

Institution: University of Liverpool		
Unit of Assessment: (28) History		
Title of case study: Gangs in Urban Britain: Inspiring Learners in Prisons, Informing Creative Works and Shaping Public Understanding		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2001–2013		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name: Andrew Davies	Role: Professor of Modern Social History	Period employed by submitting HEI: 1992–2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013–June 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Davies' research has benefitted diverse groups of users, from prisoners to playwrights and novelists. Classes based on his book <i>City of Gangs</i> led to increased engagement in education at HMP Barlinnie and HMP Low Moss (2019). Both prison education classes and creative adaptations of Davies' work have been reinforced by the frequent use of his research by journalists and by television production companies in historical dramas as well as documentaries. Through his own media appearances, but especially through the use of his findings by prominent cultural commentators such as the hip hop artist, Akala, Davies' work has substantially informed public understanding of gangs and 'knife-crime'. His research has also been commercially exploited by businesses ranging from a clothing manufacturer to a marketing agency. Through these wide-ranging activities, users in multiple sectors—both regionally and nationally—have benefitted from Davies' research.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Davies explored the nature and extent of gang formation and conflict in three case studies: Manchester and Salford (1870–1900), Birmingham (1870–1900) and Glasgow (1918–39). His research revealed that in all three conurbations gangs were the subject of intense concern among civic and religious leaders, judicial authorities, social reformers and journalists. Clear patterns in gang formation emerged from Davies' research. In late Victorian Manchester and Birmingham, territorial youth gangs emerged throughout the 'factory districts' that ringed the city-centres (3.1; 3.5). Conflicts were most intense in 'slum' districts, such as Ancoats in Manchester, where youths with few economic prospects acquired considerable prestige through their reputation for fighting prowess (3.5).</p> <p>Davies uncovered a different pattern of gang formation in interwar Glasgow. Whereas Manchester's late Victorian 'scuttlers' and Birmingham's 'peaky blinders' tended to be aged in their mid- to late teens, Glasgow's street gangs included many men aged in their twenties or even thirties. Davies attributed this to two factors: the sectarian basis of gang formation in Glasgow, especially in the city's East End, where gangs purportedly existed to 'protect' processions by local churches and organisations such as the Orange Order; and mass, long-term unemployment, which saw gang members resort to property crime and 'protection'</p>		

rackets from the mid-1920s. The rivalry between the Rangers and Celtic football clubs – identified as ‘Protestant’ and ‘Catholic’ respectively – reinforced sectarian tensions in Glasgow. The most powerful of the city’s Protestant gangs, the Billy Boys, were avid Rangers supporters. They also provided stewards at Unionist (Conservative) Party election meetings (3.2; 3.6).

Five key research findings were articulated in the activities detailed in Section 4, below:

- Current concerns with gangs and ‘knife-crime’ are not new. To portray these phenomena as unprecedented is misleading, and fosters shallow explanations of their causes. Davies’ case studies show that gangs were clustered in districts characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment and ill health. Gangs must be understood in the contexts of economic deprivation and social exclusion (3.1; 3.5; 3.6).
- Contrary to claims by some modern politicians and high-profile media commentators, gangs are not a by-product of the growth of black communities in Britain’s cities; nor can they be attributed to the influence of new forms of music such as ‘drill’. Gang formation and conflict are more deeply rooted than these racialised discourses imply (3.5; 3.6).
- Mass imprisonment failed to curb the spread of gangs or the use of weapons. Many gang members served serial prison sentences (3.2; 3.5; 3.6).
- The most successful attempts to combat gangs hinged not on penal sanctions, but on the provision of new opportunities for sport, education and training for youths in poor districts. These initiatives were most successful in late Victorian Manchester, where the working-lads’ club movement received substantial donations from employers and philanthropists. ‘Pals’ Clubs’ enjoyed similar, if more limited, successes in interwar Glasgow (3.5; 3.6).
- Sectarian gangs such as the Bridgeton Billy Boys played a significant role in local politics and sport in Glasgow, as well as in communal disturbances in the city’s tenement districts. Their leaders, notably Billy Fullerton, were prominent figures in civic life, with reputations that extended far beyond the neighbourhoods in which the gangs were based (3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.6).

3. References to the research

(all publications sole-authored by Andrew Davies; copies available on request)

3.1 ‘Youth, violence, and courtship in late-Victorian Birmingham: the case of James Harper and Emily Pimm’, *The History of the Family*, 11, 2 (2006), pp. 107–120.

