

Institution: University of Leicester		
Unit of Assessment: 28		
Title of case study: Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms: informing “the most impressive, far-reaching show ever staged at the British Library”		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 01 January 2000–01 October 2018		
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:
Joanna Story	Professor of Early Medieval History	October 1996 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 14 May 2014 – 31 July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>The British Library (BL) facilitates access to its globally significant collections and delivers exhibitions “<i>to bring their . . . stories to the public</i>”. In 2014, it sought expertise to contextualise its early English manuscripts for the 2018/19 international exhibition: <i>Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms: Art, Word, War (ASK)</i>. Research led by Professor Joanna Story significantly informed the shape and content of ASK, particularly on early manuscripts, art, and history. Story’s research on links between Britain, Ireland and continental Europe influenced this “<i>once-in-a-generation</i>” exhibition. ASK exceeded BL’s visitor targets by 155% in four months, garnered worldwide acclaim via more than 100 media articles, and inspired intellectual curiosity among its 108,000 visitors.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>The islands of Britain and Ireland made fundamental contributions to the cultural, political, social and population histories of Europe in the centuries that followed the end of the Roman Empire. This interconnectedness is key to understanding the development of the medieval kingdoms of northern and western Europe that underpinned both the later political geography, and the received histories of modern nation states in this region, feeding into national identities that are much debated and often contested. For England, much of the story of this early medieval period is transmitted to modern times in contemporary manuscripts, written before c.1100 CE in Latin or Old English. More than 300 of these manuscripts (c. 25%) are part of the national collection held at the British Library. As part of its public service remit, and recognising that there had not been a major show on the topic since 1991, the British Library proposed installing an ambitious temporary exhibition on the history, language and written culture of Anglo-Saxon England. Story’s extensive and on-going research on Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent, her specialist knowledge—communication skills, media proficiency (TV and radio), and experience of working with non-academic audiences and public-facing heritage partners—led to an invitation in May 2014 to join a small group of academic advisors to help the British Library contextualise their collection with specialist historical knowledge, and deliver what became a major and internationally acclaimed exhibition, which ran from October 2018–February 2019 [R1, X1].</p> <p>Story’s distinctive research was key to the British Library’s invitation and its plans for the exhibition because of her expertise on the history, archaeology, and manuscript culture of early Anglo-Saxon England. Story’s research is well known for its rigour [R3], its concentration on connections between continental Europe and the islands of Britain and Ireland [R5], and its use of early manuscript evidence [R4] informed by multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to data [R2]. Her research methods deploy text, art, and material culture analysis, as well as palaeography and codicology to investigate and</p>		

contextualise manuscripts and the texts that they contain, revealing new evidence that illuminates the movement of people, objects, texts and ideas, and the impact of those connections within early medieval Europe.

Story's UKRI-, British Academy and Leverhulme Trust-funded research [G1–G6] on 'Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent' and on contemporary texts, manuscripts, sculpture and inscriptions reveals the depth and character of intellectual exchange within Britain, with Ireland, and with the European mainland at that time [R3–R5]. For example, her research on Insular Manuscripts (written in England or Ireland [G1, G2], or in scriptoria founded by English or Irish missionaries in Francia and Italy), has identified c. 850 books written in Insular script or annotated by Insular scribes. Alongside some of the greatest cultural treasures of the post-Roman world, such as the Lindisfarne Gospels or Codex Amiatinus, many hundreds of others reveal the profound contribution of English and Irish creativity to the revival of learning in Europe under Charlemagne [X1, R1, R3–R5].

3. References to the research

Publications

- [R1]. C. Breay and J. Story, eds. *Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms. Art, Word, War* (London: British Library, 2018)..
- [R2]. J. Story and R. N. Bailey, 'The Skull of Bede', *The Antiquaries Journal* 95 (2015), pp. 325–50. DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003581515000244](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003581515000244)
- [R3]. J. Story, "Bede, Willibrord, and the Letters of Pope Honorius I on the genesis of the archbishopric of York", *The English Historical Review* 127 (2012), 783–818. DOI: doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ces142.
- [R4]. J. Story, "Aldhelm and Old St. Peter's, Rome", *Anglo-Saxon England* 39 (2010), pp. 7–20. DOI: doi.org/10.1017/S0263675110000037
- [R5]. J. Story, *Carolingian Connections. Anglo-Saxon England and Francia, c. 750–850* (Routledge, 2003).

