

Institution: University of Reading		
Unit of Assessment: 28 History		
Title of case study: Raising the presence, profile and voice of women in Parliament and politics with the Nancy Astor centenary events – Astor 100		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2020		
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:
Dr Jacqui Turner	Lecturer Associate Professor	01/10/13 - 31/07/14 01/09/14 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-20		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Turner's research has challenged the male-dominated space of Parliament, fuelling a public debate around women in politics. Using the centenary of Nancy Astor taking her parliamentary seat for activism rather than commemoration, Turner engaged with sitting and former MPs to install an Astor plaque in the House of Commons and, controversially, a statue in Plymouth. Collaboration with the National Trust and the Astor family facilitated a cultural shift. Turner helped the family revisit their archive and transform Cliveden House's representation of women in domesticity to one of women in power. The project has been recognised as a yardstick to measure women's parliamentary history.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research basis for Dr Turner's engagement with British politics begins with <i>The Labour Church: Religion and Politics in Britain, 1890–1914</i>, published in 2018 (output 1). Gender history proved integral to Turner's study, denoting female pioneers of British socialist politics and their role in forging the Labour Church. Such a focus led, in turn, to an interest in female MPs elected after the 1918 Representation of the People Act, primarily those presented as 'sex-candidates'. During the process of her research – premiered in an article for the <i>Conservative History Journal</i> and developed through a co-edited special issue of the <i>Open Library for Humanities</i> (outputs 2 and 3) – Turner reassessed the importance of the 1918 Representation of the People Act on British democracy and especially, the emergence of female public politicians. It was such engagement that led her to contribute to the 'Voice and Vote' exhibition at Parliament and contribute a paper to the accompanying book (outputs 4 and 5).</p> <p>Nancy Astor is a key figure in Turner's research, the first female MP to sit in the House of Commons. Turner's focus on political and gender history led her to the Astor archive at the University of Reading's Special Collections, with documentary sources opening the way for a collaborative project with the National Trust at Cliveden (the Astor family home). With her students, Turner produced an exhibition in 2015 that showcased the highlights of the Astor archive at Cliveden House. This has since become a regular exhibition and led to the National Trust Cliveden requesting a tour of the Astor archive at the University's Special Collections. The resulting collaboration included an oral history project, 'Astor Voices' in 2019, involving Turner and National Trust staff and volunteers. The recordings are to be held at the British Library as part of their Sound collection, underpinning the national and international value of the research.</p>		

Work in the Astor archive led on to the campaign for a plaque to go up in Parliament, with Turner's research featuring in the case presented to the Speaker of the House of Commons. The richness of the Astor archive also led to Turner's collaboration with students towards a Twitter exhibition: 'The political career of Nancy Astor in 50 documents'. The exhibition was supported by contributions from internationally renowned academics, researchers, the Astor family and numerous female politicians. From the debate generated, certain 'Astor myths' were challenged, including the so-called 'D-Day Dodgers' controversy. The research further led to a partnership with Emily Astor, Nancy Astor's granddaughter, with Turner advising on the publication *Nancy Astor: A Life in Photographs* (2020) and producing much of the historical narrative running through the volume.

In 2019, the centenary of Nancy Astor taking her seat in Parliament was branded as 'Astor 100'. A centralised [web presence](#) was hosted from the University of Reading, generating debate around women in Parliament and touching on such contemporary issues as the verbal abuse received by female MPs past and present. The project received cross-party engagement, through which Turner's research broke through prevailing male-centric narratives of parliamentary history.

3. References to the research

The research meets or exceeds the threshold for 2*. It involves rigorous engagement with an archival base to produce original studies published in peer-reviewed journals and with established presses. It significantly extends knowledge of women's political history and serves as a catalyst for both academic study and public debate.

