

<b>Institution:</b> University of Plymouth		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA28		
<b>Title of case study:</b> New Technologies and Changing Lives: Histories of the Unexpected		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2006-2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Professor James Daybell	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Prof Early Modern British History	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2006-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p><i>Histories of the Unexpected</i> is a collaboration between Professor James Daybell and TV presenter and historian Dr Sam Willis that has achieved impact in three main ways: 1) stimulating learning from and engagement with history globally, and teaching people how to be historians; 2) stimulating technological and practice innovation in the creative industries through Histories of the Unexpected Ltd; and 3) changing modes of engagement with history in professional practice. The project began in 2016 as a weekly history podcast (featuring on Dan Snow's History Hit Network) that transformed the communication of history into an accessible, fun and creative format (for new and global audiences) with the mission to democratise both historical knowledge and historical practice. The podcast (over 200 episodes) has received over 2.5 million downloads in 193 countries and formed the basis for a 496-page book, a four-volume book series, two live touring stage shows, a homeschooling history series responding to the COVID-19 crisis (250,000 downloads), and an online magazine.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Daybell's published historical research and findings over the past two decades (supported by British Academy, Leverhulme and AHRC-funded research projects) has underpinned and served as the foundation on which <i>Histories of the Unexpected</i> (hereafter, <i>Unexpected</i>) has achieved global reach with non-academic audiences. It is the detailed insights of Daybell's archival research published across his outputs that bring <i>Unexpected</i> to life, were instrumental to developing the concept at the outset, and without which the brand simply would not have worked nor achieved its significant impact. In addition to providing direct content and themes, the methodological approach Daybell has established in his research underpins the entire project.</p> <p>While all of Daybell's research ultimately contributes to the <i>Unexpected</i> content, most notable is his published work in four main areas around which the brand has essentially been built:</p> <p><b>a) early modern letter-writing and archives</b> [3.1-3.3], where his ground-breaking and exhaustive research explored epistolary cultures throughout the early modern period, concentrating on gendered, material and socio-cultural approaches to correspondence, as well as on the ways in which the construction of early modern archives was inflected by issues of gender;</p> <p><b>b) gender and political culture</b> [3.4] which has looked at how political structures throughout early modern Europe were shaped by gender;</p> <p><b>c) material culture</b> [3.5], which has been explored through the manuscripts practices associated with the culture and practice of early modern letters and letter-writing; and</p> <p><b>d) gendered interpretations of museums</b> [3.6] where Daybell's research as PI on an AHRC-funded project 'Gendered Interpretations of The Vasa and V&amp;A Museums' has explored gender as an important interpretative category within the museum environment, exploring objects and their gendered narratives across their lifecycle, and the impact of issues of gender on curatorial practice, as well as educational and public programming.</p> <p>These published outputs provide raw materials for the <i>Unexpected</i> outputs, with dedicated episodes, chapters or stage-play elements on letters, ink, paper, handwriting (in conjunction with British Library exhibition 'Writing: Making Your Mark'), love, the family, spies, and gloves. Daybell's specific findings, such as John Donne's grovelling letters to his father-in-law and the Jesuit priest John Gerard's use of orange juice for secret letters (output 5) bring these to life. There have also been special podcast episodes on the Vasa and V&amp;A collection as part of the AHRC project.</p> <p>Theoretically and methodologically <i>Unexpected</i> is underpinned by the rigorous historical approach Daybell uses in his research, that combines cultural history, object biography, comparative and global history. Daybell's own research has worked at the level of micro-studies meeting a macro-world and this is something that infuses <i>Unexpected</i>, which is interested in the ways in which the</p>		

everyday and mundane can be recovered, and their stories told and interpreted, as well as how they relate to broader historical forces and shifts, and how they connect to well-known events in the past.

