

Institution: University of Exeter		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Empowering creative communities and heritage organisations by stimulating reflections on meanings of place, belonging and identity, inspired by early modern literature of English and Welsh nationhood		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2004 — 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g., job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Andrew McRae	Professor	September 2000 – present
Philip Schwyzer	Professor	September 2001 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Improving the scale, diversity and value of public reflection on places and their histories is critical to the heritage sector, and nationally significant for cultural life. McRae and Schwyzer have led multiple research projects into early modern literature, nationhood and cartography which have enriched understandings of places in England and Wales for a range of publics through the large-scale production, documentation and exhibition of creative work. These culminated in ‘Places of Poetry’ in 2019, which generated and exhibited online more than 8,000 new geo-tagged poems and was shortlisted for Research Project of the Year (Humanities and Social Sciences) in the 2020 THE Awards in recognition of its geographic reach and quality of engagement. Partnering with many national and community organisations, McRae and Schwyzer’s research has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated reflection on place, heritage and identity through new creative works. • Creatively empowered underrepresented and disadvantaged communities in place and identity dialogues. • Enabled new, more inclusive methods of engagement, contributing to organisational development and helping achieve heritage objectives and lasting legacies. 		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Through the course of multiple research projects, conducted independently or in partnership over the past 25 years, McRae and Schwyzer have addressed the representation of nations, and places within them, in early modern England and Wales. Their research has demonstrated the ways in which concerns of place and history were intertwined in this critical period in the formation of nationhood, and uncovered tensions and debates that resonate through to the 21st century. These include: the fraught relationships between the constituent nations of the UK [3.1]; the significance of natural land features to national and regional identities [3.2]; anxieties about mobility and immigration [3.3]; and the origins of ecological consciousness [3.4].</p> <p>Preceding his collaborative work with Schwyzer, McRae’s <i>Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England</i> (2009) [3.2] identified the relationship between domestic travel and the emergence of vital new models of nationhood and identity. His subsequent AHRC-funded ‘Stuart Successions Project’ (April 2012-October 2015) addressed the pivotal role of the Stuart era in modern state-formation in Britain. McRae’s AHRC follow-on project (2015-16) targeted improved public understanding of the Stuart era and its culture through collaboration with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the Historical Association, the Ashmolean Museum and the Bodleian Library.</p>		

Schwyzler's monograph *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (2004) [3.3] identified the role of historical narratives, especially those relating to British antiquity, in the construction of early modern national identities. His subsequent ERC-funded 'Past in its Place' (2012-16) project explored how specific locales such as Verulamium and Runnymede emerged as sites of historical memory in the medieval and early modern periods. Schwyzler's subsequent research on the sixteenth-century geographer Humphrey Llwyd, beginning with his 2011 edition of Llwyd's *Breviary of Britain* [3.6] and continuing in his AHRC-funded 'Inventor of Britain' (IoB) project (2017-20), has shed light on how early modern topographical writing and cartography facilitated the development of new conceptions of Britishness and Britain. The IoB enabled a partnership with the National Library of Wales (NLW), which resulted in an exhibition on Llwyd and an accompanying workshop series for Welsh schoolchildren.

McRae and Schwyzler's collaborative work includes the jointly undertaken AHRC-funded, 'Poly-Olbion Project' (2013-16) devoted to Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612, 1622), a 15,000-line expansive poetic and cartographic journey through the landscape, history and customs of early modern England and Wales. The subsequent HLF-funded project, 'The Children's Poly-Olbion' (2014-15) used creative practice and inspiration from *Poly-Olbion* to engage with questions about present places and their heritage. This was done in partnership with Flash of Splendour, a non-profit organisation working to empower marginalised, disabled and disadvantaged young people through the arts.

