

<b>Institution:</b> Oxford Brookes University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA33, Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Sound Diaries: Recording Everyday Life in Sound		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2009–2018		
<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 Whitty	Professor	[text removed for publication]
Felicity Ford	PhD Student & Postdoctoral Research Assistant & Early Career Fellow	
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2013–2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Developed since 2008 by Felicity Ford and Paul Whitty of Oxford Brookes University's Sonic Art Research Unit (SARU), <i>Sound Diaries</i> is an innovative field recording project, documenting everyday life in sound. Exploring the cultural and communal significance of sounds, <i>Sound Diaries</i> forms a research basis for creative projects both locally and internationally. It has had significant impact on a range of beneficiaries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>artists:</b> in the production of new cultural artefacts and innovative creative practices in field recording and audio documentation;</li> <li>• <b>audiences:</b> through the development of novel connections between field recording practices and a variety of sounding contexts and communities that include grassroots football, our everyday domestic lives, wool production and knitting;</li> <li>• <b>museum and arts professionals:</b> through enhancements to cultural and community heritage, particularly with regard to the interpretation of museum exhibitions including contributions to public events at Tate Modern, Shetland Wool Week and the Charles Dickens Museum.</li> </ul>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>The innovative and prescient field recording project <i>Sound Diaries</i> (<a href="http://www.sound-diaries.co.uk">www.sound-diaries.co.uk</a> from 2008) (R1) documents everyday life in sound, aiming from its inception to resist the overwhelming tide of visual images of the everyday and meet it with soundings of our daily lives, including vending machines, luggage carousels, toasters, knitting, escalators, boilers, rural football, garden sheds and wheeled luggage. <i>Sound Diaries</i> developed as a collaborative online venture designed to disseminate strategies and research methodologies for recording everyday life in sound and investigating the contexts and locations in which those everyday sounds exist. The aim was to engage the public in discourses relating to the audio documentation of the everyday and to provide a platform for artists through symposia and open calls.</p> <p><i>Sound Diaries</i> was founded by Professor Paul Whitty and Dr Felicity Ford. Whitty has been employed by Oxford Brookes University since January 2003 as a Senior Lecturer (2003–2007), Reader (2007–2012) and Professor (2012–present) in the School of Arts, whilst Ford took on her post as an Early Career Researcher with the SARU in May 2013 following completion of her doctoral studies at the University (2007–2011) and contribution to various research projects (2011–2013).</p> <p>Field recordings considered characteristic of everyday sounding life in 2011 were archived and</p>		

submitted to the online *UK Soundmap* created by the British Library and formed the basis of a themed session at *Making Sound Objects: Cultures of Hearing, Recording, Creating and Circulation*, the British Forum for Ethnomusicology's Day Conference in association with the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (2012) (R2). Whitty and Ford led a panel examining the notion of a sonic time capsule:

- Auditory archaeology: object, text and place as Sonic Time Capsule (Whitty) (R2.1)
- Virtual sound museums: digital phonographic archives as Sonic Time Capsules (Ford) (R2.2)

Ford's paper examined how digitally curating and archiving field-recordings might inform the physical production of a sonic time capsule, while Whitty's paper explored relationships between objects, texts and places and how the objects we encounter in our everyday lives – if we listen to their auditory past – can become sonic time capsules hidden in plain sight.

These papers drew together the research findings from the *Sound Diaries* project (2008–2012) and proposed methodologies for the development of further context-specific field recording and phonographic projects including:

- The sound installation and field recording archive *Hûrd* (Ford 2011–2012) physically embeds the voices of the producers of wool, the atmospheres and weather of the places where wool is grown, and the specific sonic texture of British sheep in an installed array of thirty-two miniature loud-speakers covered in British hand-knitted yarn. Through sounds and materials, the work unites sheep farms and shepherds with a finished woollen product. *Hûrd* was commissioned by the British Wool Marketing Board and Rheged for their *Wonder of Wool* exhibition, and was described by Bridget Kelly from the Wool Marketing Board as being 'like listening to wool'. Furthermore, this research activity underpinned the 'cultural exchange' theme of a British Council and MoKS (Mooste K lalisStuudio) funded residency in Estonia undertaken by Ford (2012) and provided an invaluable online platform for Ford's sonic investigations concerning relationships between the UK and Estonian woollen industries. (R3)
- *Get Rid!* (Whitty 2016-2018) investigates the ephemeral everyday sounding cultures of grassroots football, documenting experiences of grassroots football in the Aylesbury and District, North Berks, Oxfordshire Senior and Westmorland Association Football Leagues amongst others. An archive of field recordings; transcriptions of verbal exchanges between players, coaches and spectators; and a series of reflective texts form the principal modes of investigation. The project formed the basis of *Get Some Chalk On Your Boots!* (2018). (R4)

### 3. References to the research

R1. *Sound Diaries* website: <http://www.sound-diaries.co.uk/>

R2. *Making Sound Objects* (British Forum for Ethnomusicology's Day Conference, 2012)

R2.1 Paul Whitty [Auditory archaeology: object, text and place as Sonic Time Capsule](#)

R2.2 Felicity Ford [Virtual sound museums: digital phonographic archives as Sonic Time Capsules](#)

R3. *H rd* (Ford, from 2011) Archive of field recordings and research blog:

<http://www.sound-diaries.co.uk/previous-sound-diaries-projects/2012-3/listening-to-wool-hurd/>

R4. *Get Rid!* (Whitty, from 2016) Archive of field recordings and research blog:

<http://www.sound-diaries.co.uk/category/grassroots/getrid/>

**Evidence of quality:** *H rd* (Ford) attracted commissions and development grants for creative practice from Oxford Contemporary Music (OCM), UK and MoKS Centre for Art and Social Practice, Estonia. Reviews of associated projects in printed media (*The Wire*; *When Saturday Comes*); and features on broadcast media including BBC Sounds and BBC Radio 4. *Sound Diaries* was returned as an impact case study to REF2014.

#### 4. Details of the impact

*Sound Diaries* has initiated a unique creative context in which artists, museum professionals, producers and a wider audience can engage with the practice of recording everyday life in sound, enhancing their understanding and appreciation of diverse contexts and their own sounding lives. *Sound Diaries* has considerable reach, including an international subscription base for its online repository ([sound-dairies.co.uk](http://sound-dairies.co.uk)) of 3,402 individuals (at 26.02.2021) and impressive page visitor figures for work of this type (29,409 August 2013–January 2021). Its various field recordings and sounding practices have reached diverse audiences in the UK and beyond.

##### **Enabling artists to create new artefacts and develop their practice and career**

Artists investigating the sound of everyday life, audio documentation and related sound art practices are among the key beneficiaries of the methodologies instigated by Ford and Whitty, including artists who responded to the *Sound Diaries* Open Call (**S1**) to develop projects that engage with the documentation of everyday sound. The Open Call attracted 2525 page views on [sound-dairies.co.uk](http://sound-dairies.co.uk) (February 2019); there were 187 applicants; and the international reach of those applicants was represented by the 12 selected artists based in Canada, England, Ireland, Mexico, Spain, Sweden, and the United States from a variety of career stages.

Artist participants in the Open Call have noted the impact of engaging with *Sound Diaries* on their access to new networks, career development and the opportunity to expand their practice (**S2**). For example, Kathryn Tovey states that it *'helped distribute my work across platforms and audiences that were otherwise unreachable at the time ... the project helped develop multiple areas of my practice as well as a support for technical and theoretical development of my sound explorations. Making new connections with artists and researchers has ... been hugely beneficial'*. James Green notes that the project enabled him to secure new collaborations, such as working with *Audible OKR* on a project looking at the sounds of Old Kent Road and working with Aberdeen Art Gallery. *'Without completing the Sound Diaries project I wouldn't have vital skills and practice in my process of gathering, processing and displaying the field recordings that were essential for these projects'*. For experienced Mexican artist Lucia Hinojosa Gaxiola the research provided a change of perspective and relationship with the everyday. The Open Call by *Sound Diaries* *'has been a vehicle for a more expansive dialogue in my artistic research and practice, and I've felt that finally someone is listening. It has been such an important catalyst for my creative growth, the sense of freedom and interdisciplinary interaction that this platform provides, the dynamic intellectual openness'*.

The exhibition, conference and series of publications [Get Some Chalk On Your Boots!](#) curated by Whitty drew on the *Sound Diaries* project *Get Rid!* that investigated sounding cultures of grassroots football (**S3**). The attentive listening to the everyday developed by Whitty in the underpinning research led directly to this creative curatorial outcome. The unique intersection of football culture and sound art instigated by the project had a significant impact on the practice of the participating artists. For example, Italian artist Davide Tidoni who created four new works for the exhibition said: *'my participation in Get Some Chalk On Your Boots! has significantly contributed to the expansion of my work towards the fields of ethnography, oral history, and the history of countercultures and social movements. This is one of the most interesting results I've achieved in the last years as it puts my research in close contact with social sciences, art and politics, and archival practices.'* *Get Some Chalk On Your Boots!* artist Duncan Whitley's archive of chants and sound from the erstwhile home of Coventry City FC - Highfield Road (<https://www.thisishighfieldroad.net/>) offers a tool for the playful exploration of the language of football crowd sound, reflecting broadly on the connections between sound, place and identity. It was commissioned for the exhibition, providing creative development for Whitley *'...bringing new curatorial skills into my artistic practice'* (**S4**).