Exhibition

- [X1]. C. Breay and J. Story, et al. Exhibition: *Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms. Art, Word, War*. PACCAR Gallery, The British Library (19 October 2018 – 19 February 2019). www.bl.uk/events/anglo-saxon-kingdoms

Grants

- [G1]. J. Story, PI. *Politics and Script: Anglo-Saxon influence at the Carolingian Court*, GBP51,215, British Academy and Leverhulme Trust Senior Research Fellowship (2017–18), [SRF/170016](https://www.ukri.org/grants/170016)
- [G2]. J. Story, PI. *Networks of Knowledge: Insular Manuscripts, c. 650–850*, GBP87,507. Leverhulme Trust (2015–16), IN-2016-029.
- [G3]. J. Story, PI. *Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent: the manuscript evidence*, GBP57,597, AHRC CDP BL studentship (2015–18), [AH/N002385/1](https://www.ukri.org/grants/AH/N002385/1).
- [G4]. J. Story, PI. *England and France, 700–1200: Franco-Saxon Manuscripts in the 9th century*, £69,969, AHRC CDP BL studentship (2017–20), [AH/R00272X/1](https://www.ukri.org/grants/AH/R00272X/1).
- [G5]. J. Story, Co-I. *Worked in Stone: Completing the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*, Leicester share £51,215 (Durham University, GBP765,405), AHRC (2017–22), [AH/R003558/1](https://www.ukri.org/grants/AH/R003558/1).
- [G6]. J. Story, PI. *The Impact of Diasporas on the Making of Britain: Evidence; Memories; Invention*, GBP1.37m, Leverhulme Trust (2011–17), F/00/212/AM.

4. Details of the impact

The British Library's (BL) exhibition, *Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms: Art, Word, War (ASK)* (19 October 2018 – 19 February 2019) [X1] was “a once-in-a-generation opportunity” to see the BL's collection of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and objects, “which demonstrate the interconnected European world of Anglo-Saxon art, literature and history” [E1].

Impact on the British Library

Professor Joanna Story took a leading research advisory role (May 2014 – October 2018), collaborating very closely with Dr Claire Breay, ASK Lead Curator and BL's Head of Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts. Breay stated that Story's “wide-ranging expertise on the history of the earlier Anglo-Saxon kingdoms was a critical support to the development of the exhibition” [E2].

Story's research on the history and archaeology of early Anglo-Saxon England [R3–R5, G5–G6] helped shape the thematic structure and content of over a third of the show's sections: *Origins*; *Kingdoms and Conversion*; *Mercia and its Neighbours*; and *The Rise of the West Saxons* and exhibition films; and informed the themes and narrative threads running through the show. Breay stated: “[Story's] background in archaeology [and] history was key in helping to select the archaeological content of the exhibit list and balance it with the books and documentary material” [E2]. Story appeared in two films about ASK with more than 20,000 viewings [E7]. The ASK website, drawing on catalogue content, garnered 70,838 unique page views during the show; and 257,871 in total by July 2020 [E2].

Surpassing attendance targets

Story's scholarly expertise contributed to ensuring that the exhibition was highly topical for contemporary audiences and thus helped the BL exceed its ticket sale target. More than 108,000 visitors attended ASK, surpassing BL's 70,000 target by 155% [E2], which was “the third highest attendance for a charged British Library exhibition” [E2]. ASK attracted the highest recorded proportion of UK visitors to a BL exhibition from outside London (2015–2019) at 54% (average: 43%) [E2].

Story co-edited the ASK catalogue with Breay [R1] and authored numerous entries, including two of the six essays — “Introduction” and “Anglo-Saxon England and Europe” — underpinned directly by her research [R3–R5, G1–G6]. Breay said: “I relied very much on [Story's] wide-ranging knowledge of the manuscripts and other objects both for the overall shaping of the catalogue and when focusing on the detail of the entries” [E2]. The BL sold 16,212 ASK catalogues, surpassing its original print run by 400% by June 2020 [E2]. In comparison, *Magna Carta* exhibition visitors purchased 8,537 catalogues [E2]. Breay stated: “These [ASK catalogue] sales required one reprint of the hardback and three of the paperback. In a very unusual move, the third [paperback] reprint was ordered as the exhibition closed, owing to the confidence of BL Publishing that the book would continue to sell beyond the run of the exhibition, as indeed has been the case” [E2].

