

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of East Anglia		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 – English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Celebrating W.S. Graham at 100: New Audiences, New Networks, New Artworks		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> Between 2012 and 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>
Dr David Nowell Smith Dr Jeremy Noel-Tod	Senior Lecturer Senior Lecturer	2012 to present 2009 to present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> Between 2016 and 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>W.S. Graham (1918-86) died in obscurity, but today is coming to be considered one of the great poets of the twentieth century. Armed with new discoveries from untapped archives, UEA academics oversaw a programme of publications, exhibitions, and public artworks to mark Graham's centenary, from his hometown of Greenock via the Pier Arts Centre in Orkney and the National Poetry Library in London, that unlocked his work for wider audiences, and inspired contemporary poets and artists to produce new work and embark on new projects.</p> <p>The programme, devised with the support of the W.S. Graham Estate, (1) introduced Graham's work to new audiences, (2) engaged gallery spaces to innovate in exhibition display, and (3) fostered new, sustainable networks of artists, curators, councils, and communities. It transformed these partners' approaches to curatorial practice, to collaboration-building, and to artmaking, leaving a legacy not just for Graham's own reception, but for the local areas where the collaborations took place. The artists produced new work inspired by Graham and our collaborations, thus extending Graham's legacy for a new generation of artists, poets, and audiences.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Graham's centenary came at a time of a developing critical consensus that his work had been unfairly neglected. The centenary year saw a new <i>Collected Poems</i> released by his publisher Faber in the UK, and by NYRB Classics in the US.</p> <p>David Nowell Smith and Jeremy Noel-Tod have conducted research into WS Graham's poetry for over a decade. This research made key contributions to critical reappraisals of Graham, generating new knowledge in crucial areas of his work:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Graham's status in the broader poetry culture, and his influence and significance for poets and critics on both sides of the Atlantic (<b>3.1, 3.2</b>).</li> <li>2. Graham's poetic technique, especially his verse technique and his exploration of language as a poetic medium (<b>3.1, 3.4</b>).</li> </ol> <p>On the basis on this work, between 2016 and 2020 Nowell Smith undertook extensive archival research, uncovering notebooks, drafts, letters, and mixed-media works that had never previously received scholarly attention. Drawing on archives and private collections from Glasgow to Penzance, Victoria Canada to Victoria Australia, Nowell Smith uncovered new work including illuminated manuscripts, hand-drawn postcards, artists' books, watercolours, landscapes, abstracts, and even a slate sculpture. In a literature review of recent Graham scholarship, Nowell Smith's work was singled out as a '<i>step-change in Graham appreciation</i>' (Gerald Carruthers, 2018 Hugh MacDiarmid lecture, Scottish Poetry Library).</p> <p>This archival research led to the discovery of previously unpublished work: these include poems and visual and mixed-media artworks, and this new material has transformed scholarly understanding of Graham as poet and artist. Our publications constitute the first substantive critical</p>		

accounts of Graham's visual work (3.3, 3.6). They further generated new knowledge in the following areas:

1. Graham's compositional practices (3.3, 3.4, 3.6). Archival material was shared with contributors to the *Chicago Review* special issue edited and introduced by Nowell Smith (3.6), allowing for a diverse range of approaches and treatment of different aspects of his oeuvre, and meaning that Nowell Smith's archival work immediately had academic beneficiaries able to develop their own research from his findings.
2. Graham's indebtedness to 'place', and in particular his hometown, Greenock, which is far more prominent in his unpublished archive than in his published work (3.2, 3.5, 3.6).
3. Graham's communities: the networks of friendship, debate, and patronage, which sustained him (3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.6).