DOI: [10.1016/j.hisfam.2006.07.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hisfam.2006.07.001)

3.2 ‘Football and sectarianism in Glasgow during the 1920s and 1930s’, *Irish Historical Studies*, XXXVI, 138 (2006), pp. 200–219. DOI: [10.1017/s0021121400004892](https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021121400004892)

3.3 ‘The Scottish Chicago: from “hooligans” to “gangsters” in interwar Glasgow’, *Cultural and Social History*, 4, 4 (2007), pp. 511–27. DOI: [10.2752/147800407X243505](https://doi.org/10.2752/147800407X243505)

3.4 ‘Glasgow’s “reign of terror”: street gangs, racketeering and intimidation in the 1920s and 1930s’, *Contemporary British History*, 21, 4 (2007), pp. 405–427.

DOI: [10.1080/13619460601060413](https://doi.org/10.1080/13619460601060413)

3.5 *The Gangs of Manchester: The Story of the Scuttlers, Britain’s First Youth Cult* (Milo, 2008), 336 pp: “the unpicking of inter-personal and community dynamics ... enables Davies to engage with the nuances of working-class and ‘slum’ culture” (*Journal of Victorian Culture*).

3.6 *City of Gangs: Glasgow and the Rise of the British Gangster* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2013), xiii + 450 pp: “[a] rich and accomplished interpretation ... [t]he level of research that has gone into this book is extraordinary” (*Contemporary British History*).

4. Details of the impact

Inspiring learning and creativity in prisons

The use of Davies' book *City of Gangs* in classes at HMP Barlinnie and HMP Low Moss grew out of a partnership between Glasgow's Mitchell Library and the Scottish Prison Service (SPS). Confident that Davies' research would interest prisoners, the Principal Librarian for Reader Development at the Mitchell arranged for Davies to give a talk to 60 prisoners at Barlinnie in 2014 (5.1). A follow-up session with a prison reading group and creative writing class was attended by the Head of Learning and Skills for SPS. His feedback inspired the programme of classes based on *City of Gangs* delivered by Davies at the two prisons in 2019. The Head of Learning and Skills facilitated this with the Area Manager for SPS's education provider, Fife College.

The Education Team Leader at Barlinnie described the outcomes of this programme as "remarkable" (5.2d). The immediate change she noted was the increased engagement in education that resulted directly from the programme: "I am so impressed at how well the guys have engaged with both yourself and the topic and all the [tutors] have said how motivated the guys are to come and contribute which (and trust me when I say this from many years' experience) is no easy task and does not always happen!" (5.2a) The Education Team Leader showcased the programme at Fife College's annual staff conference in September 2019 as an example of successful innovation in prison education (5.2d).

The beneficiaries of the classes delivered by Davies were the resident tutors and six groups of learners (four at Barlinnie: 36 men in total; two at Low Moss: 44), who worked with Davies over four weeks in August 2019. The groups read *City of Gangs* and examined legal files and press reports used in Davies' research before analysing these sources in their own essays. Learners at Barlinnie used their participation in Davies' classes to complete 140 qualifications, ranging from personal development awards to SQA Level 4 History (5.2e–g). One class was inspired to produce a magazine, 'The Auld Team', for fellow prisoners. This contained extracts from Davies' sources, a student essay and paintings by a prison art class (5.2m).

Resident tutors reported that participants in Davies' classes gained increased confidence as well as critical reading and listening skills. Feedback from learners and tutors testified to exceptionally high levels of engagement (5.2a–n). Attendance at Barlinnie was over 80% (5.2d; normally 50%). Classes at Low Moss were relocated due to demand: double the number of anticipated learners arrived for Davies' first session. One tutor who worked alongside Davies at Barlinnie described learner engagement in these classes as "amazing" (5.2e). She commented that learners were "surprised by their ability to read such a factual book," adding that their confidence grew over the course of the programme (a comment echoed by all of the tutors involved). She noted that her group had shared information about the classes, and their copies of *City of Gangs*, around the prison's halls, generating interest among prisoners who did not participate in education and boosting her own efforts to stimulate recruitment (5.2e).