Global critical acclaim

ASK garnered acclaim via 112 pieces of worldwide press, media, and social media coverage [E2, E1]. “Off the scale . . . by some distance the most significant exhibition in London.” – *London Evening Standard* (18 October 2018) [E3]. “Marvellously engrossing . . . the most impressive, far-reaching show ever staged at the British Library.” – *Financial Times* (1 November 2018) [E3]. Of the catalogue [R2], reviewers said: “It will be a companion and an inspiration for a long time to come” – *The Times Literary Supplement* (29 November 2019) [E3]. “It is lavishly and lovingly illustrated, supported by the most up to date scholarship. Monumental really” [E5]. The catalogue jointly won the International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England (ISSEME) *Biennial Publication Prize* (2019) for ‘Best Research Aid’ [E2, E8].

Influencing public dialogue about culture and identity

Story's research [R4–R6, G1–4] helped to identify and define a core exhibition theme: the connectivity between England, Ireland and the European continent, which proved timely. The June 2016 Brexit result encouraged visitors and reviewers to reflect on Britain's cultural

contacts with Europe and notions of national identity. *"The farther you venture, the more certainly you discover that what we now claim as our indigenous culture grew from deep roots in a pan-European world"* – *The Times* (9 November 2018) [E3]. *"Inextricably bound up with wider European culture and politics . . . it is hard to imagine a more appropriate time to consider the lessons we might draw from this understanding"* – *Country Life* (14 November 2018) [E3]. In a government speech about post-Brexit international collaboration, the Science Minister stated: *"Only recently, at the British Library, I was struck by the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms exhibition, how truly interconnected our shared past with the continent is"*. (Chris Skidmore, 9 October 2019) [E4]. Visitors stated that ASK: *"[is] particularly apt now that Brexit is prompting many in Britain and Ireland to rethink the political landscape of these islands"*; and *"[d]emonstrated the centrality of migration and the constant exchange of ideas to our island's story"* [E5].

Enhancing visitor engagement, knowledge, and independent study

ASK visitors reported the second highest enjoyment rating—9.21 out of 10—for a BL exhibition [E2]. Story's research [R1–R5, G1, G2, G5, G6] informed the exhibition displays, and *"very unusually, many visitors reported reading all the interpretation on the introductory panels and labels"* (Breay) [E2]. Breay stated that the average visitor dwell time in the exhibition was *"exceptionally long"*: 80% stayed more than 2 hours and 44% of those stayed more than 3 hours (compared with the BL's 2016-2019 exhibition average: of 33% staying more than 2 hours and 7% of those staying more than 3 hours) [E2]. *"We spent well over three hours browsing through the exhibition. We came down from [NW England] just for the exhibition and will be coming again in January."* (Visitor email to BL, 24 October 2018) [E6].

The impact on visitors' knowledge was high, with 44% motivated by 'cultural curiosity' [E2]. 21% researched ASK's topics before visiting, and 53% researched further afterwards [E5]. *"I am in no way a scholar . . . and recently retired from the bakery trade. My visit today was electrifying. Books and documents about which I had read were suddenly there in front of me. Developments about which I had wondered were explained and illustrated"* [E6]. *"I had no idea that the Gospels, Psalms, etc., had been translated into English in the 900s! I thought that was a Reformation thing"* [E5]. Visitors also responded emotionally: *"I'm a bit awestruck, . . . So many important items together in one place at one time was an amazing thing."* *"I was close to tears when I saw the enormity of [Codex Amiatinus]."* *"The tiny . . . personalised objects . . . have a very direct connection to the people. I always imagine who held it, how it was made . . . they speak to you"* [E2].

Breay stated about Story's contribution to ASK: *"[This] was the closest, most creative, supportive and productive academic collaboration I have benefited from, the results of which benefited all visitors to the exhibition and readers of the catalogue"* [E2].



5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[E1]. British Library press release for *Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms: Art, Word, War*.

[E2]. Letter from Claire Breay, Head of Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts, British Library, 20 November 2020; exhibition website; catalogue [R1].

[E3]. British Library press and media summary and compiled press reviews.

- [E4]. "The Future of International Research Collaboration". UK Government Science Minister, 9 October 2019. www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-future-of-international-research-collaboration
- [E5]. Selected visitor Twitter feedback. British Library closing tweet and responses.
- [E6]. Selected emails and letters to the British Library.
- [E7]. British Library ASK exhibition videos.
Golden Age of Northumbria: www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtggJDzibVI
Anglo-Saxon Language and Literature: www.youtube.com/watch?v=tp_RyvRL6g.
Also: [G3]: www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN9gCfoi2U8
- [E8]. ISAS/ISSEME Biennial Publication Prize (2019) for 'Best Research Aid'.
isseme.wordpress.com/history/overview-of-award-winners/