

<b>Institution:</b> Lancaster University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27, English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Poetry of Place: Enhancing Understanding, Stimulating Creativity, Improving Access		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2009 to 2019		
<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>
Paul Farley	Professor	September 2002 to present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> August 2013 to December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Farley's research on poetry and place has achieved wide-ranging and significant impact via publications, extensive public engagement and media work, and through his leading role in the 'Places of Poetry' project. His research has given readers and audiences a greater appreciation of the landscapes around them and enhanced their understandings of how place is related to the lives and works of poets. The research has brought new writers and readers to poetry and enhanced heritage interpretation and engagement, informing a wider discourse on identity and belonging that was outward-facing and inclusive. Farley's collaborative project, 'Places of Poetry', has empowered individuals as writers of place and has stimulated the mass production of creative work, with contributors uploading over 7,500 original poems to a digital map; a selection of these has been published in an anthology entitled <i>Places of Poetry: Mapping the Nation in Verse</i>. Farley's BBC appearances and research-related discussions have reached combined audiences of over 20 million people.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Farley is an award-winning poet, non-fiction writer and broadcaster. His research insights into the relationship between poetry and place underpin his published outputs, broadcasts, and the 'Places of Poetry' project.</p> <p><b>Edgelands</b> [2011, R1] stemmed from a collaborative exploration with poet Michael Symmons Roberts (Manchester Metropolitan University) of overlapping, in-between places. They researched scholarly sources and archival materials including local council minutes, Forestry Commission reports, gallery collections, Environment Agency reports, and ornithological records. They also conducted site visits to a power station, breaker's yard, meteorological station, waste and landfill facilities, retail parks, hotel and conference sites, allotment societies, and coastal ruins. Combining orthodox textual and site-based research helped create the book's interdisciplinary character, and by drawing on artistic, literary, ecological and scientific sources, <i>Edgelands</i> joined the tradition of 'nature writing'. But by examining wild, liminal places, it also critiqued the tradition, creating a discourse that tested the boundaries between longstanding oppositions (e.g., pastoral and urban), and encouraged appreciation of overlooked landscapes.</p> <p>Another collaboration with Symmons Roberts, <b>Deaths of the Poets</b> [2017, R2], employed a similar methodology, described by an <i>Observer</i> reviewer as a combination of literary biography and 'psycho-geography'. The authors undertook research journeys to key sites in the lives and deaths of 26 poets, conducting archival searches for the minutiae of their everyday lives: dinner-party menus, shopping lists, diaries, discarded verse fragments, and portraits. The resulting publication mirrored the researcher's approach, taking the form of 26 'pilgrimages' that simultaneously explored the poets' death-places and interrogated the Romantic myth of the 'doomed poet'. Accordingly, <i>Deaths of the Poets</i> challenged the travelogue, by consciously following tourist trails to great poets' graves, while also straying</p>		

dramatically from it in search of their actual places of death. The result is, in the authors' words, 'a book about forgetting, and the ways we consecrate some kinds of literary sites, while bypassing others'.

Farley has researched the poetry of place – both of his birthplace, Liverpool, and more widely – in **other forms of writing and broadcasts**, such as essays ('Tipping Buckets' in *Ground Work* [R3]), radio documentary features (*Lern Yerself Scouse*, BBC Radio 4, 2015), film (*Looking for Lennon*, Roger Appleton, 2017) and television (*Accent on Liverpool*, ITV: Granada Reports, 2017). These pieces explored many facets of place, including dialect, language and identity. The BBC Radio 4 contemporary poetry programme that Farley presents, *The Echo Chamber*, engaged with this research agenda by taking the poem and poet 'back to source', exploring how poetry can emerge from, reflect or construct a sense of place. Many other features for BBC Radio 3 and 4 have also focused on place and writing; for example, *v. is for Tony* (poet Tony Harrison and Leeds), *Hotel Suite* (the literature of transit) and *Somme* (literature and war). Farley's research underpinned the flagship day of poetry programming on BBC Radio 4, *We British* (8 October 2015), for which Farley travelled the country to interview in situ five contemporary poets about canonical poets.

As Co-Investigator on the AHRC **Places of Poetry** project (2018 to 2019), Farley collaborated with Andrew McRae (Exeter University) to marry his ongoing research into Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1622) with contemporary creative practice by encouraging reflection on English and Welsh national and cultural identities [R4, R5]. This was a national community arts project that formed partnerships with heritage and cultural bodies and addressed the challenge of improving public reflection on places, important for the heritage sector and cultural life nationally. It extended Drayton's model by superimposing the maps of his illustrator, engraver William Hole, onto modern-day Ordnance Survey data, pre-populating the resulting online map with historic poems associated with various locations. Individuals were encouraged to write original poems of place, heritage and identity, and upload them to the searchable map – creating a crowd-sourced 'poly-vocal' poem that inspired people to write about places important to them [R5]. The project also led to an anthology in book form, *The Places of Poetry*, that showcased an edited selection of work featured, often from previously unpublished writers [R6].

