

Institution: University of Chester		
Unit of Assessment: 27: English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Textile Stories: Enhancing public knowledge of the relationship between textiles and literary texts		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Deborah Wynne	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Nineteenth-Century Literature	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2001 – ongoing
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Research into the role of textiles, their use and manufacture in Victorian literature and culture led in 2013 to the establishment of the Textile Stories project. Public-engagement events included seven annual study days, and other talks and workshops in collaboration with regional and national museums, libraries, churches, charities, literary festivals, and literary societies. These brought together people interested in textiles: professionals (costume designers, museum curators, needlecraft teachers, artists, pattern-cutters, rare-breed sheep farmers) and amateurs (crafts hobbyists, vintage clothes enthusiasts, fans of costume drama) were introduced to academic research on textiles in literature and screen adaptations. These interactive events inspired more than 250 participants to experience an enriched understanding of the literary and cultural importance of textiles. This stimulated creativity and promoted wellbeing, as well as prompting participants to read books and watch films they might otherwise ignore, engage in further study, and change their professional practices. The project's reach was extended by a Textile Stories blog, online talks, and an appearance on a primetime BBC television show.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The research was conducted by Deborah Wynne (Professor from 2010), initially when researching women's portable property in Victorian novels, funded by an AHRC Research Leave Grant in 2008-09 [ref. AH/G002940/1]. The resulting monograph, *Women and Personal Property in the Victorian Novel* (2010) [3a], demonstrated how writers depicted women's property in the form of 'soft wealth' or textiles. From this beginning, Wynne's understanding of textiles as pervasive in Victorian society and culture led her to examine the diversity of cloth representations in the literature of the long nineteenth century. She later gained an AHRC Fellowship (2013-14) [ref. AH/K00803X/1] to focus on how textile cultures informed, and were represented in, nineteenth-century literary culture and contemporary screen adaptations. The outputs from this research [3b, 3c, 3d, 3e] have contributed to the 'material turn' in Victorian studies.

The project's research findings between 2010 and 2020 revealed that nineteenth-century literature utilised a diversity of languages and plots related to cloth manufacture and a consumer economy based on the retail of textiles and clothing, showing how textile cultures facilitated writers' engagements with political and social developments, from controversies around slavery and cotton manufacture to the conditions of British textile workers. Wynne's research has ranged across the Victorian period: her published outputs include an article on Victorian textile recycling and paper manufacture in the writings of Dickens [3c]; a co-authored study of Miss Havisham's wedding dress in screen adaptations of *Great Expectations* [3b]; an analysis of male drapers' assistants in late-Victorian life-writing and fiction [3d]; and an article examining Charlotte Brontë's engagement with Yorkshire wool manufacturing in her novels and juvenilia [3e]. During her Fellowship year Wynne established the public engagement aspects of the project as a way of disseminating the research more broadly. This firmly set in place a plan for the impact evidenced in section 4.

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

- [a] **Monograph:** Deborah Wynne, *Women and Personal Property in the Victorian Novel* (Routledge, 2010) [submitted to REF2014; reviewed in *Victorian Studies*, Spring 2012]
- [b] **Journal article:** Amber K. Regis and Deborah Wynne, 'Miss Havisham's Dress: Materialising Dickens in Film Adaptations of *Great Expectations*', *Neo-Victorian Studies* 5:2 (2012): 35-58 [submitted to REF2014; peer-reviewed journal]
- [c] **Journal article:** Deborah Wynne, 'Reading Victorian Rags: Recycling, Redemption and Dickens's Ragged Children', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20:1 (2015): 34-49 [Submitted in REF2; peer-reviewed journal]
- [d] **Journal article:** Deborah Wynne, 'The "Despised Trade" in Textiles: H.G. Wells, William Paine, Charles Cavers and the Male Draper's Life, 1870-1914', *Textile History* 46:1 (May 2015): 99-113 [Submitted in REF2; peer-reviewed journal]
- [e] **Journal article:** Deborah Wynne, 'Charlotte Brontë and the Politics of Cloth: The "vile rumbling mills" of Yorkshire', *Brontë Studies* 43:1 (January 2018): 89-99. [Submitted in REF2; peer-reviewed journal]