This was echoed at Low Moss, where a group of men visited the prison's Learning Centre for the first time to attend one of Davies' classes. The Area Manager for Fife College reported that: "The men who attended from [this] Hall, 6 in total, never leave the Hall due to acute mental health issues. They heard about the project from their regular tutor and were keen to get involved. Coming to the Learning Centre to hear Andrew was a significant achievement for the men, who overcame their own personal issues to engage with the class" (5.2i).

In addition to these educational classes, Davies worked for four weeks with a 'work party' of ten prisoners to serialise the life story of the leader of the Billy Boys (one of Davies' key sources) for Barlinnie's radio station, 'Barbed Wireless'. The Radio Tutor reported: "It's only occasionally that we get projects to work on that can involve several students at once, and they're always invaluable as they help facilitate team building skills, amongst others. Your project was arguably the best that we've worked on—everybody, bar none, got involved with different aspects, from reading & recording passages to making adverts and the eventual finished feature. It really helped them to develop their skills, both as team players and on their own initiative ... it's been great to give them a real project to work on" (5.2h). Feedback from the work party stressed their enjoyment of the project—a significant response given their prior experiences of education (every member of the group had been excluded from school). The 'life story' approach prompted the work party to reflect on their own experiences, and to view their own stories as worth recording. Learner evaluations were extremely positive ("I got inspired by the book, it gave me the motivation to write my own book so I took a lot in": 5.2n). Responses to the broadcasts among the wider prison population were "very positive" (5.2h).

Reviewing Davies' project, the Head of Learning and Skills for SPS identified learners "critically reflecting on their own experiences" as a key benefit (5.2l). The project has had a lasting legacy: Davies' material has been embedded in the history curriculum at Barlinnie and continues to be used by the radio work party. The prison's Education Team Leader is eager to re-run the project once COVID restrictions are lifted (5.2j–k).

Inspiring and informing television documentary and drama

The Secret History of My Family episode on 'The Salford Scuttlers' (BBC 2, 2016; 1,230,000 viewers: 5.3e) was derived from Chapter 14 of *The Gangs of Manchester* ("We have thoroughly enjoyed reading your book"; "It has really opened up another avenue of enquiry for us": BBC Researcher, 5.3a–b). Davies acted as consultant for the episode (5.3d). Davies' account of Glasgow's Billy Boys and their leader, Billy Fullerton, in *City of Gangs* provided the creative springboard for the fictional portrayal of the Billy Boys in series 5 of *Peaky Blinders* (BBC 1, 2019). The Assistant Script Editor at Tiger Aspect Productions told Davies that the production team had relied heavily on his account (5.3f): "your book was so incredibly useful during the preliminary research stages!" 5,900,000 UK viewers watched the Billy Boys' first appearance in the series (5.3g). The broadcast of series 5 of *Peaky Blinders* further boosted interest in Davies' educational classes at Barlinnie and Low Moss. Learners in both prisons used their new historical knowledge acquired from *City of Gangs* to critique the television drama in conversations with fellow prisoners. As one member of Barlinnie's radio work party observed: "Much truth can be changed around for TV" (5.2n). This encapsulates the critical thinking among participants in Davies' classes, repeatedly noted by the resident tutors.

Inspiring and informing creative works and commercial uses

The Gangs of Manchester informed a host of creative works, including a novel and two commercial theatre productions. *Angel Meadow* (2014) by ANU productions was commissioned to launch HOME, Manchester's new theatre, cinema and arts complex. Cast members developed their characters directly from Davies' research. One of the actors told the *British Theatre Guide* that Davies' book was "the first thing I got hold of" when researching his part: "I focused on one character in the book ... *The Gangs of Manchester* was a great help" (5.4b). *Angel Meadow* sold-out (1,800 tickets: 5.4c), won 'Best Production' and 'Best Ensemble Production' at the 2015 Manchester Theatre Awards (5.4d), and was described by

the *Daily Telegraph* as “too fierce to dismiss ... a superb piece of programming” (5.4e). Director Louise Lowe was nominated for ‘Best Director’ at the 2014 UK Theatre Awards (5.4f).

Scuttlers, by award-winning playwright, Rona Munro, was commissioned by Manchester’s Royal Exchange Theatre Company and performed in 2015 (39 performances; total audience: 18,589: 5.5c). Munro centred her script on Chapter 9 of *The Gangs of Manchester*, acknowledging her debt to Davies’ research (5.5a), while Davies wrote an 1,800-word companion piece for the programme (5.5d). Along with the cast and production team, