighton and Hove City Council, and the University of Sussex, opened its recently deposited Ourstory collection to Cook for the project, and some contents for the first time, meaning 'many more people will be able to access [them] as a result'. This has allowed Ourstory and other donors 'to see that the Keep was acting in a responsible way with their material and that it was being used to further serious academic research' (3). At the West Yorkshire Archive, Cook's work resulted in additional deposits contributing to the representation of local LGBT+ histories.

In Plymouth, Cook's work on and with community history and archiving for Sexualities and Localities project was part of the inspiration for the project 'Lesbian Voices of Plymouth: Past and Present'. With Cook's advice and support the community organisers received GBP46,000 in 2017 to contribute 46 interviews with lesbian participants to the city's award-winning LGBT+ archive and to develop a website focusing on Plymouth lesbian history. The project recruited volunteers to create a lesbian history website, providing work experience and new skills for local people (<https://www.lvop.org/>) (<https://prideinplymouth.org.uk/lesbian-voices-of-plymouth-past-and-present/>). Prior to this there had only been six interviews with lesbians in the oral history archive, so the project marks a major contribution to the city's understanding of its own LGBT+ past.

In 2018, Cook contributed to another HLF project in Hampshire. YVoices, a local youth charity, launched 'Voices for Heritage', an LGBT+ history project which produced a

series of oral history interviews and engaged its young participants in exploring and recording the history of local LGBT+ figures. In collaboration with Cook, one group explored the history of local-born early homosexual rights pioneer, George Ives. The project culminated in a 2019 exhibition at the County Record Office accompanied by a new 36-page guide to the area's queer history. At the launch event, one of the project's youth participants described the importance of understanding regional queer histories: 'It was moving to learn of so many people living in Hampshire who had advocated for change ... Because that's what this project was really about: acknowledging and honouring the hidden voices who created the foundations of what we stand on.'

(<https://hampshirearchivesandlocalstudies.wordpress.com/2018/03/28/voices-for-heritage/>)

In 2017, the Islington Museum consulted Cook while preparing a community exhibition, 'Up Against It: Islington 1967'. The Museum's curator consulted Cook's research in the early stages of exhibition design, stating that his work helped her to develop 'a more nuanced approach' (4). She later consulted Cook on the specific examples featured in the final exhibition, in particular, local celebrities Joe Orton and Keith Halliwell. Cook's feedback led the exhibition to adopt a closer focus on class, helped the curator to 'better understand the lives of gay men before and after the act', and emboldened the Museum 'in pushing more complex narratives than we may otherwise have gone ahead with' about the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. This meant that the 2,557 visitors who saw the exhibition between July and October 2017 (including new audiences from among the local LGBT+ community) were given the most accurate possible picture of Islington's LGBT+ past. In 2019, The Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain (SAHGB) – the UK's foremost Architectural History society – cited Cook's *Queer Domesticities* as a grounding introduction to the theme of queer architectural history and a driver for the launch of their own equality networks (5). The aim of the networks is in part to encourage the architectural profession 'to engage in diverse lived experiences' in their work.

Cook has also shared his expertise internationally. He has spoken to non-academic audiences about his work in Johannesburg, Cape Town, New York and Bergen (Norway), where he delivered the keynote speech for the Norwegian Queer History Archive conference and discussed his experience of queer heritage work and in particular his involvement with the NT. The Archive's director states that Cook's input was particularly valuable given that 'this field is not widely developed in Norway'. The event attracted 65 attendees, predominantly curators from major heritage institutions around the country (including the university museums and the National Library), who will 'bring Matt's research and ideas... to their home institutions'. The director described how Cook's work has encouraged the Archive to 'widen' its understanding of what historical LGBT+ spaces can look like and to understand queer histories as 'ubiquitous' (6). In 2016, Cook conducted a 'witness seminar' at GALA in Johannesburg, Africa's only dedicated LGBT+ archive. Participants were invited to respond together to material drawn from the archive as a way of piecing together GALA's 20-year history. Its members found that the seminar was an important opportunity to preserve institutional knowledge following 'a major staff shift' shortly beforehand. The witness seminar approach had not been used there before and it provided an 'affirming' experience to the long-standing GALA members who took part and was 'inspiring' to the new staff team (7).