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

Wynne's research approaches the study of nineteenth-century textiles, needlecrafts, dress, cloth manufacture, and the retailing of fabric from the perspective of literary studies. Submitted as an impact case study to REF2014 in its nascent stages, the project has grown considerably, benefiting from Wynne's AHRC Fellowship in 2013-14, which funded the first Textile Stories Study Day (TSSD) in 2013. This was followed by annual events on the same model, whereby Wynne presented talks based on her research project (which included topics such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Manchester and US slave-grown cotton, the Brontës and Yorkshire wool manufacture, and clothing and costume in Jane Austen's novels and screen adaptations). Additionally, invited speakers from the fashion and heritage industries, needlework instructors, sheep farmers specialising in wool production, novelists, poets, and textile artists presented talks and interactive workshops at the events. The study days introduced a general audience interested in textile history, fashion, vintage clothing, and crafts to Wynne's research on textile cultures in nineteenth-century literature and its modern manifestations in the form of screen adaptations, known as 'costume dramas'. Harnessing this interest in textiles, crafts, museum collections and fashion, the TSSD activities engaged participants in discussions relating to costume in literature and film, thus encouraging the reading of literary texts and the co-creation of resources via the Textile Stories blog, as participants and speakers contributed posts based on their interests and responses to the events [5:3]. Between 2013 and 2020 approximately 250 participants attended study days from a broad geographical reach within the UK (one participant wrote: 'I will be going back home to Scotland full of knowledge from answers to my questions and inspiration from all I have seen and heard', TSSD 2015) [5:2]. 80% of participants attended more than one event.

Wynne's research findings have been delivered to the public through talks linked to her published work [3b, 3c, 3d, 3e], and this has encouraged participants, some of whom would not normally have read nineteenth-century fiction, to make meaningful engagements with literature and film via their interest in textiles. Designed to bring together diverse people from different backgrounds (including teachers of needlecrafts; amateur crafts people; professional textile artists; fashion designers; fans of vintage clothing and costume dramas; collectors of antique textiles; school and college students), participants shared their interests in textiles, and discovered how these could lead to rich engagements with literature and film. Some participants mentioned in feedback that they had previously considered academia remote and inaccessible and the TSSD, as their first experience of a university-led event, had made them see the relevance of academic research; some were inspired to continue their studies in FE and HE [5:2]. Participants at the events recorded developing a sense of community and belonging, many expressing their appreciation of the unique opportunities afforded by the TSSDs to discuss their interests in textiles in the context of literature and film [5:1]. In this way, the events (along with the project's related blog [5:3], which has attracted 64,645 views since 2013 from across the world) have promoted wellbeing and stimulated creativity, as well as encouraging the reading of literary texts and watching of screen adaptations with new understanding.

The TSSDs have been held in different locations in the North West, Midlands and Wales, some on University of Chester campuses, while others, involving collaborations with museum curators, were hosted by museums [5:1]. Some participants have contributed to the project's blog, which was established in 2013 [5:3]. In addition to the day-long annual study days, Wynne took the project to other venues, delivering public lectures based on her literary textiles research in libraries and churches (the Unitarian Chapel, Shrewsbury (2019), for example), and in 2017 for a charity's fundraising event (namely the Shrewsbury Drapers' Guild's project to build homes for the disadvantaged elderly). She was invited to present talks at numerous literary festivals (including Gladfest at Gladstone's Library in 2015 and 2019) and events organised by literary societies (including the Brontë Society (2016); Gaskell Society (2018); Jane Austen Society (2015); Mary Webb Society (2019); and Arnold Bennett Society (2019)). These talks recruited new participants for the TSSDs.

