Section A

Institution: University of St Andrews

Unit of Assessment: UoA 28: History

Title of case study: Promoting mental health through the lessons of history

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000 - 2014

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:**
Robert Allan Houston	Professor	01 September 1983 - 30 September 2020

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 - September 2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

Section B

1. Summary of the impact

Mental illness is common and the most rapidly growing diagnosis globally. The research by Professor Houston at the University of St Andrews uncovered its diverse histories and made them accessible to both specialist and general audiences using multiple media. It focused on ordinary individuals and communities, not institutions and sciences, encouraging empathy through imaginative engagement. Socially inclusive, the research de-mystified, de-mythologised, and de-stigmatized mental ill-health for multiple constituencies outside academia. Through free resources developed from the research, the project has enabled healthcare professionals, educators, and policy makers to plan, manage, and deliver treatment, care, and education more effectively and empathically in both the developed and developing world. The project has changed public perceptions of how understandings of mental disorder have developed over time, and of transformations in medical and social care. It has influenced thousands of people worldwide, directly and indirectly, in all walks of life.

2. Underpinning research

The social history of disability, and especially mental ill-health, has only developed very recently. A late extension of the trend begun in the 1960s, which studied ordinary people and their lives, rather than élites and institutions. By unpicking abnormal minds, it has given original insights into what was regarded as 'normal' in different eras and societies. Houston has been a leader in the field since the 1990s, highly regarded among both historians and the caring professions. He recognised that perceptions of modern mental health and healthcare are uniquely shaped by understandings (and misunderstandings) of the past. Non-academic audiences often have outdated views, loaded with preconceptions about continuity, change, tradition, and progress. All struggle to locate their picture of the past in evidence of the lived experience of sufferers and carers in specific locations and periods. The research met this challenge by examining underused sources in novel ways; charting complex and changing attitudes to mental disorders of all kinds; adopting a comparative and interdisciplinary approach which revealed significant regional variations in experience within the UK; and treating historic ideas and practices in a non-judgmental way. It helped a wide audience see recurrences as well as divergences, continuity as well as change, similarities as well as differences, roots as well as routes; above all, the social, cultural, and political context in which mental medicine has always operated.

Houston provided a balanced, in-depth, and historically accurate analysis of how mental disorders were understood and treated in Britain since 1500 (R1, R2, R3). Though we all live with the consequences of past health policies, the lessons he offered are not simply examples of what to emulate or avoid. R6 showed that there are few psychiatric understandings and practices that have not been round at least once before in history. We should not romanticise the

past, nor see it as all bad. Rather, we find that it offers valuable lessons about modern suffering and healing. For much of the historic past provision was private and resources scarce, similar to modern developing countries. Scientific and medical developments occurred slowly, but they were just as contingent on the broader social context as they are today (R4, R5). The medical landscape was plural, encompassing biomedicine, traditional healing, and spiritual remedies, again similar to modern developing countries. Perceptions of health and illness were holistic and individualised, an emphasis which is rapidly gaining ground in modern psychiatry. Yet the interests of family and community took precedence over the rights of individuals, establishing a clear difference with the developed West today.

Clinicians and public alike debate changes in epidemiology. Is the explosion of conditions such as autism the result of changing incidences or reporting? R2 argued strongly that changing perceptions and awareness were the main reasons for the upsurge in diagnoses. Suicide has been ubiquitous in human populations, but attitudes towards it varied over time and space, even within the British Isles (R3). Understanding those attitudes opens up present-day preconceptions and allows for more realistic and sympathetic approaches. Until c. 1850, family and community provided most care for the mentally disordered – as they have done since the 1980s (R1). Houston showed how the changing balance between public and private provision over the last 500 years highlights the spectrum of possibilities for care in different economic, legislative, and cultural environments. Finally, since the 1980s, law seems to have come to define modern psychiatry. Yet Houston used primarily legal documents in his research and thus sheds light on the law's enduring significance for both forensic and general psychiatry (R1, R6).

3. References to the research

All publications are peer-reviewed and solely authored by R. A. Houston unless co-author is stated. R1-R3 are books recognised by reviews as landmark research on the subject; R4-R6 are highly cited articles. R3 and R5 are submitted to REF 2014 and REF2021, respectively.