McRae and Schwyzler's research on the poetic mapping in *Poly-Olbion* [3.1] provided the inspiration for the most ambitious and wide-ranging initiative underpinning this case-study: the AHRC, HLF and ACE-funded Places of Poetry (2019). Led by McRae (CI, Prof. Paul Farley, University of Lancaster), PoP centred on an interactive digital map of England and Wales that used distinctive iconography from *Poly-Olbion*'s maps overlaid on Ordnance Survey (OS) data. The public were encouraged to pin their original poems of place to the map. Artistic residencies and partnerships with national bodies including OS, The Poetry Society and National Poetry Day supported the project.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 Andrew McRae and Philip Schwyzler, eds. *'Poly-Olbion': New Perspectives*, Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2020.
- 3.2 Andrew McRae, *Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- 3.3 Philip Schwyzler, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- 3.4 Andrew McRae, 'Tree-Felling in Early Modern England: Michael Drayton's Environmentalism', *Review of English Studies*, 63 (2012), 410-30.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/res/hgr080>
- 3.5 Daniel Cattell and Philip Schwyzler, eds. Imagining the Nation in Seventeenth-Century English Literature, Special Issue, *The Seventeenth Century* 33:4 (Sept. 2018), 377-495.
- 3.6 Humphrey Llwyd, *The Breviary of Britain, with selections from The History of Cambria*, ed. Philip Schwyzler, MHRA Tudor & Stuart Translations, vol. 5, MHRA, 2011.

Outputs 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, and 3.6 available on request.

Related grants:

Andrew McRae, Arts Council, 'The Places of Poetry' £34,500, (2019-20); HLF South West, 'The Places of Poetry: building community engagement with heritage sites'; Our Heritage programme, £56,500 (2018-19); AHRC Follow-On Grant, 'The Places of Poetry'; PI, £80,564 (2018-19); HLF Grant, 'The Children's Poly-Olbion'; PI, £80,000 (2014-15); AHRC Grant, 'The Poly-Olbion Project'; PI, £385,000 (2013-16).
Philip Schwyzler, AHRC Grant, 'The Inventor of Britain'; PI, £623,770 (2017-20).

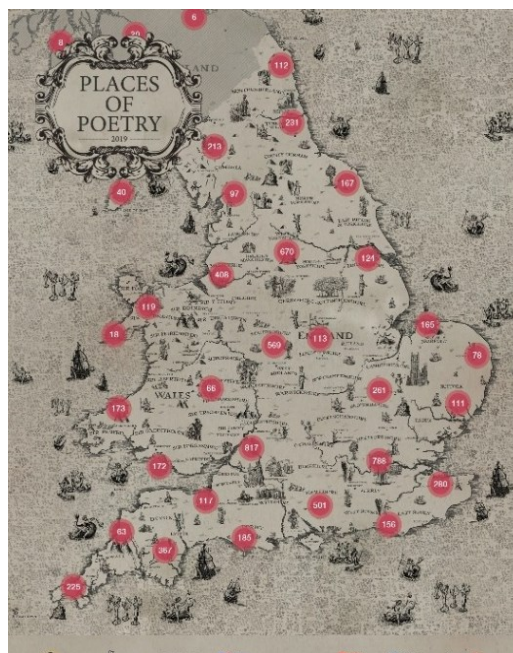
4. Details of the impact

Facilitating reflection on place, heritage and identity through new creative works

All projects generated, documented and exhibited a substantial volume of new creative work responding to place, heritage and belonging. Moreover, Places of Poetry (PoP) and The Children's Poly-Olbion (CP-O) took an inclusive and egalitarian approach to producing and displaying outputs, situating the work of members of the public alongside historic and contemporary pieces by established creatives.

PoP reached an audience comprising thousands of writers and tens of thousands of readers. In 2019, 3,250 individuals submitted 7,500 original poems to PoP, while a reopening to new submissions in October 2020 garnered a further 500 [5.1]. Among those engaging with the project were many previously unpublished writers, such as Sarah Reeson who wrote a 24-poem series on Southend-on-Sea. She spoke on Radio 5 Live (July 24, 2019) of the 'satisfaction and validation' gained, noting 'I'm now in the middle of a career change and want to be a full-time poet. And being able to say to people this is what I have done, it has literally changed my life.' In October 2020 she launched a YouTube channel to share her poetry [5.2]. More than 53,000 people visited the PoP website [5.1], with a peak after PoP featured on BBC1's *Countryfile* (September 8, 2019, audience c.6 million). Other national coverage included the *Guardian*, *Telegraph*, and Radio 4's *Today* programme [5.2].

Community contributions to the PoP map were encouraged through many workshops and 12 residencies for poets at distinct heritage sites: Stonehenge, Ely Cathedral, Caernarvon Castle, The Roman Baths, River Severn, Big Pit National Coal Museum, Peak District National Park, Hadrian's Wall, Byker Community Trust, Wordsworth Trust, Sherwood Forest, Surrey County Cricket Club and Exeter Heritage Partnership. Severn Rivers Trust reported that the workshop 'attracted a really diverse mix of people that we don't normally see on ... heritage conservation days.' For the Exeter Heritage Partnership, 'it was great to hear people talking about the process and remarking how they hadn't written a poem for 25, 30 years. We had engagement from all ages too – grandparents and grandchildren' [5.3].