Impact on participants: new discoveries of literature and screen adaptations

The feedback from each study day is dominated by the word 'inspiring', with participants revealing how the events stimulated them to read books and watch films they did not know about before; one participant reported: 'I'll certainly be seeking out Elizabeth Gaskell novels' (TSSD 2019), while another stated: 'I've never seen "The Piano" but I will now' (TSSD 2014) [5:2]. Many now engage with nineteenth-century texts via their love of textiles and crafts [5:1]. Comments from participants reveal an impulse to take what they have learned at the study day to explore cultural forms differently. For example, feedback comments include: 'Will look at film and TV dramas in a different light!' (TSSD 2014); 'My mind has been opened and questions are being asked in it. I have made a note of your suggested books and look forward to reading them' (TSSD 2018) [5:2]. Participants reported enjoying the novelty of being presented with information from an academic perspective, an indication of the educational benefits of the events [5:1]. For some, it has been a revelation to discover new aspects of culture: 'Who knew there was so much to wool! It is even in art and literature' (TSSD 2016) [5:2]. As these typical comments demonstrate, the study days have prompted participants to think of new ways of engaging with textiles via literature and film, enriching their hobbies and professional interests, and raising awareness of the role of textiles in literary texts, screen adaptations and historical contexts [5:1].

Impact on participants: furthering education

Some participants have been stimulated by the study days to continue their education or to view their studies differently. One college student reported, 'I've left with lots of think about and this has been an excellent add on to my textile art studies' (TSSD 2019) [5:2]. Others took practical steps to return to education, one writing: 'Attending the study day in 2015 reignited my love of learning, and contributed to my enrolling on the MRes in Gender Studies'; she went on to complete a dissertation at Chester's Institute of Gender Studies on gender and 1950s home dressmaking, graduating in 2020 [5:2]. Another participant, a retired Maths teacher with an MA in Textile History, was stimulated by the first TSSD to study for a PhD on the cultural history of tatting lace, gaining her PhD (supervised by Wynne) in 2018 when she was 80 years old: 'It was after attending one of the Textile Story Days that I was inspired to transfer [...] to Professor Deborah Wynne who was inspirational' [5:2]. Another retired participant stated in 2019, 'Textile Stories enables me to keep in touch with education [...] helping to fill a much-needed gap where I can continue learning alongside others' [5:2]. A number of school and college students have attended the TSSDs: one 15-year old reported gaining a new understanding of textiles, fashion and costume through the lens of literary and film studies, and wrote about this in a blog post for the *Textile Stories* blog [5:3].

Impact on textile professionals and teachers

The study days have also been popular with a range of professionals, such as teachers of crafts (including spinning; weaving; pattern cutting; and natural dyeing); sheep farmers specialising in wool production; textile artists; fashion and costume designers; and museum curators, many setting up stalls at the events to showcase their work or the collections they manage in the museums and heritage sites (such as the Flax Mill in Shrewsbury) [5:1]. The events have also encouraged some professionals to change their practices. For example, a needlework teacher

stated in an email that attending the Textile Stories events encouraged her to include references to literature in her talks; in her demonstrations of creating vintage-style smocks she now refers to representations of smocks in the work of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy [5:2]. One participant reported: 'The talk on Miss Havesham's [sic] dress prompted me to make my own version of her wedding dress for World Book Day, when I was employed as a reading interventionist specialist teaching assistant at Middlewich High School. This also inspired a display around the reading room of the novels of Charles Dickens' [5:2].

Impact via the media

In 2019 Wynne was interviewed for the BBC One series *The Great British Sewing Bee* about her research into textile recycling in the Victorian period. This was broadcast on 27/05/2020, the series attracting c. 4.9 million viewers per episode. The interview came about when the producer (from Love Productions) had read Wynne's open access journal article on Dickens and rags recycling [3c]. Wynne showcased Dickens's interest in rags recycling in his writing, thus highlighting in the interview the relationship between textiles and literature to a mass audience.