R1. Madness and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland. Oxford University Press, 2000. ISBN -13: 9780198207870. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198207870.001.0001.

R2. (and Uta Frith), Autism in History. The Case of Hugh Blair of Borgue. Blackwell, 2000. ISBN 9780631220886 hb, 9780631220893 pb.

R3. Punishing the Dead? Suicide, Lordship and Community in Britain, 1500-1830. Oxford University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-19-958642-4.

R4. 'The face of madness in eighteenth-century Scotland', Eighteenth-Century Life 27, 2 (May 2003), 49-66. DOI: 10.1215/00982601-27-2-49.

R5. 'A latent historiography? The case of psychiatry in Britain (1500-1820)', The Historical Journal 57, 1 (2014), 289-310. DOI: 10.1017/S0018246X1300054X

R6. 'Poor relief and the dangerous and criminal insane in Scotland, c.1740-1840', Journal of Social History 40, 2 (Winter 2006), 453-76. DOI: 10.1353/jsh.2007.0017.
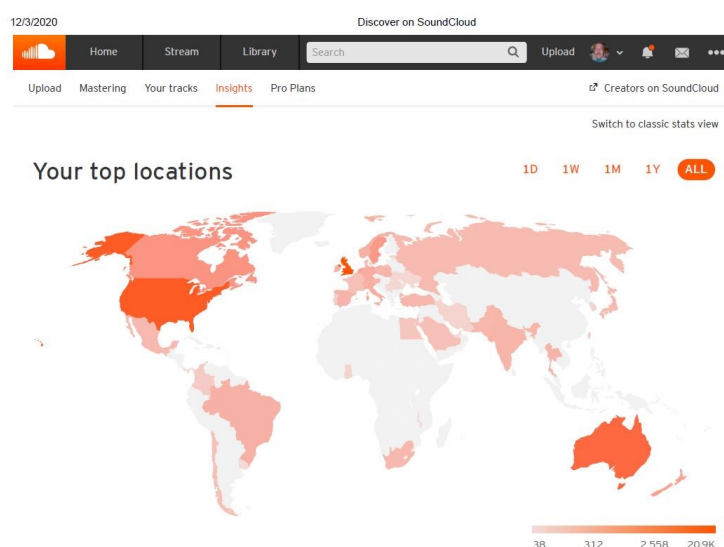
4. Details of the impact

Since 2014, Houston has reworked all underpinning research in section 3 about mental health and its history into accessible resources for non-academic audiences using: a website (https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/psychhist); 86 podcasts; 2 distinct public photo exhibitions shown in Dundee, Edinburgh, Bristol, and elsewhere; invited talks to the general public, psychiatrists, and learners in prisons; and social media (@HistPsychiatry). By making mental health history accessible in myriad ways to differing audiences and by providing training materials free at the point of delivery, the research has increased mental health awareness, informed changes to policies, and improved service delivery among multiple non-academic constituencies in the UK and abroad.

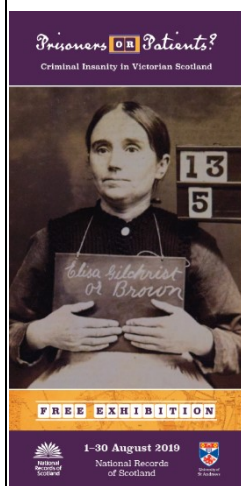**Making mental health history accessible to all:**

Houston initially used **podcasts** to showcase his research (R1-7) to a wide global audience between July 2016 and December 2020. Series 1: 44 episodes on the history of psychiatry

between 1500 and 2000, seen from the viewpoint of both carers and sufferers. Series 2: 23 episodes using extracts from the autograph writings of those with mental problems or from their reported speech, between 1600 and 1900, to explore topics such as autism, depression, stalking. Series 2.1: commissioned 4-part mini-series on colonial psychiatry in Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa. Series 3: 15 hour-long interviews with medical professionals and researchers. [S1]

The podcasts created growing interest, drew feedback, established contacts, and generated new ideas for outreach. Google stats show the website had over 24,000-page views by more than 9,000 unique visitors between July 2016 (when it was created) and December 2020. The podcasts have had over 67,800 plays on SoundCloud (30% in UK, 25% in USA, 17% in Australia). The Twitter account has over 1,200 lively followers (December 2020), giving a maximum impression rate of over 780,000 (April 2019). [S2] The map shows the global reach of Professor Houston's podcast series, tracked by SoundCloud:

'Face to Face: Stories from the Asylum', for which Houston provided the research (R4), was a **public photo exhibition** of Victorian lunatic asylum patients (between March 2018 and June 2018) at the University of Dundee and in collaboration with University of Dundee Archives. The exhibit attracted approximately 8,000 people (visitors) and increased mental health awareness (see details of feedback below). The exhibition also helped draw people into unfamiliar spaces, widening access: one visitor to the exhibition said in conversation that she had lived all her life in Dundee, and this was the first time she had ever set foot on university property. The success of the exhibition led to 8 talks to community groups in IMD areas and at Science Festivals, and to invitations to exhibit at the Scottish Parliament in September 2018 and Glenside Hospital Museum, Bristol, between February 2019 and May 2019.

A **second photo exhibition**, a collaboration instigated by National Records of Scotland (NRS), built on 'Face to Face' and drew on (R5) to create 'Prisoners or patients? Criminal insanity in Victorian Scotland' (August 2019). The NRS invested GBP10,000 in the exhibition and employed PGRs, designers, archivists, and performing arts students in preparation and delivery. As part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, it attracted approximately 2,000 people (visitors) (see details of feedback below). The Chief Executive of NRS wrote that the partnership with Houston *was "invaluable ... we were able to produce an accessible exhibition that introduced our archives to the broader public, and to the subject of the prison system and mental health"*. [S3] The exhibition has since displayed at: 5 Scottish prisons, as part of health education and training in creative writing; 2 secure psychiatric hospitals; a forensic psychiatry conference. It is now available online with an accompanying lecture by Houston.

Press, TV, radio coverage of the two photo exhibitions reached approximately 14,000,000 people in total: e.g. BBC Reporting Scotland (1/8/19; 300,000 per day across the UK) [S4], STV News at Six (1/8/19; 300,000 per day across the UK), Daily Mail (1/8/19; 1,200,000 print; 12,000,000 online), The Scotsman (1/8/19; 16,000 print; 180,000 online).

Providing training materials and changing service delivery, especially in Scottish prisons and in the 'Scotland Malawi Mental Health Project':

All the podcasts have been used (1) to **educate health practitioners and the public across the UK, and parts of Europe, N. America and Africa**, and (2) for **continuing professional development:** e.g. British Association of Social Workers (20,000 people [members]); RCPsych UK (14,000 people [members]); NHS Health Improvement Scotland (160,000 people [members]); Gloucester NHS Trust (8,000 people [members]). Resources have been used by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) / Fife College (FC) in **Scottish prisoner education**. The incidence of mental disorders is 4 to 5 times higher among prisoners, than the general population. In June 2019, after further invitations to prisons, SPS asked Houston to join a working party to produce a set of guidelines for academics in prisons.

Houston's research, in podcast form, has also been used to improve **training of indigenous psychiatrists in a low-resource, under-medicalised developing country**, under the umbrella of the Scottish Government's 'Scotland Malawi Mental Health Project'. A Scottish psychiatrist seconded to Malawi heard Houston's podcasts and asked (1) for a CD with them all to use in the College of Medicine and (2) for a special mini-series that contextualised colonial psychiatry in the wider history of psychiatry. These have now been included in the College's teaching programme as a more permanent fixture and are used by the entire annual cohort of indigenous medical students doing the elective in psychiatry. The Scottish psychiatrist stated that: "*The collaboration with Professor Houston has enhanced the training of psychiatrists in Malawi … The inclusion of the history of psychiatry podcasts within the teaching programme encourages the trainees to think critically about how modern mental health care practice developed into its current form … [T]he resources developed by Houston will remain a part of the training of Malawi's psychiatrists over the coming decade*" (2 Nov. 2017). [S5]

Increasing mental health awareness and contributing to the well-being of offenders and the public:

Quantitative and qualitative feedback from the photo exhibitions and from lectures testifies to the extent to which they have changed understandings of mental disorders in the past and in the present (see above). On average, people reported that attending these events had significantly changed their understanding of mental disorders in the past and, to a slightly lesser extent, in the present day (examples drawn from 3 events with 262 feedback forms). [S6]

Examples of comments on feedback cards at the Dundee Archives exhibition included: "*moved me +/- [more or less] to tears*"; "*very interesting [I] work in mental health today and [it] was very good to be able to see what mental health was like in the past*"; "*so many parallels between past & present re poverty, L[earning] D[isabilities] & connections with physical wellbeing*". Highlights of visitor feedback at NRS included: "*It put a human face on the "prisoner-patients". Makes us stop and reconsider how we deal with mental health today*"; "*the recorded voices were excellent, poignant and touching*"; "*a sad but vital exhibition*". Feedback from the Bristol exhibition included: "*This greatly enriched my own practice as a CPN [Community Psychiatric Nurse]*". [S6, selected quotes]

Houston's engagement with prison inmates and staff has been a distinctive aspect of his project. SPS Area Manager, West, wrote: "*Our learners were moved and touched by the poignant stories of past sufferers … the photos made them think and consider mental health, in the past and present day and how society has changed its attitude towards the treatment of those with mental illness*" (5 June 2019) [S7]. Feedback from prison inmates included: "*not something I've ever really thought about until now*"; "*made me think about mental health and that we are better off now*"; "*good: quite sad, the faces of the people look broken*" (HMP Low Moss, 31 Aug. 2018); "*starting to learn just how much mental health has changed over the years with the topic now much less taboo*"; "*I think as human we all have mental health problem but it's different level for*

each of us. Some people are on hi[gh] level of it who become siruse cereminal [serious criminals] like sirial kilers [serial killers]. But some of us are low level who are just [a]ggressive … Problem is most of the people don't know this and most of them are thinking they are OK" (HMP Barlinnie, 8 May 2018); "*I'd like to find out more about how science has changed and what we used to think was right but isn't anymore*" (HM YOI Polmont, 22/10/2018). [S6]

<u>Influencing approaches to mental health by institutionalising historical thinking among businesses and by raising awareness of amongst policy makers:</u>

A private showing of 'Face to Face' in the entrance hall of a major financial services company in Edinburgh was visited by approximately 1,000 people (employees) during March 2017. A senior manager commented: "*Houston's humane approach got staff talking to each other more freely about mental health issues and about employers' approaches to fostering improvements in this area of their working lives. As a result, management was able to 'tune' our mental health policies, to be more sensitive, open, and positive.*" [S8]

Having listened to Houston's podcast series and used it in staff training, the University Secretary and Compliance Officer at the University of Strathclyde wrote: "*I am responsible for ensuring the safety, health and wellbeing of over 23,000 [people] students and 3,500 [people] staff … The series has had a significant effect on our Student Mental Health Action Plan and our Workplace Mental Health Action Plan for staff. It has broadened our understanding and informed our thinking and planning.*" [S9]

Scottish Parliament invited Houston to display 'Face to Face' in the Members' area (September 2018), where it raised awareness of mental health amongst policy makers. One MSP stated: "*thoroughly worthwhile … an important reminder about the past and a pointer to the future*". Another MSP, Minister for Mental Health, said: "*I found the exhibition fascinating, as did my staff. It certainly started some interesting conversations about how far we have come in terms of understanding mental illness and how it is treated.*'" [S10]

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

S1: Date-stamped PDF of website showing podcasts: [Podcast series – History of Psychiatry (st-andrews.ac.uk)](#)

S2: Statistics on use of website, podcasts and Twitter.

S3: Letter from Chief Executive, National Records of Scotland (13/12/2019)

S4: BBC News, 1 August 2019: 'Criminally insane: Perth's Victorian 'lunatic' prison': https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-scotland-49199895

S5: Email from Consultant Visiting Psychiatrist, College of Medicine, University of Malawi (2 November 2017)

S6: Exhibition feedback, 'Face to Face' and 'Prisoners or Patients'.

S7: Email from Area Manager, West, Learning and Skills (SPS) (5 June 2018)

S8: Letter from Global Head of Stewardship and ESG Investment, at a major financial services company (31 June 2017) CONFIDENTIAL

S9: Letter from University Secretary and Compliance Officer (September 2020) CONFIDENTIAL

S10: Email from MSP (1 October 2018)