*Sound Diaries* has had a significant impact on the creative practice and career of Ford (**S5**). *Hürd*, a project investigating the sounding cultures of wool and knitting, had a transformative effect on her career. It led to creative engagement with Shetland Wool Week (SWW) who she has collaborated with regularly since August 2013, through workshops and events that include the regular *Quotidian Colourwork* workshops drawing directly on Ford's work with the everyday. One of the outcomes of the relationship with SWW was the film *Shetland oo* developed with Kate Davies of KDD & Co., an award winning Publishing and Design Company

(<https://kddandco.com/tag/shetland-oo/>).

Building on her interests in knitting and everyday sound Ford has found a new audience in her publications exploring *Stranded Colourwork*, also known as Fair Isle knitting – a technique for working two or more colours into the same row. The *Stranded Colourwork Sourcebook* (2014 – c.7,300 sales GBP138,627) and *Stranded Colourwork Playbook* (2018 – c.2,600 sales GBP51,974) (**S6**) resulted from this exploration. Making the connection with *Sound Diaries* she states: ‘...it’s something about paying attention. All of the stranded colourwork is about really looking very closely at these everyday things and then pulling out tiny details from them and repeating them with fabric. I don’t think I would have come to a place where I was so interested in everyday things if I hadn’t been working with sound in the same way...’ (**S5**). Ford founded the creative enterprise Knitsonik - <https://www.knitsonik.com/> (4,517 subscribers at 04.03.2021) connecting her work with everyday sound and knitting and providing a platform for the development of podcasts, sound projects and publications. Following a recent talk at Vogue Knitting Live, *Celebrating Daily Life in Sounds and Stranded Colorwork*, one of the participants remarked that ‘Dr. Ford’s presentation about her innovative work was interesting and informative. Going forward I will listen to the sounds around me in an entirely new way.’

### **Introducing the practice of listening to everyday sounds in daily life to a wider audience and changing their understanding**

*Get Some Chalk On Your Boots!* created an unexpected connection between sound art practice, field recording, audio documentation of the everyday and the sounding cultures of football – creating a hybrid audience by connecting football studies and experimental sound art. Evidence of this impact is demonstrated by the reviews of the exhibition in the only remaining national football magazine *When Saturday Comes* (WSC) (circulation 20,151); and of the project publications in the leading international experimental sound and music magazine *The Wire: Adventures in Modern Music* (circulation 16,000) (**S7**). In WSC, writer and Assistant Editor Ffion Thomas notes that *Get Some Chalk On Your Boots!*: ‘...will resonate with anyone who has ever acknowledged or appreciated the sonic and spatial rituals of football’s presence in a community’. WSC subsequently invited Whitty to write about the everyday sound of football during the pandemic, building on the *Sound Diaries* project *Behind Closed Doors* (WSC 401: September 2020). This is the first article published in WSC that focuses specifically on the sounding aspects of the game. Commenting on the current situation with football being played behind closed doors and drawing on the practices showcased in the exhibition Ffion Thomas notes that ‘...when full stadiums are back I think the noise will be something that really affects people after not being in a crowd for so long. I was thinking about the Highfield Road project in relation to that a few months ago actually, and have already decided that the first time back in my season ticket seat I’m going to take my dictaphone with me and leave it recording throughout the game to see what I can capture!’

The *Sound Diaries* project *Get Rid!* (Whitty) is the only research project investigating the sounding culture of grassroots football and charts an innovative course between field recording and social documentation. As a curious and seemingly obscure cultural obsession the project generated interest from writer and producer James Ward whose interest in the quotidian led to him instigating *The Boring Conference* at which *Sound Diaries* discussed the sound of Vending Machines in 2011 and more recently *The Boring Talks* a series of weekly podcasts on BBC Sounds. Whitty was invited to write and present Episode #34 *Sounds of Grassroots Football* (21.01.2019) (**S8**). The research as presented in the podcast had an impact on the thinking of event producer Rahul Keerthi who was planning a festival of football culture *Jumpers for Goalposts* (August 2019: Printworks, London: attendance 3,700) and on hearing the podcast immediately decided that the sounds of grassroots football were a missing element in the festival. Keerthi commissioned (GBP3,500) a sound installation in collaboration with Tate - *Take it to the Corner* - exhibited at *Jumpers for Goalposts* and the Tate Exchange project *Who Are Ya? Exploring Art, Identity and Football* (Tate Modern August 2019).