Impact on the heritage sector

The *Textile Stories* study days have also been organised in collaboration with heritage organisations, as museum curators heard of the success of Wynne's events. In 2017 the Director of the Silk Museum in Macclesfield invited Wynne to organise the study day in the museum as a way of promoting its collection to a wider audience. Costumes and other silk items which had long been in storage were displayed, revealing the breadth of the collection to participants. The event also involved a crafts session, whereby participants constructed booklets using textual fragments from *Jane Eyre* and fragments of waste silk. One participant found this creative bringing together of text and fabric 'inspirational' [5:2].

In 2020 Wynne collaborated with Wrexham Museum to organise an event designed to display for the first time items from its costume collection. The whole collection had been in storage since its arrival at the Museum in 1980 [5:1]. For this study day Wynne worked with Ruth Caswell, an award-winning costume-maker for the films *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) and *Elizabeth* (1998), as well as for television and theatre productions, while her fashion designs had featured in *Vogue*. Caswell had approached Wynne after hearing her talk on Victorian textiles at Gladfest, Gladstone Library's literary festival in North Wales in 2019. They went on to collaborate with Wrexham Museum's lead curator, Karen Murdoch, to organise a study day for 40 participants as a way of highlighting how collections of historical costume can inspire the making of costumes for theatre and film. The Victorian costumes were taken from their storage boxes, where they had lain since the 1980s, and were then displayed and explained during the event. For example, Wynne discussed the design of one gown from the 1840s in relation to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and its many screen adaptations. The study day began with Wynne interviewing Ruth Caswell about her work with actors to develop character through costume. One participant noted: 'Really made me think about costume in a new way' [5:2]. The study day, as well as benefitting the participants, also helped the Museum to rethink the importance of its collection. Karen Murdoch stated in an email after the event that it had 'an even greater impact as it has provided the momentum needed to look at larger projects as well as enabling us to start to understand the wealth of the collection' [5:2].

Other collaborations with the heritage sector involved speakers at the study days from the National Trust at Attingham Park, Shropshire (2019); from the Flax Mill heritage site in Shrewsbury (2018); and from the V&A (in 2014 and 2016), all of whom talked to participants about the textile and costume collections they manage. Participants mentioned in feedback that they had subsequently visited these heritage sites and museums with a new awareness of their links to literature and film [5:1]. The costume curator at Attingham Park, Holly Kirby, reported that following her involvement in the 2019 study day there was an increase on previous years in the number of people booked for her 2019 Summer guided tours of the costume collection [5:2]. Participants mentioned to her that their attendance at the TSSD had prompted them to book a guided tour, offering further evidence that Wynne's project made an impact on the heritage industry.

Online impact during the Covid-19 pandemic

The cancellation of the 2020 TSSD because of the pandemic led to Wynne establishing alternative channels of communication via the *Textile Stories* blog [5:3]. Participants at previous events were invited to submit details of their textile crafts projects, along with the books they were reading while under lockdown. Many reported finding this channel of communication useful, enabling them to retain their awareness of the relationships between texts and textiles and feel a sense of connectedness with the people they had met at previous study days [5:3]. Further opportunities for online engagement came later in 2020 when Wynne was invited to present a short talk on textile recycling and paper-making (delivered on 06/08/20) for the *Crafting Communities: A Series of Victorian Object Lessons & Scholarly Exchanges in COVID Times* project, organised by the Victorian Studies Association of Western Canada and involving scholars from the Universities of Alberta and Victoria. Wynne presented (and will present in 2021) online talks on Victorian textile recycling to a global audience of 65 academics and members of the public. In response to her talk, one non-academic participant from the UK emailed Wynne to say, 'thoroughly enjoyed your discussion about "rag collectors". For many years I researched my family tree and recently came across a great grandparent who was a "rag sorter". Your talk gave me a new perspective and made me think about him in a completely different way' [5:2].

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

The following evidence is available on request:

[5:1] Feedback forms (scanned) and emails (saved copies) from participants at TSSDs and other public events. List of public events and talks related to the project. Photographs of TSSDs and other events.

[5:2] Sources of the quotations used in Section 4.

[5:3] Textile Stories blog: <http://dwtextilestories.blogspot.co.uk/> [usage figures accessed: 26/02/2021]