1. Turner, J. (2018) *The Labour Church: Religion and Politics in Britain 1890-1914*. International Library of Political Studies. I.B. Tauris, London, UK, pp.304. ISBN 9781784539436
2. Turner, J. (2019) Keeping up the legacy of Nancy Astor: 100 years since the first woman took her seat in parliament. *Conservative History Journal*, 2 (7). ISSN 1479-8026
3. Turner, J. and Grey, D., eds. (2020) *Nancy Astor, Public Women and Gendered Political Culture in Interwar Britain*. Open Library of Humanities, 6 (2). Open Library of Humanities. CenTAUR ID: <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/91581/>
4. Turner, J., (2016) Nancy Astor. Living heritage: women and the vote. www.parliament.uk/nancyastor
5. Turner, J., McCarthy, H., Bartley, P., Gay, O. and Sutherland, D. (2018) 'The Tomb 1918-1963: the first female MPs'. In: *Voice and Vote: Celebrating 100 Years of Votes for Women*. History of Parliament, London, pp. 80-86. ISBN 9781906670702

4. Details of the impact

Although the UK has seen huge steps towards social equality in the last 100 years, more needs to change, and gender representation remains a major issue at all level of politics. Parliament continues to be a male-dominated space and the vast majority of statues representing politicians in public spaces are male. Similarly, the way in which women are represented through heritage sites and organisations remains problematic, with the focus continuing to be on their domestic role, rather than any political role they may have had. Turner's research on Nancy Astor has disrupted male political narratives and brought changes to public tours of Parliament, informed exhibitions in the Palace of Westminster and at the Astor home at Cliveden. In addition, a successful crowdfunding campaign resulted in the first publicly accessible statue of a female MP (E1). Turner has provided a platform to celebrate Astor, revealing little-known stories of her life, and building a legacy that is helping to bring more women into politics.

A. Challenging the male dominated spaces in Parliament

Until Turner's intervention in 2016, there was limited representation of female politicians in the House of Commons Committee Corridor, other than an obscured and overlooked portrait of

Margaret Thatcher. This served to promulgate the male-dominated space of Parliament. Underpinned by Turner's research in the Astor Archive at Reading and in collaboration with the Parliamentary Archivist and the Parliamentary Curator, Turner made a case for putting a permanent plaque of Nancy Astor in the Committee Corridor. This required permission from the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art, led at the time by John Bercow. After some reluctance, permission was granted and the plaque was installed in 2016, with an accompanying leaflet and YouTube video (more than 10,000 views to date), both of which are on the UK Parliament website (E2). This intervention was the catalyst needed to help change the male narrative of Parliament. This plaque has since featured in the work of other research and engagement projects, particularly as a feature of the Vote100 commemorative events including a FutureLearn Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) 'Beyond the Ballot: Women's Rights and Suffrage 1866 – Today' (approximately 16,000 learners to date).

The installation of the plaque coincided with and set the tone for the start of the build-up to the Vote 100 events of 2018, including the 'Voice and Vote' exhibition at Westminster in summer 2018. At the end of the Vote 100 celebrations the baton was passed on to Astor 100. This changed the tone of the movement from being one of commemoration to one of activism. The difference between Vote 100 and Astor 100 is that Vote 100's aim was to commemorate the centenary, not bring about change. Vote 100 also did not court controversy, whereas Astor 100 would always be provoking and generate attention because of Astor's political and personal views and actions.



Turner's close work with colleagues at the Parliamentary Archives has changed how they are using their collections and how they are engaging MPs and the wider public with the history of female MPs. While the Parliamentary Archives had always had material relating to Nancy Astor, 'it had virtually no public profile, visibility or wider awareness' prior to Turner's involvement (E3). '[Turner's] role in leading the Astor 100 project brought us connections and networks which were extremely helpful in helping us interpret our existing collections, encouraging us to acquire new material (the Le Cras papers), and bringing works of art relating to Astor on loan to the Parliamentary estate' (E2). It has also allowed for Astor to be understood in a new way and as a key figure in British politics (E4).

The History of Parliament Trust went on to sponsor an event entitled: 'Astor 100 and Women's Parliamentary History: Where do we go from here?' (January 2020) to reflect on the work that had been done to mark the centenary of Nancy Astor taking her seat in the House of Commons. At the event, Astor 100 was referred to as the benchmark for women's political history moving forwards and has changed how the History of Parliament Trust are planning their future events (E5).

B. The first publicly accessible statue of a female MP

A lack of statues or other public artworks celebrating women in power continues to enable a male dominated narrative of politics in both central government and in the localities. Turner's work to raise the profile of women in politics has extended into the local community, with Turner working with the City of Plymouth to erect the first publicly accessible statue of a female

MP and manage the controversy around this, shifting the focus to the main message of representing women in power.