### 3. References to the research

[R1] Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2011). ISBN: 9780099539773. Held at HEI. *Winner of the 2012 Foyles 'Best Book of Ideas', criteria for which included presentation of 'new, important and challenging ideas' and 'rigour'; nomination for the Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize 'awarded annually to a book of the highest literary merit – fiction, non-fiction, poetry – evoking the spirit of a place'.*

[R2] Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Deaths of the Poets* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017). ISBN: 9780224097543. Held at HEI. *BBC Radio Book of the Week (2017); reviewed widely in national and international media, e.g. Guardian, London Review of Books, Spectator, Times, Financial Times, Independent, Scotsman, Irish Examiner, Sydney Morning Herald.*

[R3] Paul Farley, 'Tipping Buckets' in *Ground Work: Writings on Places and People*, ed. by Tim Dee (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018). ISBN 9781910702710. Held at HEI. *Contained in anthology featuring leading 'New Nature' writers; positively reviewed in national press e.g. Guardian, Observer.*

[R4] Paul Farley, 'From the Electric Poly-Olbion', in Carol Ann Duffy and Gillian Clarke (eds), *The Map and the Clock: A Laureate's Choice of the Poetry of Britain and Ireland* (London: Faber & Faber, 2016). ISBN: 9780571277070. Held at HEI. *Anthology of poetry selected by then-Poet Laureate; positively reviewed in national press e.g. Guardian, Observer, Times.*

[R5] Andrew McRae and Paul Farley, *Places of Poetry* (2019), online, interactive map and poetry resource. <https://www.placesofpoetry.org.uk/>, retrieved 25th November 2020.

[R6] Andrew McRae and Paul Farley, *The Places of Poetry: Mapping the Nation in Verse* (London: OneWorld, 2020). ISBN: 9781786078797. Held at HEI.

**Peer-reviewed research grants:**

- Farley (Co-I), 'The Places of Poetry', AHRC: (2018 to 2019) GBP80,564
- Farley (Co-I), 'The Places of Poetry: building community engagement with heritage sites', Heritage Lottery Fund, Our Heritage programme: (2018 to 2019) GBP56,500
- Farley (Co-I), 'The Places of Poetry', Arts Council England: (2019 to 2020) GBP34,500

**4. Details of the impact**

Farley's research has not only changed the ways people understand the relationship between poetry and place but has also enabled them to participate in the writing of their own place-based poetry. The research has enabled the public to think about places from different angles – environmental, industrial, cultural, religious, sporting – and to respond creatively to those places that held meaning for them.

**Influencing the ways people understand and experience poetry and place: publications**

*Edgelands*, subject of a REF2014 case study, has continued to have a far-reaching impact, transforming contemporary understandings of landscape for a diverse range of readers and practitioners. It received approximately 300 Goodreads 3\*+ ratings between August 2013 and December 2020. One reader identified its 'gentle floating quality... that immediately makes you feel like you are already half dreaming' (2014); another wished to explore 'Lincoln & its edgelands & [try] to capture these images on my new camera!!!!' (2016); while a third vowed to look at 'pieces of wasteland ... with new eyes' (2017). Two 5\* Amazon reviews (2016) described it as 'the sort of book which makes you look at ordinary things differently ... I feel enriched by it' and 'a lovely book ... [that] makes me look at the urban environment in a whole new way' [S1].

*Edgelands* continued to influence how people understand and experience landscape. At Liverpool's Bluecoat Arts Centre, a 2014 'edgelands' season included an exhibition, an author-led talk, and a curated walk for 20 participants who went 'in search of the authentic edgelands experience', past 'desolate spaces await[ing] a visionary future' and places reminiscent 'of paintings by George Shaw or David Rayson' [S2]. In 2016, Farley led a similar walk, encompassing a dump, sewage works, abandoned railway line and eco-camp on the Lizard Peninsula, for a group of artists, filmmakers and curators. One participant wrote: 'we are thinking about these edges because they are not already written and imaged ... they are unclaimed ... open for unobserved action or intervention.' She also noted that one artist, Ben Rivers, had incorporated the edgelands concept into his work, particularly a 2015 exhibition at Camden Arts Centre [S3].