### 3. References to the research

- 3.1 "So, Farewell/Then": W.S. Graham, E.J. Thribb and the Shaping Line Break'  
**Noel-Tod** (saved on file at the UEA)  
*Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 4(1) (2012), 23-32.
- 3.2 "To Speak in this Place": Peter Gizzi, W.S. Graham, and English Poetry'  
**Noel-Tod**, in Anthony Caeshu (ed.), *In the Air: Essays on the Poetry of Peter Gizzi*  
Wesleyan University Press, (2018), Chap 7, pp.78-93. ISBN: 9780819577467
- 3.3 'Poetry's Plastic Medium: The Example of W.S. Graham'  
**Nowell Smith**  
*Modernism/modernity* print+ vol.3, cycle 2 (2018): DOI: 10.26597/mod.0061  
[modernismmodernity.org/articles/poetrys-plastic-medium](http://modernismmodernity.org/articles/poetrys-plastic-medium).
- 3.4 "The Gradual Construction of a Timbre": W.S. Graham's Three Accent Meter'  
**Nowell Smith**  
*Modern Philology* 116:3 (Feb 2019), 236-261.DOI: 10.1086/700429
- 3.5 Rachael Boast, Andy Ching, and Nathan Hamilton (eds.), *The Caught Habits of Language: An Entertainment for W.S. Graham on His Reaching 100* (Bristol: Donut Press, 2018), with an introduction from **Noel-Tod** and archival contributions from **Nowell Smith**. ISBN: 9780956644589
- 3.6 *W.S. Graham: Approaches*  
**Nowell Smith** ed., includes introduction from **Nowell Smith**, archival work from **Nowell Smith**, and article from **Noel-Tod** ('Yet More Shots of Mister Simpson').  
*Chicago Review* triple special issue: (vol. 62 nos. 01/02/03, Winter 2018-19).  
[www.chicagoreview.org/issues/w-s-graham-approaches/](http://www.chicagoreview.org/issues/w-s-graham-approaches/) (saved on file at UEA)

### Grants

PI: **Nowell Smith**. Project: '*W.S. Graham: The Poem as Art Object*'. Project dates: 2018-19.  
Funder: British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship Grant value: GBP106,784.

### 4. Details of the impact

The research outputs and public-facing collaborations had multiple benefits for our different partners: the W.S. Graham Estate, the institutions Pier Arts Centre, National Poetry Library (NPL), and Inverclyde Council, and the many artists and communities who created work in response to our research.

#### 1. Bringing Graham's work to new audiences

Nowell Smith's archival research '*contributed hugely to a wide celebration and critical re-evaluation of W.S. Graham's work*' during Graham's centenary, according to the Graham Estate (5.7). The Estate reports '*a sharp upsurge of academic interest in Graham*' as a result of our research and public-facing activities, leading to '*an increase in incomes related to book sales and copyright permissions requests*'. Our research and generation of interest in Graham have helped the Estate plan for '*key archival, educational and promotional activities in the future*' (5.7). Noel-Tod's introduction to *The Caught Habits of Language* was reproduced in the *Times Literary*

Supplement as cover feature for the 9 March 2018 Issue (*The Poetry Boy, Unpublished Poems by W.S. Graham*), with a circulation of 38,000 readers (5.8).

David Nowell Smith also guest-curated two innovative multimedia displays of Graham's archive: an exhibition at Pier Arts Centre in Stromness, Orkney, entitled *Voice and Vision*, and an interactive installation at the National Poetry Library, *Constructing Spaces*.

*Voice and Vision* brought Graham's archive into dialogue with works by artists who were part of the same community as him; the gallery's founder, [REDACTED], was a prominent collector of work by many of those artists who were Graham's closest friends, and the gallery's 'collection reflects the friendships [she] developed with artists' among Graham's community. In 2019, The Herald listed *Voice and Vision* as one of Scotland's best visual arts exhibitions of the last 10 years, describing it as a 'fascinating reappraisal of the poet as artist' (5.1).

*Constructing Spaces* meticulously recreated Graham's writing spaces, using documentary evidence and interviews with friends. A replica Cornish cottage was built in the library, with facsimiles of Graham's manuscript drafts pinned on walls, to imitate Graham's own practice, and a soundscape made from rare footage of Graham reading, chatting, and singing. Visitors were then invited to produce their own work, playing with and building on Graham's own compositional practices. A total of 211 pieces of work were left by visitors in the installation: poems, ink drawings, watercolours, and mixed-media productions. The original work drew strikingly on key motifs from Graham's poems and manuscripts, but visitors also used the space for a more general contemplation, with many leaving texts dedicated to friends and loved ones, including elegies. One included a letter saying that the space offered an atmosphere for reflection (5.4).

The artworks and exhibitions allowed Graham to reach audiences that do not often encounter poetry. Pier Arts Centre counted 4,549 visits to the six-week exhibition (in a town of 2,200): the gallery staff also reported a notable number of 'visitors returning several times to study Graham's manuscripts' (5.1). A substantial majority of visitors to both exhibition and installation said that had never previously encountered Graham's poetry, and those who had were unaware of his visual oeuvre. Audiences that had never encountered Graham before expressed the desire to read more of his work in the future (5.1).