3,250 individuals submitted 7,500 original poems to an online map

PoP's success led to independent publisher Oneworld commissioning a print anthology (launched by the Poetry Society on October 1, 2020, to celebrate National Poetry Day), which includes 166 poems selected from the map with all poets paid for their work. Among them are many by previously unpublished writers, including two school-aged contributors and an entire Lancashire primary school class. The poems pinned across the map reflect many different types of place and heritage (urban, environmental, archaeological, industrial, military and sporting) and constitute one of the largest distinct bodies of poetic work produced in England and Wales in recent years.

CP-O and Inventor of Britain (IoB) similarly engaged the public in creative dialogue with place and heritage. CP-O workshops were for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in South West England; the cartography and poetry of *Poly-Olbion* were used to inspire writing and art on their contemporary environment. These were accorded value of space in three exhibitions at London's Royal Geographical Society, Cecil Sharpe House and at the University of Exeter's Forum, and were seen by more than 50,000 people [5.3]. Project partner Flash of Splendour noted: 'The impact of seeing their works

professionally displayed in an iconic space, hung next to major artists and seventeenth-century maps and prints, was profoundly empowering.’ [5.4] The majority of items exhibited were children’s artworks, selected from hundreds produced by CP-O workshop attendees. One young artist, who produced a portrait of Michael Drayton, saw his work exhibited alongside an item borrowed from the National Portrait Gallery. And in workshops at the National Library of Wales, more than 400 children from 12 primary and secondary schools produced original cartographic artworks reflecting diverse visions of Wales in the past and present. Examples of these artworks and quotations from the children featured in the IoB exhibition; it was seen by 6,258 people, accounting for 17% of NLW visits during the exhibition period of January-June 2019 [5.5].

Both PoP and CP-O supported the creative sector by commissioning new works. The 12 poets-in-residence produced original pieces for the PoP map, also published in *The Clearing* online poetry journal and some republished elsewhere. For example, *The Wisden Almanack* (2020) (estimated worldwide circulation of 40,000) printed Zaffar Kunial’s poem, inspired by The Oval. Kunial also published an additional pamphlet of cricket poems with Faber, *Six* (2019). For the CP-O exhibition, cartographic artist Stephen Walter was commissioned to produce ‘Albion’, a huge map of England and Wales inspired by *Poly-Olbion* [5.4].

Creative empowerment of underrepresented and disadvantaged communities in place and identity dialogues

Supplementing the broad community engagement, all projects had distinct impact by giving creative voice to disadvantaged and underrepresented communities. For CP-O, Flash of Splendour, in collaboration with McRae and Schwyzer, worked exclusively with seven South West SEND schools, generating an innovative programme of school-based workshops, field trips, family days, exhibition visits and special events. Reflecting on how CP-O impacted her, SEND student Sophie Roberts effused that her confidence had ‘definitely grown’ and that ‘I had always wanted to have something ... I had done in an expedition [exhibition].’ [5.7]

‘[Children’s Poly-Olbion] ranks among the finest inclusive heritage projects I have seen.’ – Simon Timms, chairman of HLF’s South West Committee (2010-16) [5.6]

IoB workshops targeted Welsh schools in deprived areas, in line with the NLW’s government commitments, and used Llwyd’s 16th-century maps and writings to prompt reflection on Wales today. PoP included workshops, led by poets-in-residence, with refugee and asylum-seeker groups (Harbour Trust, Swindon; The Conversation Group, Newcastle upon Tyne), mental health support groups (Bevan Men’s Café, Bradford), and residents at Byker Wall Estate, Newcastle upon Tyne, among many others. All activities were designed to generate a greater sense of connection between individuals and places. For instance, the poem *Happy Meal*, co-created by schoolchildren at Byker Wall, captured the meaning of that lived environment to its highly diverse residents. Byker Community Trust attests that PoP ‘brought out the confidence and talent of the young people here, prioritising listening to community voices and getting them a wider audience’. [5.8] PoP also enabled The Poetry Society to support 23 extra free schools workshops. These prioritised disadvantaged areas (e.g., Cornwall, Ely) and helped The Poetry Society widen access to creative provision in schools, a ‘key priority for us, and one which our involvement with Places of Poetry afforded’ [5.8].