*Deaths of the Poets* proved similarly thought-provoking, offering what the *Sunday Times* described as 'an utterly original perspective that will change the way you think about posterity itself' [S4]. Approximately 3 million listeners enjoyed it as BBC Radio 4's 'Book of the Week' in February 2017 [S5] and that August it underpinned the poets' live show, 'Dead Poets' Society', at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. The *Guardian* called the book 'thoughtful, funny, informative . . . and wide ranging' [S7], while the *Mail on Sunday* found it 'a gripping, witty read' that 'asks serious questions about the way the post-Romantic myth of the doomed poet skews the way we interpret their work' [S7].

Readers, too, experienced changed perspectives. Composer Mark-Anthony Turnage tweeted that the book 'inspired me to revisit Byron, Larkin, Stevie Smith and discover Liz Bishop' [S8]. Rated 4\* or above by 71% of Goodreads and 91% of Amazon reviewers, it was judged 'intriguing', 'enlightening and provocative, eye-wateringly funny and powerfully moving'. One reader felt 'a little more learned', another gained 'some notion of what a poet is, and what drives the poetic instinct . . . There is poignancy . . . and the touching insight into lives . . . so often full of the ordinary, domestic and routine.' A third found it 'amazing . . . a journey across countries and minds. . . I just wanted the beautiful writing and mind opening to go on and on' [S8].

**Developing the public's understandings of poetry and place: media broadcasts**

Farley's research into poetry and place have underpinned his radio broadcast work, which has attracted a huge audience to contemporary poetry, enhancing the cultural lives of the public and bringing new readers and listeners to the form. Between August 2013 and December 2020, Farley participated in over 40 programmes on national radio, including as presenter of *The Echo Chamber* (BBC R4), each episode of which had over 0.5 million live listeners and gained approximately 11,000 individual listens on iPlayer. *The Echo Chamber* is grounded by Farley's commitment to place, with poets framed in locations significant or formative to their work, and on-location interviews with Farley providing context and illumination for the general listener. *The Echo Chamber* was a regular Pick of the Week/Radio Choice in the national press, demonstrating qualitative impact (*Guardian* 9 November 2013, 4 January 2014; *Independent* 22 March 2015, 2 August 2015; *Sunday Telegraph* 2 August 2015; *Daily Telegraph* 12 December 2015, 1 June 2016), and generated much discussion on social media. Examples demonstrate the significance of place: 'Paul Farley travels to Shetland to interview Jen for *The Echo Chamber* on BBC Radio 4 and the result is a beautiful soundscape with interesting insights into the poet's work, worth listening to on the iplayer while you can' [vickihusband.wordpress.com](http://vickihusband.wordpress.com), verse from the north, 14 April 2014; 'Startlingly good poetic tour of UK @blackcountry with Paul Farley, Helen Mort and Liz Berry on BBC R4@Echochamber' [S6]. As these examples illustrate, Farley's research has enhanced people's understanding and appreciation of the rich relationships between poetry and place.

**Engaging the public in place-based reflection and creation: 'Places of Poetry'**

In 2019, the 'Places of Poetry' project invited people to write their own poems of place, heritage and identity and locate them on the project's interactive digital map. This resulted in over 3,250 people uploading more than 7,500 poems, many of high quality. One contributor of 24 poems reported how 'the feeling of satisfaction and validation . . . literally changed my life', while another was inspired to run workshops in her area; the attendees, many previously unpublished, 'added loads of poems to the map and were tremendously supportive of each other' [S9]. By February 2020, over 40,000 people had made more than 70,000 visits to the website, which remained open for reading and searching poems, and for downloading poetry toolkits to support place-based poetry writing, enabling project participants to develop their writing skills [S9]. In October 2020 a selection of poems was published in a mass-market anthology, *The Places of Poetry: Mapping the Nation in Verse* [R6]; for many of the contributors this was their first publication.

The project reached a wide cross-section of the British population via traditional and social media. With approximately 2,000 Twitter followers, 700 on Facebook, and 500 on Instagram, the researchers tweeted 1,800 times during the project (earning 1.1 million impressions) and posted a daily poem on Facebook [S9]. Social media comments included: 'A brilliant project for poets, especially for those who love a special landscape', 'This project has inspired me so much I will continue to write about the places I go from now on', and 'I am really enjoying the variety of poems related to places and identity' [S9]. The researchers' and contributing poets' BBC appearances included Kayo Chingonyi with Farley at Hadrian's Wall on *Countryfile* (average 5.5 million viewers); Zaffar Kunial on the *Today* programme (average 6.8 million listeners) and BBC Radio 5 Live (average 4.9 million listeners); Jo Bell, Farley and Sarah Reeson on BBC Radio 5 Live; and Andrew McRae on BBC Radio 3's 'Arts and Ideas' podcast for National Poetry Day [S9].

