

Institution: University of York		
Unit of Assessment: 28 - History		
Title of case study: St Stephen's Chapel and the House of Commons: changing historical practice, enhancing understanding, and influencing restoration in the Palace of Westminster		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2020		
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 John Cooper Dr Rosemary Hill	Reader Senior RA 'St Stephen's Chapel'	1/10/2005 - present 1/07/2014 - 30/09/2016
Dr Catriona Cooper	PDRA 'Listening to the Commons'	03/04/2017 - 07/09/2018; and 21/01/2019 - 28/06/2019
Professor Miles Taylor Professor Tim Ayers	Professor Professor	1/10/2004 - present 1/10/2005 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013-December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Historical research at the University of York is influencing debate on the Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster, has enriched Parliament's understanding of the origins of the House of Commons, and has changed Parliament's presentation of its history to the public. Two funded projects have shaped decisions on the future of this UNESCO World Heritage site; opened up lost histories of buildings and people at Westminster; briefed Members of Parliament in committees and conferences; changed institutional practice in presenting parliamentary history; employed acoustic technology to highlight the experience of women accessing politics at Westminster; and informed a major BBC historical drama.		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) The University of York 'St Stephen's Chapel' project consisted of two phases, both funded by AHRC in partnership with the UK Parliament. <u>Phase 1</u> , 'St Stephen's Chapel Westminster: Visual and Political Culture 1292-1941' (2013-17, GBP791,785, PI Cooper, Co-I Taylor Dept of History, and Co-I Tim Ayers Dept of History of Art) undertook extensive research on the role of the royal chapel of St Stephen in shaping the UK Parliament. It demonstrates how the medieval chapel transformed to become the first permanent House of Commons from 1548 [3.2]; the enduring influence of St Stephen's on the development of British political culture 1548-1834, including practices of debate and voting and the identity of MPs [3.1]; how the recreation of a 'Tudor Gothic' Commons chamber in the post-1834 Parliament shapes political culture to the present day, influencing legislatures around the world [3.1, 3.4]; the architectural, social and cultural legacy of former St Stephen's buildings within the parliamentary estate [3.5, 3.6]; and the value of historical research to the restoration of the Palace of Westminster, the biggest conservation project currently being undertaken in the UK [3.1]. Archival research from Phase 1 was visually modelled in a series of 3D virtual reconstructions of St Stephen's and the House of Commons [3.6], designed by York's Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture, in order to evaluate evidence and resolve problems in historical sources, and to create a resource for future researchers and visitors to Parliament. <u>Phase 2</u> , 'Listening to the Commons: The Sounds of Debate and the Experience of Women in Parliament c. 1800' (2017-18, GBP171,143, PI Cooper and Co-I Damian Murphy Dept of Electronic Engineering) examined the ways in which British women engaged with politics before their universal enfranchisement, concentrating on the ventilator space above the pre-1834 House of Commons ceiling where women were able to observe debates [3.3]. The visual models from Phase 1 were reconfigured for aural analysis, and a historic debate was performed in the modern House of Commons chamber by Members and parliamentary staff to highlight the presence and absence of women. Phase 2 of the project demonstrated the varied experiences of both men and women in the pre-1834 Commons, and pinpointed the relationship between the layout of parliamentary space and questions of women's access to / exclusion from politics in both the historic and the contemporary House of Commons.		

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

3.1 J.P.D. Cooper and Richard A. Gaunt, 'Architecture and Politics in the Palace of Westminster, 1399 to the Present', in J.P.D. Cooper and Richard A. Gaunt (eds.), *Space and Sound in the British Parliament: Architecture, Access and Acoustics* (Wiley, 2019 - special issue of *Parliamentary History*), 1-16 [DOI](#) *^

3.2 J.P.D. Cooper, 'The Elizabethan House of Commons and St Stephen's Chapel Westminster', in Cooper and Gaunt, *Space and Sound in the British Parliament*, 34-59 [DOI](#) *+^

3.3 Catriona Cooper, 'The Sound of Debate in Georgian England: Auralizing the House of Commons', in Cooper and Gaunt, *Space and Sound in the British Parliament*, 60-73 [DOI](#) *^

3.4 Miles Taylor, 'St Stephen's in War and Peace: Civil Defence and the Location of Parliament, 1938-51', in Cooper and Gaunt, *Space and Sound in the British Parliament*, 135-148 [DOI](#) *^