In her appearance on Woman’s Hour (BBC Radio 4 *The Listener Chain: Sonic Knitter Felicity Ford* 12.07.2016) Ford connects the audience for sound art with the audience for knitting (**S9**). Kate Davies of KDD & Co who collaborated with Ford on the film *Shetland oo* attests to ‘the significance and public impact of Dr Felicity Ford’s wonderful work in the fields of sound, textiles, and material culture’. In relation to *Shetland oo*, Ford’s field recordings of the sounds of Shetland

wool 'lent vivid sonic texture to the project, making the landscape of Shetland, and its important local wool industry, feel immediately tangible, alive and accessible to a wide and diverse global audience - many of whom were later inspired to visit the Shetland islands, and discover this unique landscape for themselves'. Shetland oo was recognised for its significance in 2018 by EEF / Make UK (the UK national body promoting industry and manufacturing), and shortlisted for its annual prize.

In the regular feature *Books that Made Me*, author Sarah Moss cites Ford's *Stranded Colourwork Sourcebook* (2014) as a 'sermon against despair as well as a book about knitting' (*The Guardian* 13.07.2019). This publication and the *Stranded Colourwork Playbook* have had a significant impact on knitters serving to energise the field of stranded colourwork. 'It's a fabulously expansive attitude towards a knitting technique that can often feel artificially constrained by traditions that were never set in stone anyway' says Daniel Kay in the knitting blog ysolda.com.

### **Enabling Museums and Arts professionals to develop projects that embed the impact that sound has in our understanding of our daily lives and the daily lives of historical figures**

Ford and Whitty have developed projects with the Charles Dickens Museum and The Wordsworth Museum respectively, both of which introduce the daily sounding life of historical figures. Ford's project [Hearing Catherine: The Artist's View](#) was commissioned by the Charles Dickens Museum and gave presence and audibility to the memory of Catherine Dickens. Sounds were installed throughout the house in which Charles and Catherine lived, capturing the mundane, domestic textures of Catherine's world to make them present again. The Curator notes '*Felicity Ford's sound pieces commissioned for the ACE funded Discovering Catherine project were a beautiful, poignant element to the 2015 exhibition, 'The Other Dickens: Discovering Catherine Dickens'. We learnt a lot about Catherine through Felicity's research ... We have returned to the soundscapes in 2020, playing them in two parts of the Museum to enrich interpretation and again, provide a sense of Catherine in 48 Doughty Street*' (**S10**). The Museum had 21,631 visitors through the house during the exhibition and the Director of the museum is planning to install several of the soundworks in the museum permanently. *Look Up London* reviewed the exhibition: '*The sound installations are remarkable. They create a haunting, evocative mood... you really do feel a presence of Catherine*'. (<https://lookup.london/the-other-dickens-discovering-catherine/>)

*Wordsworth Sounds*, developed by Whitty for the Wordsworth Trust in collaboration with writer and academic Steven Matthews, documented the everyday sounding environment of sites associated with Wordsworth including the 'ceaseless music' of the River Derwent that Wordsworth heard as it flowed past his childhood home in Cockermouth. This soundwork is installed permanently the Wordsworth Museum, Grasmere. A free-to-access Aporee sound map has been established for the project, which includes sounds not included in the Exhibition: <http://aporee.org/maps/projects/wordsworth>

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

**S1.** *Sound Diaries* Open Call: <http://www.sound-diaries.co.uk/category/open-call/>

**S2.** Testimonials from *Sound Diaries* Open Call Artists: James Green, Lucia Hinojosa, Jacek Smolicki, Beth Shearsby, Kathryn Tovey.

**S3.** [Get Some Chalk On Your Boots!](#) exhibition, conference and publications: including details of *Get Rid!* (Paul Whitty); *The Sound of Normalisation* (David Tidoni); and *This is Highfield Road* (Duncan Whitley).

**S4.** Testimonials from *Get Some Chalk On Your Boots!* artists: Davide Tidoni and Duncan Whitley.

**S5.** Transcription of Q&A with *Sound Diaries* artist Felicity Ford.

**S6.** Knitsonik publications including the *Stranded Colourwork Sourcebook* and *Stranded Colourwork Playbook* (<https://www.knitsonik.com/>)

**S7.** Print media reviews of *Get Some Chalk On Your Boots!* exhibition (*When Saturday Comes*) and publications (*The Wire*).

**S8.** BBC Sounds Podcast Boring Talks [#34 - Sounds of Grassroots Football](#)

**S9.** BBC Radio 4: Woman's hour [The Listener Chain: Sonic Knitter Felicity Ford](#)

**S10.** Testimonial from Curator, Dickens Museum, UK