Establishing new models of public engagement, enhancing institutional effectiveness

McRae and Schwyzer’s work involved more than 30 partnerships with organisations for which they facilitated step-changes in creative capacity and organisational effectiveness. PoP helped to build cultural capacity and introduce new models of public engagement. Heritage and community partners attest to deriving reputational benefit and organisational development from their involvement. At a UK level, it was the Ordnance Survey’s ‘first engagement with poetry: connecting poetry with landscape and geography was a perfect match for us, as was the sense of heritage and history in the project’ [5.8]. Furthermore, The Poetry Society attested that PoP helped to improve its publicity and engagement processes for similar projects [5.8].

PoP created legacy by improving organisational experience for future ventures. The website reopened in October 2020 to assist English Heritage's programme of poetry activities during Black History Month. Severn Rivers Trust now considers poetry and artists in residence as a route to quality community engagement [5.8]. For Ely Cathedral, PoP was 'very helpful as a model for engagement on a larger scale' and influenced a forthcoming week-long environmental event, Heaven and Earth, combining science, climate change awareness, poetry, music and worship, currently postponed from May 2020 to July 2021 [5.8]. The #heritagehaiku campaign, supported by 15 Exeter heritage sites during the 2019 Heritage Open Days, was a first experiment with creative practice for many heritage professionals and volunteers, and the Exeter Heritage Partnership plans to adapt the PoP model for the next ones [5.8]. PoP also inspired independent creative practitioners: for example, poet Jane Lovell took the project's model as the basis for independently staged workshops at Rye Harbour, Sussex, in 2019. The resulting anthology is forthcoming in spring 2021.

Promotion and support for future creative activity was built into PoP. The schools' workshops modelled creative methods to teachers, with one attesting: 'I have taken away some great ideas that we can use in our teaching of poetry.' [5.8] Additionally, in association with The Poetry Society, PoP developed toolkits on writing about place and heritage (in English and Welsh), designed variously for schools, heritage and arts organisations, and individuals [5.8]. They remain freely available via the PoP and Poetry Society websites, along with films about PoP and approaches to writing about place and heritage. Project staff have also delivered four training sessions for staff and volunteers at sites including Exeter Heritage Partnership, National Trust South West and Stonehenge.

Flash of Splendour continues to deliver activities for SEND children using methods developed in the project partnership. Its HLF final report noted that 'the most important legacy of the Children's Poly-Olbion ... was our development of a new methodological mode of engaging children and young adults, particularly those with additional learning needs, with difficult heritage material' [5.4]. Through contacts made on CP-O, the non-profit was able to develop a larger HLF-funded project centred on *Reynard the Fox*, in partnership with Bristol University, Aardman Studios and *Poly-Olbion* research associate Dr Sjoerd Levelt.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Google Analytics Data; poems pinned at <https://www.placesofpoetry.org.uk/>
- 5.2 Sarah Reeson interview on BBC 5 Live up All Night Interview (25/07/2019); <https://www.placesofpoetry.org.uk/Resources/> (see Audio and podcasts section) 3' 45 – 7' 40, for Sarah Reeson's YouTube channel, <https://cutt.ly/1z1AKlr>; file of media coverage; <https://www.placesofpoetry.org.uk/Press-and-Media/>
- 5.3 Testimonials from Exeter Heritage Partnership (David Adcock, Exeter City Council); Ordnance Survey; Head of Community Engagement Severn Rivers Trust.
- 5.4 *The Children's Poly-Olbion - Record of Activities And Events* (Oct. 2016), exhibition figures pp.28-30. 'The Children's *Poly-Olbion*' HLF Evaluation Report, p.7.
- 5.5 Statement from National Library of Wales Education Office, with documentation from participating schools.
- 5.6 Testimony from Simon Timms, Chair of the HLF South West Committee (2010-16)
- 5.7 Sophie Roberts' testimony in film, 'Flash of Splendour: Art Empowering Children'; <http://childrenspoly-olbion.exeter.ac.uk/press-andmedia/films>
- 5.8 Places of Poetry (a) testimonials from Jessica Martin, Ely Cathedral; Emma Leggott, Byker Community Trust, 14; Projects Manager, The Poetry Society; reportage upon Jane Lovell: <https://www.ryenews.org.uk/culture/local-poet-pins-beach>; (b) Places of Poetry training films at <https://www.placesofpoetry.org.uk/Resources/>; (c) Places of Poetry schools' workshop testimonies.