

Institution: Newman University Birmingham		
Unit of Assessment: History		
Title of case study: Creepy Classics: Enhancing Public Awareness of Ancient Ghost Folklore		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016-20		
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:
Juliette Harrisson	Senior Lecturer in History	January 2012 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2006-20		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Beyond specialist research, ancient ghost folklore is not well known outside the academy. However, more modern ghost folklore remains extremely popular as a subject for study and entertainment, bringing substantial benefits to contemporary economy and culture through books, television series and films. In the Western world, better known more recent ghost stories have often been produced within a broadly Christian culture. Public engagement activities on ancient ghost stories have an economic impact, supporting heritage centres, and a cultural impact, on how people think about religion, belief and different religious traditions. By working with creative practitioners in the arts, the research also has an impact on new music composition. Beneficiaries of the impact include members of the public with an interest in ghost folklore, musicians and creative practitioners, and heritage sites.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Dr Harrisson's 2013 monograph, <i>Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire: Cultural Memory and Imagination</i> included a detailed consideration of ghost stories in which the ghost appeared through the medium of a dream. This research demonstrated that in some ways, the ways ancient Greeks and Romans thought about ghosts and their relationship with reality and belief were quite different from the ways in which modern ghost Western stories are shared and thought about.</p> <p>However, there are some similarities between ancient and modern attitudes to ghost stories and to the relationship between the telling of ghost stories and afterlife belief. In a 2019 article in her own edited collection <i>Imagining the Afterlife in the Ancient World</i>, Dr Harrisson compared modern online ghost folklore with the use of ghost folklore in a 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE Latin poem, finding that in both cases, there is a deliberate ambiguity in the relationship between truth and fiction in the telling of ghost stories. Both storyteller and receiver accept the likelihood that the story is not 'true', while at the same time maintaining an illusion of 'truth' that is essential to full enjoyment of the story. This was published in the 2019 article 'Reality and Unreality: Literature and Folklore in Propertius 4.7'.</p> <p>Modern ghost folklore remains extremely popular, but is primarily focused on ghost stories – whether 'true' ghost folklore or literary fiction – from the nineteenth century onwards. The key aspect of Dr Harrisson's research that underlies the impact is her work on ancient ghost stories and their relationship to ancient folklore, religion and belief. This work goes beyond assuming that if an ancient text tells a ghost story, all readers believed in it literally, exploring the extent of ghost belief and the importance of other factors in the telling of ghost narratives in the ancient world. There was a flurry of activity on ancient ghost literature around 1999 (with the publication of both Sarah Iles Johnston's <i>Restless Dead</i> and Debbie Felton's <i>Haunted Greece and Rome</i>) but little in the intervening years, and much of Johnston and Felton's work laid the groundwork for later study, setting out the broad parameters of ancient ghost folklore rather than exploring</p>		

the issue of belief in depth. Works on ancient ghost stories are also not well known outside the academy, despite widespread interest in ghost folklore in general.

Due to the comparative nature of Dr Harrison's work, the research impact goes two ways. Dr Harrison is able to share her work on ancient ghost folklore with a wider audience, who in turn can share more modern ghost folklore with her, providing rich material for comparative research in the future. This process has continued throughout 2020, as several of Dr Harrison's students at Newman University have collected ghost stories online or from friends and family members as part of a university project, which will be used in further research. The project will culminate in a monograph in 2024-5.

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

Publications:

Juliette Harrison, 'Introduction', in J. Harrison (ed.), *Imagining the Afterlife in the Ancient World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 1-13.

Juliette Harrison, 'Reality and Unreality: Literature and Folklore in Propertius 4.7', in J. Harrison (ed.), *Imagining the Afterlife in the Ancient World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 133-152.

Juliette Harrison, *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire: Cultural Memory and Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

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

Dr Harrison has researched ancient ghost stories and disseminated key similarities and differences between these and modern ghost folklore through two key means; the 'Creepy Classics' podcast, which has produced monthly episodes since 31 October 2019, and an 'Anti-Valentines Ghost Stories' event at the Coffin Works, Birmingham, held in February 2020.

There have been three main beneficiaries of the research impact: the heritage site The Coffin Works in Birmingham, the composer with whom Dr Harrison has been working (Ed Harrison), and members of the general public with an interest in ghost folklore.

#### Creepy Classics Podcast

Building on Harrison's reputation as a specialist in understanding the intersection of modern and ancient folklore beliefs, the podcast 'Creepy Classics' was launched in October 2019, hosted on the platform Podbean, with episodes available on Apple Podcasts and Spotify. Each month, Harrison selects one ghost story to present and analyse. The podcast brings together dramatic readings of historic ghost stories with historical and literary analysis. Several episodes included leading experts on storytelling and folklore, including Liz Gloyn (Royal Holloway), Tony Keen (University of Notre Dame in London) and Olivia Knops (Birmingham), bringing academic expertise to a broad audience.

To date, there have been eighteen episodes of 'Creepy Classics'. Between October 2019 and 31 December 2020, the ten most popular episodes of the podcast received over 2,000 downloads combined. The podcast has an international reach with around 1,400 listeners from the United States, 500 from the UK and 400 from France.

The podcast has enjoyed specific cultural impact. For example, following an episode on a story from Petronius, *Satyricon*, 61-62, children's author Caroline Lawrence re-tweeted the episode, with a picture of an ancient werewolf. Twitter user @roughtradeX responded saying, "Ancient Romans believed in werewolves?" When this was confirmed, roughtradeX said "I thought it was only a Slavic myth" This demonstrates that the podcast is having a cultural impact and changing people's minds about ancient Roman culture.

### Anti-Valentine's Public Engagement

The Coffin Works in Birmingham were approached as partners in a public engagement event for several reasons. Newman University has a long-standing relationship with the organisation, and the museum also has a strong reputation in enhancing public awareness and understanding relating to ghost folklore (for example, 'Canterville Ghost', a Victorian theatrical event put on 31 October 2019, 'A Wreath of Festive Frights', 27<sup>th</sup> November 2019, and 'Restless Graves', a Zoom event held on 29 October 2020; <http://www.coffinworks.org/past-events/>). The museum allows visitors to sit surrounded by the paraphernalia of Victorian death while listening to ghost stories being re-told, which creates an atmospheric and memorable event, forcing those present to reflect on cultural aspects of dying and death. The events represented a close collaboration between Harrison and the museum.

The theme of an 'anti-Valentine's' event was chosen because the site already has successful programmes of events on more recent ghost folklore running around Halloween and Christmas, but an 'alternative' Valentine's celebration presented a gap in the market; this was also particularly suitable for the ancient material, as several ancient ghost stories relate to romantic or sexual relationships, but often in dark ways. Audience members were asked to complete a short anonymous questionnaire after the event, and several mentioned that what had attracted them to come was the idea of something "unusual" to do for Valentine's Day.

The event at the Coffin Works had a positive economic impact on the heritage site, as it sold 26 tickets and made £300 for the site (this is near to maximum capacity). At the event, audience members were given a short anonymous questionnaire, asking them what had interested them in the event and whether there was anything they learned that surprised them. Responses to this second question included "How classic ghost stories have such impact in modern stories"; "The different types of oracles and the various ways ghosts were referred to in the ancient world"; "it's an area of Classics I haven't really delved into. Excellent, will look out for the podcast!", and "the range of ghost stories from ancient texts". These responses demonstrate a clear cultural impact from the event.

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

R1 'Creepy Classics Podcast', <https://classicaljq.podbean.com>

R2 'Creepy Valentine's Classics: An Alternative Valentine's Evening', <http://www.coffinworks.org/coffinworks/creepy-valentines-classics-an-alternative-valentines-evening/>

R3 Tweet by Caroline Lawrence, 26 August 2020:

<https://twitter.com/CarolineLawrenc/status/1298648375198396417?s=20>