[REDACTED], former head of Creative Learning at Inverclyde Council and now Arts Manager for Renfrewshire Leisure, described with enthusiasm a major impact of the collaboration: 'Graham is hardly known in his own town. The WS Graham centenary provided an opportunity to celebrate a local figure from a shipyard background that most local people would feel a strong connection to and project a strong message about Greenock outwards to poetry and art lovers across the UK and beyond' (5.6). Since the artworks' unveiling, they have 'become something of a selfie-spot' (5.5), a popular feature of the local landscape, where locals and visitors have had an opportunity to learn about this illustrious son of Greenock (5.5).

Over 1000 people visited the 'Constructing Spaces' installation on timed-entry tickets, and the accompanying video received 12,573 views online (5.2). It engaged particular interest in key audiences: curators, poets, artists, archivists, and school groups, and 'brought in new audience members' (5.2). Primary school children were particularly excited by the opportunities for typing on the typewriter, reciting poems and hearing them played back in the soundscape, and producing illuminated poems of their own (5.2). One story stands out: a nine-year-old girl visited with her primary school class. When, the following Monday, her teacher asked her what she'd done that weekend, she said she'd returned with her parents to *Constructing Spaces* and typed out a poem. 'The teacher was amazed as the child wasn't much usually committed to schoolwork and hadn't expressed interest in poetry before' (5.2). The project did not only generate interest in Graham but offered this girl a new form of creative expression.

## 2. Innovative practices of art display

The multimodal nature of Nowell Smith's archival discoveries led partner organisations to experiment with new forms of art display. The Pier Arts Centre exhibition included visual work by Graham and his artist contemporaries, audio, text, and film footage, and interactive digital displays. It was the first time Pier Arts had displayed such a range of materials, providing a framework for future experiment with 'multilayered' exhibitions that fit with the gallery's exhibition spaces (5.1). In particular, 'A high resolution copy of a unique printed book, over-written and

*illuminated by Graham (held by the University of Victoria, Canada) was also displayed, providing page-by-page access to an exhibit that could only have been shown otherwise under glass' (5.1). This was the first time Pier Arts Centre had used this technology, and the successful experience on this occasion 'has led to further digital presentations of books and other difficult to handle material in the gallery' (5.1).*

The NPL considered *Constructing Spaces 'the most ambitious exhibition we have undertaken in the National Poetry Library space' (5.2)*. The exhibition also allowed the NPL to explore the possibilities of the venue as an exhibition space, boosted its reputation among curators and archivists nationally and enabled *'the library to raise its profile within Southbank Centre, with colleagues in the Hayward Gallery, Learning Teams and Literature all being aware of the offer' (5.2)*. *Constructing Spaces* also influenced the design of subsequent exhibitions: the 2019 Laurence Ferlinghetti display included a loan of some of his visual work, and as a result of this loan, *'Ferlinghetti made a gift to the library of one of his prints. Through this approach we now have a very rare Ferlinghetti work as part of the national collection of poetry' (5.2)*. The (postponed) 2020 display of Edwin Morgan's archive followed *Constructing Spaces* in being organised around the poet's typewriter, and as *'[Constructing Spaces] brought to the fore how audiences were keen to understand a poet's place in a much larger creative network'*, the display aimed to document Morgan's own networks. Similarly, *'As sound was such a key part of [Constructing Spaces], we were replicating this through a series of Morgan listening posts through which audiences would be able to hear the voice of the poet, and feel themselves closer to the person who had created the work' (5.2)*.

In Greenock, our research formed the basis for a collaborative public artwork, entitled *Word Roads*. Overseen by Nowell Smith, with the artists [REDACTED], with support from Inverclyde Council and the participation of local community arts and history volunteers, it kickstarted a new approach to public artworks: site-specific, community-oriented projects that celebrated the cultural heritage of a *'beleaguered post-industrial town' (5.6)*. Nowell Smith presented his research to the artists (21 Aug 2017), who then ran workshops in schools, building on this research (Sept-Nov 2017). Ideas from these workshops were developed in consultation with local history, arts, and creative groups (March-Sept 2018). The result was three works, made of Cornish slate and timber piles from Greenock's now-defunct Princes Pier, with lines from Graham's poems about Greenock inscribed on them. They were sited in places significant for Graham's life and work.

The *Word Roads* project has had extensive impacts for the cultural life of the area. The project built on Inverclyde's 2014-17 'Place Partnership' initiative, which aimed at *'culturally-driven regeneration'*, and has served as a template for future initiatives throughout the region. As [REDACTED] describes it: *'The project developed an organic momentum that absorbed local artists and poets, even taking in the redevelopment of the health centre where one of the installations was planned' (5.6)*. Artist [REDACTED] has developed public art projects and workshops utilising collaborative practices from the Graham centenary (5.5). In particular, he received a commission to produce a new artwork in stained glass to be sited alongside one of the *Word Roads*, in a new Health Centre next to where Graham was born. He *'was able to link the original Nightfishers group into [these] new glass pieces'*, and even *'incorporated Sydney [Graham]'s words into the glass, creating a link, not initially intended, between the Words seats and the three new glass pieces' (5.5)*.

The project left [REDACTED] a believer in the *'great synergies to be had with academic institutions'*, as he became *'aware of the nexus of partners around poetry and how they might be mobilised and "festivalised", if that's not too ghastly a word' (5.6)*. As a result of our collaboration, he felt *'inspired'* and *'able'* to take on the programming and development of the Paisley Book Festival and to set up new Poetry Prize (the Janet Coats Memorial Prize): the legacy of our collaboration can thus be seen in new public arts initiatives across the region (5.6).

### **3. Developing new networks of artists, institutions, and communities**

Nowell Smith's research situated Graham's work within networks of patronage and artistic exchange linked to individual localities. It was thus fitting that the practice-based research



collaborations led to the creation of new art, poetry, and networks of artists, institutions, and communities.

The artists in Greenock obtained commissions on the strength of *Word Road*, and developed independent creative projects building on the collaboration, exhibiting these works and obtaining grants to develop these projects (5.5). The artist [REDACTED] writes that '*I was unaware of W.S. Graham before this project began. Meeting David, reading his materials and discussing ideas led me to develop my own line of research*', resulting in a successful application to the Hope Scott Trust and new contacts with the Scottish Poetry Library to pursue a new sequence of artworks about the life of Graham and his artistic communities. (5.5) NPL organised residencies with Poetry School graduates in the installation: poems written during the residencies were published on the Southbank Centre website (5.3). The poet [REDACTED] described his residency as '*a rare privilege*', while another poet-resident, [REDACTED], wrote: '*The whole thing was so tenderly reassembled that just to be there was a miracle*' (5.3).

Both Pier Arts Centre and NPL obtained new partnerships as a result of our collaboration. Pier Arts Centre developed links with the BBC and the National Library of Scotland (5.1), and the new links with NLS facilitated archival displays being included in '*subsequent exhibitions, including a cased display of letters, photographs and publications, celebrating the life and work of Margaret Gardiner (the founder of the Pier Arts Centre)*' (5.1). Pier Arts Centre also reports that the Graham exhibition '*underscored an existing relationship with a benefactor of the organisation who lent significant material to the exhibition display. The benefactor has since decided to add additional art works to a pre-existing bequest*', thus allowing the gallery to add to its permanent collection, strengthen its profile as a home for modernist British art, and plan for future expansion (5.1).

The practice-based installation *Constructing Spaces* led the NPL to forge creative links with installation builders Art&Assembly, soundscape artist [REDACTED], and visual artists [REDACTED], and to build new institutional partnerships with the Poetry School, the Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts, and the publishing house Faber (5.2).

The collaborations also elicited creative input from the audiences themselves. Visitors to *Constructing Spaces* were invited to produce their own work in the installation: in addition to the 211 poems and drawings left at the installation, many other visitors took their work home with them - some even shared it on social media (5.2, 5.3, 5.4).

The Greenock centenary project saw '*local creative people coalesce in ways they had not been able or willing to do before*' (5.6). The centenary included an exhibition of work produced by locals who had joined a new arts network named 'The Nightfishers' in homage to Graham's famous poem (5.5, 5.6). Since the centenary, 'Nightfishers' members '*are always the first to answer the call for participants*' for new public art workshops: the network continues long after the centenary itself (5.5).

What started as a way of reintroducing Graham to Greenock ended up mobilising the local arts community, and its legacy can be seen in the networks of artists and publics that have flourished since the project ended. In Greenock, these networks are the first of their kind, and have brought confidence and creative opportunity to one of the most deprived areas in the UK (5.5, 5.6).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Pier Arts Centre testimonial and visitor statistics.
- 5.2 Testimonial from the Director, National Poetry Library.
- 5.3 Poems and blogs on the *National Poetry Library* website produced during the residencies.
- 5.4 Work produced by visitors to the *Constructing Spaces* installation (hard copy and shared on social media).
- 5.5 Testimonials from artists on the *Nightfishers* project.
- 5.6 Testimonial from the former Creative Learning Manager, Inverclyde Council Education Services, now Head of Culture, Paisley Council.
- 5.7 Testimonial from the W.S. Graham Estate.
- 5.8 Times Literary Supplement circulation figures.