As a result of Cook's 2017 work on the AIDS crisis, he was invited to advise on an AIDS Cultures and Histories festival in Amsterdam, resulting in an associated festival in London held simultaneously in July 2018 and convened by Cook and the team at the Raphael Samuel History Centre. Over 20 events were held in pubs, archives, museums and galleries across the city, with a footfall of over 1,000. The festival raised participating institutions' profiles as well as their work relating to the AIDS crisis, helping to revive the campaign for a permanent memorial to those who have died of the disease. The leader of the Campaign for a London and a UK AIDS Memorial (<http://aesthesia.org/aids-histories-cultural-festival-2018>) collaborated with Cook on the Festival, curating events at the V&A, BFI and various LGBT+ venues – events that, as he attests, 'would not have happened without Matt'. The vast majority of these were either 'very busy or sold out'; being associated with Cook 'ensured a powerful and an important Festival', which 'was crucial in raising the

profile of the #AIDSMemoryUK's Campaign'. It also led to another festival later in the year, StopAIDS, and influenced 'important people' to support #AIDSMemoryUK (8).

Culture: Cook's work has influenced the creative sector. Playwright Ian Giles describes how interviews conducted by Cook on the gay squats in Brixton published in [REF4] formed 'the backbone' of the research for his play, *On Railton Road* (9). Partly devised by its collective of gay performers, the play was written under a Jerwood Arts Commission; its performance, originally scheduled for March 2020, has been pushed back to 2021 due to COVID-19.

Patrick Gale cites Cook's *London and the Culture of Homosexuality* as an influence for his novel *A Place Called Winter* (2015) (9). The novel, which tells the story of a British man exiled to Canada in the early 20th century after the discovery of a homosexual affair, was shortlisted for the Costa novel prize, selected for the Waterstones Book Club and the Radio 2 Simon Mayo book club, and became a Sunday Times hardback and paperback bestseller. Cook has also shaped the work of Dan Glass, an activist, artist and performer who leads radical tours of London's LGBT+ heritage. Glass states that Cook's work has been 'utterly inspiring and invaluable in the ongoing exploration of Queer love, life and liberty in London and beyond' and describes his research as 'the thought-provoking backbone' to 'many' of his programmes and tours (9).

Finally, Cook's work heavily influenced Daisy Asquith's 2017 documentary, *Queerama*, which uses archive footage to tell the story of LGBT+ life in Britain throughout the 20th century. Asquith writes that 'I could not have made *Queerama* without reading [...] Matt Cook' (10). The film opened the prestigious international Sheffield Doc/Fest., with major international film journals *Screen Daily*, *Variety*, *Dazed*, *Women in Film & Television*, and *Women & Hollywood* all covering its premiere. Reviews point out the film's historical accuracy and innovation: *Queerama* is 'a glorious film reclamation of Britain's troubled gay past'; 'a heartening celebration of progress', and 'an outstanding work' (10). The latter review emphasises the film's historical depth while another notes the film's 'understanding [of] academic research' (10): demonstrating Cook's impact on Asquith's practice contributing to the film's success. In the UK, the film was distributed by the British Film Institute, broadcast on BBC4 and is now available to buy on DVD. It has received international distribution through Amazon Prime. *Queerama* was produced by a small, independent company (ieie productions), employing 5 1.0 FTE staff.

Cook's work continues to encourage engagement with the historical texture of queer everyday life. His work on the emotional contours of the AIDS crisis has led him into recent and forthcoming podcasts, debates and interviews on the current pandemic in historical perspective. His "Archives of Feeling" piece has been opened up for three months of free access by OUP, to take advantage of its renewed timeliness with the Covid crisis and the airing of Channel Four's *It's A Sin* (<https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/its-a-sin-revisiting-aids-in-the-era-of-covid/>). Cook's work continues routinely to cross the academic / popular history divide with tangible impacts on multiple sectors nationally and internationally.

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

1. National Trust: Guidebook; annual report 2017-18; Media reviews; Membership surge
2. Testimonial: Duckie
3. Testimonial: Brighton Keep
4. Testimonial: Islington Museum
5. 'Queering the National Trust', The Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain (2019)
6. Testimonial: Norwegian Queer History Archive
7. Testimonial: GALA
8. Campaign for a UK AIDS Memorial email
9. Acknowledgement in the arts: Ian Giles email; Dan Glass email; Patrick Gale email
10. *Queerama*: Daisy Asquith acknowledgement and reviews