3.5 Rosemary Hill, 'Proceeding Like Guy Faux: The Antiquarian Investigation of St Stephen's Chapel Westminster, 1790-1837', in *Architectural History* 59 (2016), 253-279 [DOI](#) *^

3.6 T. Ayers, E. Biggs, J.P.D. Cooper, J. Jago, and A. Masinton, Virtual reconstructions of St Stephen's Chapel and the Palace of Westminster, 2016: <https://www.virtualststephens.org.uk/explore> ^

*=peer-reviewed publication; +=returned to REF2021; ^=produced with peer-reviewed funding

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

The St Stephen's project, in formal partnership with UK Parliament, has: **i)** enabled a new research culture across multiple parliamentary departments; **ii)** engaged Members of both Houses of Parliament with the long history of women at Westminster; **iii)** changed the way that Westminster presents its history to the public; **iv)** enhanced public understanding of Parliament; and **v)** influenced debate and decisions regarding the restoration of the Palace of Westminster.

Parliament has benefitted from the embedding of our historical research within processes, planning, and presentation to the public, creating a depth of collaboration sustained over seven years and actively ongoing. As the Senior Archivist at the Parliamentary Archives, and the Deputy Curator and Head of Interpretation in the Heritage Collections team collectively put it: 'The sheer relevance of the research, the length of the project, and the fact it has been embedded within Parliament on a longer-term basis represents an unprecedented partnership between our institution and a research team, to our knowledge. This in turn has generated greater and more creative outputs, and, importantly, created a virtuous circle of research and impact over an extended period of time' [5.1].

i) Enabling a new research culture across multiple parliamentary departments

Within the complex structure of the House of Commons and House of Lords are multiple teams tasked with preserving and sharing the heritage of Parliament's buildings and its collections. Research from the St Stephen's project, particularly its findings about the medieval origins of the House of Commons, has informed the work of several of these teams, including Information Services, Strategic Estates, the Heritage Collections Team and the Parliamentary Archives.

The St Stephen's project team briefed parliamentary committees on the origins of the House of Commons within the medieval royal chapel of St Stephen at Westminster, and established an executive advisory board, chaired by the Director of Information Services. She communicated the project's findings about the historical fabric and development of Parliament widely within the institution [5.2]. As a result, members of both Houses hosted and attended a colloquium (June 2015), and a project conference, along with curators and managers (September 2016).

The project's findings shaped the work of Information Services (the parliamentary team tasked with curating library and information services) at the highest level, the then Director, using the project's research to inform senior management discussions and advise Select Committees of both Houses [5.2]. The project also had an impact on the activities of Strategic Estates (the parliamentary team tasked with the maintenance and improvement of the buildings of the Parliamentary Estate). To quote the Estates Archivist and Historian: 'The project has had a major impact on our understanding of the Parliamentary Estate and our own collections' [5.3]. Specifically, inspired by the project, Strategic Estates created new digital photography of key research materials in collections outside Parliament, and photogrammetry of the statues of kings

in Westminster Hall, in order to produce 'a definitive body of visual and archival records now safely stored at the Palace' [5.3]. Strategic Estates was also prompted by the project to conserve a unique wooden model of the medieval St Stephen's chapel [5.3].

The longevity of the collaboration between the University of York and the Houses of Parliament has enabled a new culture of research in Strategic Estates: 'The sustained nature of this partnership has embedded the latest academic research within the knowledge exchange and curatorial practices of the Estates team on a more persistent basis, allowing us to better engage with the material culture of the Palace and enhancing our conservation efforts over the long-term' [5.3].

The Senior Archivist at the Parliamentary Archives, and the Deputy Curator and Head of Interpretation in the Heritage Collections team, both also confirm a renewed approach to research across the institution: 'the St Stephen's Chapel projects kickstarted a new environment of research in Parliament, raising the profile of non-political science-related research, and creating a greater openness to such material across the institution' [5.1].

The former Director of Information Services also comments on the importance of the project's research in enhancing institutional memory: 'The very nature of Parliament means that institutional memory is difficult to preserve and has often been lost. The York research project has helped us address that issue over a sustained period, as it has been exceptional in the duration of its collaboration, running across more than one sitting of Parliament. The knowledge gained in this process, shared through newly reinvigorated cross-departmental links, has helped sustain vital knowledge and expertise in historic spaces of international importance' [5.2].

ii) Engaging Members of both Houses of Parliament with the long history of women at Westminster

Research from the St Stephen's project inspired the parliamentary team behind the Voice & Vote exhibition (telling the story of women in Parliament, held in Westminster Hall summer 2018) to be much more ambitious in their use of parliamentary space. This in turn enabled them to engage more parliamentary staff, MPs and Lords with the long history of women in Westminster than they had originally hoped to do. As the Senior Archivist (Parliamentary Archives) and the Deputy Curator and Head of Interpretation (Heritage Collections Team), the two leaders of the project, write: 'Our original intention for the Voice & Vote exhibition was to provide audiences with a short audio sample of past debates in Parliament, recorded on a small scale with studio actors. The St Stephen's Chapel project's research allowed us considerably to up-scale this activity and, crucially, provided the added value of rigorous underpinning academic research and significantly enhanced the immersive visitor experience' [5.1].

The Voice & Vote team, using research from the St Stephen's project and text researched by the History of Parliament Trust, was granted permission by the House of Commons Speaker to perform and record a historic debate in the current Commons chamber on 14 December 2017: 'The occasion was especially notable for the fact that nothing similar had occurred within living memory. It featured Members from both Houses reading historic speeches in the chamber with parliamentary staff playing the backbenchers – a unique combination' [5.1].

This remarkable event enabled the Voice & Vote team to engage a wider cross-section of Members of Parliament with the long history of the presence of women at Westminster: 'By generating interest in Voice & Vote among Members of both Houses prior to the public opening of the exhibition, particularly male representatives who might not otherwise have connected with the event, we were better able to build momentum for the Voice & Vote project within the Palace itself' [5.1].

The experience of the recording continued to be discussed in the Commons long after the exhibition ended. As noted in Hansard, Tim Loughton MP highlighted his participation in the event

within a 2019 debate on the Restoration and Renewal bill, as an example of how historical spaces in the Palace might be reconstructed where there are difficulties of access [5.4].

(iii) Changing the way that the Palace of Westminster presents its history to the public

The St Stephen's project has led to two technological innovations in the way Parliament presents its history to the public: an exhibit featuring authentic historic sound, and touchscreen displays.

The Voice & Vote exhibition (summer 2018) welcomed 107,328 visitors into Westminster Hall to celebrate the centenary of women's enfranchisement in the UK [5.1]. Curators drew on York's research to produce an exhibit which recreated the sound heard by women listening to debates in the pre-1834 Commons, as an immersive experience. Visitors entered the exhibition via a recreation of the ventilator space where early 19th century women gathered to listen to speeches in the Commons, featuring authentic sound based on University of York acoustic modelling. The exhibition's curators describe the change that this represented for Parliament: 'The recording, built on the project's research, was the first time that such authentic sound (rather than a studio recording) had been used by a parliamentary exhibition to create an immersive experience. It propelled the authenticity of the exhibition story by giving audiences listening at the replica ventilator an opportunity to hear a plausible reconstruction of modelled history in action. Indeed, the ventilator was the only immersive part of the exhibition with an authentic soundscape, and it succeeded in starting the exhibition with a distinct physical, visual and aural impact' [5.1]. The exhibition has had a permanent legacy, with 'Women in Parliament' specialist tours now featuring the material [5.1].

The St Stephen's project has also informed how Parliament tells the history of the origin of the House of Commons. The project team created 3D virtual reconstructions of St Stephen's Chapel and the Commons chamber. Parliament then invested in touchscreen display technology to showcase this research, installed in Westminster Hall and St Stephen's Hall [5.3]. A second screen was commissioned by English Heritage for the nearby Jewel Tower.

Parliament's Estates Archivist describes the change in practice that this represents: 'This was the first time that touchscreen technology had been used in the Palace to present its heritage to visitors and staff, and this new, innovative approach to displaying the heritage of the buildings provided a different - and very popular - way for the public to access and enjoy Parliament's historic collections' [5.3]. The touchscreen was also showcased at an 'Open House' event at Portcullis House on 19 October 2016 (1,064 visitors; comments included 'our favourite part was reconstructing the lost chapel of St Stephen's') supported by talks from project staff [5.5].

iv) Enhancing public understanding of Parliament's history

The project's activities, and coverage in media broadcasts, have changed public understanding of the history of the Palace of Westminster. 97% of attendees surveyed at the Voice & Vote exhibition came away with a better understanding of the experience of being a woman political campaigner pre-1918; 45% were inspired to take action and get involved with Parliament [5.6]. For parliamentary staff, it was a crucial impact of the exhibition that visitors were stimulated by the content of the exhibition to take action [5.1]. Visitor comments included: 'Pledging to make all my five granddaughters aware and eternally grateful for all those wonderful and brave selfless women that gave them the rights they have today and to carry on', and 'It was a very emotional experience. It reminded me, as a young woman, of the sacrifices made by those before me. It has inspired me and given me renewed confidence in the power of my voice' [5.6].

The project has also reached a broader audience through media coverage, and has in turn inspired new media productions. Working with the choir of Caius College, Cambridge, the project was granted permission by Black Rod to recreate a performance of Tudor music in St Mary Undercroft chapel before an audience of Members and parliamentary staff (June 2015). The event was filmed and made freely available on the project website. A second concert organised by the project (June 2016) featured the Parliamentary Choir of Members and staff, and inspired a BBC Parliament television documentary on the St Stephen's project, 'The Lost Chapel of Westminster',

introduced by Mark d'Arcy (screened October 2016 and September 2017). Music performed in the project concerts also appears in a Delphian Records CD *Music from the Lost Chapel of Westminster*, with text contributed by the project team. Tie-in interviews of Cooper on BBC Radio 4 'Today in Parliament' and BBC Radio 3 'In Tune' presented project research in the context of current discussions about the future of the historic Palace of Westminster [5.7].

Publicity surrounding the project led to requests for information from the production teams of 2017 BBC TV series 'Gunpowder' (20,420,000 viewers) [5.8]. The production designer used the project's virtual reconstructions of Westminster to inform the presentation of Parliament on screen: 'I can say personally that our discussions led to key design choices that helped the look of the designed world for the production [...] Access to the research and the virtual 3D modelling from the St Stephens Chapel project was hugely important. This has given the drama the authenticity visually to recreate the Palace of Westminster and the House of Commons which are at the heart of the drama itself' [5.9].

(v) Influencing debate and decisions regarding the Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster

The project's findings informed the task of preserving, conserving and modernising the Palace of Westminster through Restoration and Renewal. Drawing on research from both phases of the St Stephen's project, the Research Adviser to Strategic Estates has given tours of the building to parliamentary staff and the conservation architects involved in Restoration and Renewal, and presentations to the Houses of Parliament Restoration and Renewal team [5.2]. Donald Insall Associates, consulting architects on Restoration and Renewal, drew on images from the project's models to inform their work on the Conservation Management Plan. As an architect from the firm confirms: 'Increased knowledge about the history of St. Stephen's College has informed the 2019 Palace of Westminster Conservation Management Plan. Whilst conservation of the Chapel and Cloister of St. Stephen's College was previously provided for in the conservation management of the Palace, the St. Stephen's Project by the University of York has brought a much greater understanding of the College into focus. The work of this project has allowed better provision for the conservation of surviving parts of the medieval Palace, including below ground archaeology, to be provided in the new Plan' [5.10].

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

- 5.1** Testimonial, Deputy Curator and Head of Interpretation, Parliamentary Heritage Collections Team, and Senior Archivist, Parliamentary Archives
- 5.2** Testimonial, Former Director of Information Services at the House of Lords, now Research Adviser attached to the Architecture and Heritage Team at the Palace of Westminster
- 5.3** Testimonial, Historian and Archivist, Strategic Estates, Houses of Parliament
- 5.4** House of Commons Debates, Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill, 19 June 2019, 662, col 280
- 5.5** Testimonial, Assistant Operations Manager, Visitor Services, Houses of Parliament
- 5.6** Voice & Vote Exhibition evaluation, 2019 (Data collected by Parliament; analysis by University of York).
- 5.7** A portfolio of St Stephen's Chapel Broadcast and Print Media coverage
- 5.8** Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB) 28-day viewing data
- 5.9** Testimonial, Production designer, BBC series *Gunpowder*
- 5.10** Testimonial, Practice Director, Donald Insall Architects