In 2018 a campaign was instigated in Plymouth for a statue to commemorate Nancy Astor's election as the UK's first female MP to take her seat in Parliament. As a result of Turner's work with Vote 100 she was invited by Linda Gilroy, former MP for Plymouth Sutton (1997-2010) and Luke Pollard, sitting MP for Plymouth, to be historical consultant to the statue committee. The campaign's launch on 2nd November 2018 was a success, with cross-party support from leading female MPs (E6). After the politicians and councillors involved faced a backlash because of the controversies surrounding Astor, Turner continued with the statue campaign with Alexis Bowater, with the backing of Plymouth Women in Business Network and Astor's granddaughter Emily Astor and the Astor family. The campaign to fund the statue raised £126,000 and attracted tenders from 8 artists to create the statue. The campaign also raised awareness around Nancy Astor with a total news reach of 14.95 million, 5,221 Tweets and a total of 1,408,000 Twitter impressions (E7). The sculptor chosen was Hayley Gibbs, who was immersed in the Astor Archive and was heavily influenced by Turner's research to create the statue (E8).

The statue has always been referred to in terms of gender, not party politics, and as a result brought together female MPs from across the political spectrum. The importance of this campaign to female MPs is shown in the [video](#) of the launch of the statue campaign (E6), and in particular the support of Teresa May. May emphasised the need to support women in politics and raised the question of how this can be done through the past experiences of her predecessors (E9). The level of change in the previously male-dominated narrative of parliamentary history can be seen in the fact that at the unveiling of the Astor statue, Turner convinced the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, that he should not be sharing the podium as this was a moment for women in politics.

The unveiling of the statue also included the introduction of the Great Western Railway (GWR) newly named train *Nancy Astor*, signalling that Astor was now recognised by GWR as a person of national significance. The train took the unveiling party and invited groups (including 50:50, members of the Astor family, the curator and archivist from parliamentary Archives and several MPs) from London Paddington to Plymouth. Train guests were given packs featuring folio highlights from the Astor Archive and students were on hand to answer questions.

C. Changing the representation of women and power with the National Trust

Traditionally, the National Trust Cliveden relies on its family visitors who engage with the landscape as a playground. Engaging individual visitors with the history of the Astor family, and Nancy in particular, was a new challenge for them. Turner's collaboration with the National Trust Cliveden and the Astor family has enabled a cultural venue to change their usual representation of women in domesticity to women in power. Following the central National Trust 'Women in Power' campaign in 2018 (to mark the women's vote centenary), the Cliveden site embarked on an engagement programme in 2019 to reach a new audience in a different way.

The "Astor Voices" project inspired Astor's grandchildren, who went on to give their support to the year-long "Nancy Astor: Vigour, Vitality and Cheek" activities at Cliveden, in particular the use of their oral testimonies which became part of the Cliveden audio guide (E10). Events included an exhibition of the letters to Nancy Astor on her election, a statue trail highlighting Astor's election plus political and cultural achievements, tours of Cliveden House with specific reference to Nancy Astor, and historical interpreters performing scenarios inspired by Nancy Astor's life. The collaboration with the National Trust has engaged the National Trust's typical audience with thinking about women in power, using a cultural approach in contrast to the national political approach used in the activities with Parliament and Plymouth (E10).

Using the central figure of Nancy Astor, Turner has made significant inroads into tackling the dominant male narrative of Parliament and politics in England. Astor 100 is now the

benchmark by which the history of women in Parliament is measured and is a template and the springboard for further engagement around upcoming centenaries. The combination of the Astor family and cultural impact on the National Trust Cliveden has engaged an audience which does not typically consider women in power. Engagement with Plymouth and achieving the first statue of a female MP has changed the landscape for the representation of political women in England, and successfully rode the storm of controversy to ensure the narrative rises above party politics. Turner's direct engagement with Parliament has achieved the support of many sitting and former MPs, uniting them across political divides, to push the agenda for raising the profile of women in politics in the present as well as in the past.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [E1] Astor 100 website and blog posts (provided as a PDF file).
- [E2] Parliament YouTube Video and Leaflet.
- [E3] Testimonial from Parliamentary Archives and History of Parliament.
- [E4] Testimonial from Luke Pollard MP.
- [E5] Testimonial from History of Parliament Trust.
- [E6] Nancy Astor statue support from female MPs YouTube video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICPJ530Y8U8&feature=youtu.be>
- [E7] Testimonials from Bowater Communications.
- [E8] Testimonial from sculptor.
- [E9] Press coverage relating to the Nancy Astor statue.
- [E10] Evidence from Cliveden House (National Trust).