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

3.1. James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2006). *A groundbreaking study of early modern women's letters and letter-writing based on exhaustive archival research in archives around the world.*

3.2. James Daybell and Andrew Gordon, eds, *Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern Britain, 1580-1690* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). *Field-defining book by international experts, examining the culture of early modern letter-writing; responsible for concept, structure and editing; co-authored 12k-word introduction; 12k-word contributory chapter.*

3.3. James Daybell and Andrew Gordon, eds, *Women and Epistolary Agency in Early Modern Culture, 1450–1690* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2016). *A key output of a British Academy-Leverhulme funded project with Oxford University and the Bodleian, 'Women's Early Modern Letters Online'; responsible for concept, structure and editing; co-authored 9.5k-word introduction; 11k-word contributory chapter; 8k-word co-authored chapter.*

3.4. James Daybell and Svante Norrhem, eds, *Gender and Political Culture, 1400-1700* (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2016). *A key output of an AHRC-funded international project which looks at how gender shaped political culture in early modern Europe; responsible for concept, structure and editing; co-written 12k-word introduction; 12k-word chapter.*

3.5. James Daybell, *The Material Letter: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012). *This landmark study represents the first major socio-cultural study of manuscript letter-writing practices in early modern England.*

3.6. James Daybell, Kit Heyam, Svante Norrhem and Emma Severinsson, 'Gendering Objects at the V&A and Vasa Museums', *Museum International*, 72 (2020), 106-117. *A key output of an AHRC-funded international project exploring gender as a interpretative category in museums.*

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

#### **1. Stimulating Learning From and Engagement with History**

The achieved mission of *Unexpected* has from the start been to democratise historical knowledge by not only educating people of all ages, but also giving them the tools to become historians themselves, thus promoting history at a time when STEM subjects dominate our schools, and the UK Government's Education minister decries the 'low value' of studying the Humanities (May 2019) [IE9]. In a world of information overload and misinformation, an interest in history and the skills of the historian are of fundamental importance in any modern democratic society. *Unexpected* capitalises on the easily accessible concept that everything has a history and that these histories link together in unexpected ways (from objects to emotions, topics to themes).

Daybell's research translated through the *Unexpected* brand has reached new diverse and global audiences through the podcast (over 200 episodes), book (*Histories of the Unexpected: How Everything Has a History*, 2018), the 30,000-40,000-word series of four books (*The Romans; The Vikings; WWII; and The Tudors*, 2019), two live stage shows (*Histories of the Unexpected Live and Histories of the Unexpected: The Tudors*), a schools outreach programme and a special 30-episode series of homeschooling history podcasts (aimed at KS2-4 while schools were closed during lockdown in 2020), and an *Unexpected Magazine* (<http://historiesoftheunexpected.com>).

The podcast has been downloaded over 2,500,000 times since it launched in 2016, with more than 250,000 downloads of the homeschooling series alone during lockdown in 2020. Over 1.4m downloads are outside of the UK, with listeners in 193 countries around the world (including the Middle and Far East, Africa, Asia and South America) [5.8]. The podcast has featured on iTunes new and innovative podcasts in the UK and US, was the only history podcast to feature at the 2017 London Podcast Festival, was listed as one of the Top 5 History podcasts by *The Evening Standard* (2018) and *Independent* (2019), and one of 7 podcasts listed by BBC Scotland for homeschooling during lockdown [5.8]. In collaboration with the playwright Daniel Jamieson, two of the books were turned into live stage shows performed by Daybell and Willis. These are taking history in popular form via a national tour (produced by Makin Productions) into theatres, churches, community venues, literary and music festivals and heritage sites, as well as schools. Filmed interviews of audience reactions describe it as 'fascinating', 'absolutely brilliant', 'magical', 'imaginative', 'creative, thought-provoking', 'inspirational', 'broad appeal across the ages, bringing

*history to the masses*, with one respondent stating that *'every child in Britain should learn history... and this show helps us realise how important encouraging history is'*; another felt it was *'tremendous in bringing people together and sharing and beginning a love of history'* [5.4].

Methodologically it is the experience of working as a practising professional historian that informs all aspects of *Unexpected*. It is the excitement of archival research, the methods of working, the discoveries and fundamentally how to be a historian that is one of the most infectious by-products of the brand. People love the sense of wonder of archival discovery in the podcasts (including a mini-series on 'How to be a Historian'), one audience member saying *'they bring [history] to life [and] make you feel a part of it'* [5.4]. Dramatising history on stage embeds Daybell's research directly into live shows, as in the case of describing the discovery of a lock of the Duke of Wellington's hair in a family memory box on a research trip to the Bodleian; or John Donne's deferential placement of his signature in the bottom right-hand corner in grovelling letters to his father-in-law. In this manner, the complexities of Daybell's archival research are translated in the form of an accessible new genre of performed history in a way that significantly extends its reach and significance to non-traditional audiences. In reaching new groups as well as teachers and school children, heritage and museum professionals, and history enthusiasts, *Unexpected* has broken down the barriers to those consuming history, helping them approach history in an entirely new way that is fun, dynamic and creative. Paul Ross (Talk Radio) describes it as 'genius', Dan Snow 'History as you've never seen it before', Kerry White (BBC Radio Devon) 'The new Horrible Histories'. The show was performed nationally over 75 times (2017-2020) to more than 10,000 people, plus performances for schools with a cumulative audience of 5000 school children aged 8-18.

The innovative and creative approach to the past pioneered by *Unexpected* has led to curriculum enrichment in schools as well as social inclusion with increased knowledge. Teachers in the UK, Europe and the US (both at primary and secondary level) have benefitted from *Unexpected* through incorporating content and ideas into their practice, enriching the curriculum, facilitating social inclusion among pupils, and engaging and increasing the knowledge, understanding and self-awareness of children normally uninterested in history. Take-up of *Unexpected's* approach to history has both been ad hoc (with teachers, parents and children finding the podcasts, books and shows themselves) as well as planned; *Unexpected* has worked with around 50 schools around the country, through performing shows, leading workshops, and creating schools' events for literary festivals e.g. Beaminster and Wantage. The workshops Daybell has developed and run for primary and secondary schools are based on the *Unexpected* methodology and concept (involving pupils making their own podcasts and animations, and contributing to the *Unexpected Magazine*); the schools programme has facilitated four internships for sixth-formers; and Daybell has also provided several CPD workshops for schoolteachers about embedding the concept of *Unexpected* as a form of curriculum enrichment to engage pupils who struggle with an understanding of history. One outcome of this was a Plymouth school building a curriculum challenge day around the concept [5.5].

Feedback from Headteachers, Heads of History and History teachers attests to the engagement of their pupils, and the social value of their enhanced understanding of the past and their relationship to it. The Headteacher of a Devon school described the podcast-making workshop for KS2 pupils as an invaluable way of engaging pupils with history, building self-confidence and making them think about the world around them in new ways: *'I have never seen a history event more suited for engaging a school audience...'* [5.5]. A Buckinghamshire head wrote *'by challenging misconceptions about the past, making links across time and showing unceasing joy about the subject, Sam and James bring the past alive. I was so impressed at their use of props, humour and poignant details'* [5.5]; another head in the South West remarked *'Their witty and clever linking of concepts and themes across time is a creative and original way of helping children both to understand History but also life...and their place in it. Superb stuff!'* [5.5].

From the perspective of classroom practitioners, the methodology of *Unexpected* has been transformative for curriculum enrichment and engaging with challenging pupils. History is not simply made fun, but rather *Unexpected* delivers a fundamentally new perspective on what history is, and teachers have found ways of translating this into their practice and into the curriculum with an appreciation of the significance of the links between different periods. One teacher comments *'it's...made us reflect more on the nature of physical evidence and the power of 'narrative' history'*. A Dorset-based secondary teacher wrote it *'enriched my teaching, allowing me to use those magic*

*little pockets of history to engage all my students. It's a most wonderful feeling seeing pupils lean in slightly as you discuss how perfumes from the 1800s has been recreated today'* [5.5]. The Lead Practitioner in Humanities and Head of History at Boulder Academy, an inner city London comprehensive school, has found using *Unexpected* invaluable in light of the fact that *'engagement can be a difficulty in history teaching'* from lesson planning, keeping up to date with current historiography to sparking the interests of unmotivated kids who see little direct relevance in history for them. During lockdown the home schooling podcasts were used at the academy as part of homework tasks: *'the kids love them and the questions at the end make them so easy to use as teachers. Thanks so much!'* The invaluable nature of the homeschooling episodes as a resource for teachers during lockdown is remarked upon more widely in the teacher questionnaires [5.5]. International teachers have also been inspired by *Unexpected's* approach to history. A Middle-School teacher based in the American Mid-West uses the concept of finding a history in everything to engage 9-year-olds in her class to excite them about history and understand the world around them. Finally, parents have enthused about their children's reactions to *Unexpected*, with one parent describing it as *'an inspiration to budding historians'*; another that *'the homeschooling episodes were invaluable for my kids during lockdown when schools were closed...accessible, and aligned to the national curriculum'*; while the impact on the imaginations, knowledge and understanding of children of all ages is palpable, with one child describing it as *'loads of fun', another 'they turn learning into fun'* [5.3 & 5.4].

Through *Unexpected*, Daybell's research has reached a genuinely global audience touching the lives of thousands of people. Listening to the series has for many become part of daily routines, a listener in Kuwait writing it had *'become an important part'* of the morning school run, another from Auckland, New Zealand described it as *'informative and entertaining'*, while listeners in the USA described it as *'fun and interesting'*, and *'a fantastic way to teach history'*, experiences reflecting hundreds of interactions with end users on social media [5.7]. The brand has impacted on people in deeply personal ways, and in its most pronounced form encourages social inclusion, well-being, mental activity and positive sense of purpose. One re-enactor and museum guide described her own personal journey of self-discovery after listening to the podcast: *'I often found that - while hand-sewing costumes for events - I was inspired to research the history of the fabric or tools I was using, or the article of clothing I was making. In doing so I finally gained the confidence to get fully involved at the events. In turn this led to me having the confidence to volunteer as a guide at the museum where I now lead a team of fellow volunteers, who I have inspired to do their own research into some of the more random artefacts'* [5.7].

## **2. Technological Innovation and Stimulating Practice in the Creative Industries**

**i. Dan Snow's History Hit Network and Democratising History.** As a founding collaborator of the History Hit network established by TV historian Dan Snow, Daybell (with TV presenter and historian Sam Willis) developed the Histories of the *Unexpected* podcast brand as a way of using digital technologies to provide an alternative media platform outside of traditional broadcasters to popularise and democratise history for new audiences traditionally uninterested in history. Working with the financial support and institutional backing of History Hit, Daybell recorded over 200 podcasts, which are widely available across all providers, supported by ACAST, the largest global podcast company (<https://play.acast.com/s/historiesofoftheunexpected>).

Daybell's research translated through the medium of podcasts helped to establish the History Hit network, as part of Dan Snow's mission to develop a ground-breaking way of communicating history. In working with *Unexpected* to break down the barriers of broadcasting and publishing and *'reach an audience, unimaginable a few years ago'*, Dan Snow writes, *'with listens...in the millions'*, *Unexpected* has *'introduced listeners all over the world to rich and complex histories'*, describing it as *'a case study in how intellectuals can seize upon the giant changes in how we are living, interacting, learning and listening to share their work more widely than ever before'* [5.1]. The ability of *Unexpected* to reach new audiences through its innovation is noted by the Content Director of BBC History Magazine and BBC History Festivals, who considered that *Unexpected* is *'innovative and engaging, reaching out to both the traditional historical audience, who appreciate the fresh direction, and the non-traditional audience, who find something surprising and original in the Unexpected series'* [5.2]. It is the combination of podcasting technology and an unexpected approach of translation that brought the practice of historians to new audiences.

**ii. Enhancing Creative Practice within SMEs and practitioners.** From 2016 to 2020, the translation of Daybell's research on letters, gender and archives using digital, print, visual and

stage technologies has involved collaboration with over 200 SMEs and practitioners working in the creative industries. These include presenters, playwrights, producers, editors, festival and event organisers, agents, publishers, translators, tour bookers, theatre directors, technicians, web designers, animators, sound engineers, film-makers and PR companies who benefitted creatively and financially from the collaboration with *Unexpected* to develop innovative historical genres and formats. Through these coproductions, *Unexpected* has produced over 200 podcasts; a trade press book *Histories of the Unexpected* (2018; audio book 2019; currently translated into Italian, Dutch, Chinese, Brazilian and German); and book series based on the concept.

The award-winning playwright Daniel Jamieson was commissioned to collaborate with Daybell to transfer the *Unexpected* books to the stage. He described that the creative process of working with Daybell made him rethink how he approached his craft of writing and engagement with history to make complex manuscript practices employed in early modern correspondence visually compelling for theatre audiences of non-specialists. *'What we have achieved in developing the stage show is nothing less than a new genre for the stage – effectively an interactive historical show that brings history to life on stage. This is something that has never been attempted before with history'* [5.3]. A former BBC producer who has established his own independent filmmaking company found that working with *Unexpected* helped him develop his craft. The work allowed him to gain experience filming live audiences, which has benefited him financially, by giving him *'the opportunity to broaden my subject matter and add to both my skills and experience.... It has helped me gain additional work locally, enabling me to build my business'* [5.3].

### **3. Changing Modes of Engagement with History in Professional Practice.**

A third aspect of impact is the transformation of working practices of museum and heritage professionals, whose curation practice now draws on the *Unexpected* method of 'linking' histories as a way of engaging visitors with their collections, attracting new audiences. This was achieved through working with five museums and heritage sites (the V&A, Vasa Museum in Stockholm, Powderham Castle, the British Library, and Beaminster Museum). Each has collaborated with *Unexpected* as a media channel for engaging people with their sites and collections. As collaborators in an AHRC-funded research project 'Gendered Interpretations of Museums', Sweden's flagship Vasa Museum (with 1.5 million visitors annually) worked with Daybell and *Unexpected* to produce a podcast on the project's research findings that gender is an important interpretative category at the Vasa and in museum environments more generally. Through the podcast that resulted, the gendered narratives of the seventeenth-century Vasa ship and its objects were communicated in English to a global audience of 15,000 people. The Vasa's Director of Research writes that this 'enabled the museum to facilitate new knowledge and understanding of its collections and gendered heritage to international audiences outside of Sweden' in a way that was unimaginable through their own limited use of podcasts [O6, 5.6].

*Unexpected* achieved further global reach to transform the working practices of museum and heritage professionals in an organic manner, since curators worldwide listen to the podcast and are influenced by its methodologies. One museum curator wrote that *'working in a sector that is always challenged to diversify its audiences and in a military museum especially I have been inspired [by Unexpected] to look beyond the traditional fixed narratives and to find an exciting and fresher interpretation of our history that a wider public can...relate to in today's world...'*; another wrote *'it constantly has me thinking about my own role in the sector working front of house and from a curating perspective about connections that can be made.'* [5.6].

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

- 5.1. Testimonial from Dan Snow at History Hit TV.
- 5.2. Testimonials from Dr David Musgrove, Content Director, BBC History
- 5.3. Testimonials from Creative Industry Practitioners.
- 5.4. Transcripts of video testimonials of audience members of the live shows.
- 5.5. Report based on questionnaires, Headteacher and teacher testimonials, and pupil feedback
- 5.6. Testimonial from Fredrick Svanberg, Head of Cultural Heritage Unit, Vasa Museum
- 5.7. Report on Social Media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
- 5.8. Report on Podcasts, Books, live shows and website: [www.historiesoftheunexpected.com](http://www.historiesoftheunexpected.com)
- 5.9. James Daybell, 'The Future of Early Modern Studies: Embracing the Impact and Public Engagement Agenda', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 1,1 (2019), 351-360.