**Establishing new ways to engage hard-to-reach audiences with poetry and place**

As well as creating an open access space where reflection and creativity occurred, 'Places of Poetry' worked with national partners including the Ordnance Survey, National Poetry Day and The Poetry Society to enable hard-to-reach groups to engage with heritage. With The Poetry Society, Farley curated 13 poets' residencies at partner sites across England and Wales. Poets engaged in workshops, readings, walks and other activities (128 participants, 26 events, [S9]). Participants included: refugee and asylum-seeker groups (The Harbour Project, Swindon, at Avebury; The Conversation Group, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, at Hadrian's Wall); a youth mental health support group (the Genesis Trust, Bath, at Roman Baths); a



men's mental health group (Bevan Men's Café, Bradford, at Bronte Parsonage); and residents (mainly children) at Byker Wall Estate, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The value of active participation through reading and writing poetry as a way of exploring and enhancing our relationship to place – an idea informed by Farley's longstanding research – was central to each event. Creative activities developed a sense of connection between individuals, communities and places. A workshop at Severn Rivers Trust in 2019, for instance, facilitated by Farley and poet-in-residence Isabel Galleymore 'attracted a really diverse mix of people that we don't normally see on the average heritage conservation days... [it] led to a depth of engagement and analysis that I was really not expecting' [S10a]. Staff and volunteers at partner sites attending pre-event training learned how to use poetry to engage visitors and acquired new skills such as how to stage poetry-based events, including workshops. For example, Ely Cathedral found 'Places of Poetry' 'very helpful as a model for engagement on a larger scale and has influenced an upcoming environmental week-long event, Heaven and Earth, combining science, climate change awareness, poetry, music and worship' planned for 2021 [S10b].

### **Supporting education through poetry and creating educational resources for all**

'Places of Poetry' enabled The Poetry Society to support 23 free additional schools' workshops (approximately 440 students), prioritising children in disadvantaged areas (e.g., Ely, Cornwall). This helped the organization to fulfil its objective: 'Widening access to creative provision in schools – especially at low or no cost to them – is another key priority for us, and one which our involvement with Places of Poetry afforded' [S9]. One Derbyshire school produced a group of poems reflecting on their town's history and reputation. Some teachers were empowered to export the workshop experience to their classrooms, such as an Exeter teacher who commented: 'The children have been buzzing about the poetry sessions . . . [we] have taken away some great ideas that we can use in our teaching of poetry' [S9]. The project website [www.placesofpoetry.org.uk](http://www.placesofpoetry.org.uk) provided a series of resource packs to enhance involvement and support individuals, schools and organisations across England and Wales, adapted for writers of different ages and levels of experience, which Farley helped to develop in collaboration with The Poetry Society and National Poetry Day. These toolkits remain freely available online (the Poetry Society site estimated approximately 700 downloads per year), contributing to educational resources and wider public discourse about poetry both now and in the future.

### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

[S1a] Reviews of *Edgelands* on [Goodreads](#) and [S1b] [Amazon](#), corroborating quotes given in section 4.

[S2] Blog post [\*Wildness on the edge of town: an Edgelands encounter with Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts\*](#) (2014).

[S3] Report by Abigail Reynolds, participant at the '[The Cornwall Workshop](#)' at Kestle Barton, 11th to 16th March 2016, corroborating quotes in section 4.

[S4] Claire Lowdon, '[Books of the Year](#)' *The Sunday Times* (December 2017). Corroborates quote in section 4.

[S5] [Report by BBC Marketing and Audiences](#) corroborating listener figures for Radio 4's 'Book of the Week' in February 2017.

[S6] [Blog post](#) dated April 2014 and Tweet by Frederick Taylor (@fredvallier) dated August 2015 (pdf available) corroborating quotes in section 4.

[S7] Penguin website corroborating quotes from Blake Morrison, *The Guardian* and Kathryn Hughes, *Mail on Sunday*, <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/109/1094380/deaths-of-the-poets/9780099581321.html>, 2017 (pdf available).

[S8a] Tweet by Mark-Anthony Turnaget (@TurnageTime), (pdf available) (June 2017)

[S8b] reviews from [Goodreads](#) and [Amazon](#)

[S9] All statistics, quotes and other data relating to the 'Places of Poetry' impact are in the Project Evaluation Summary (project impact report), 2020 (pdf available).

[S10a] Testimonials from Severn Rivers Trust (2020); [S10b] Testimonial from Ely Cathedral (2020).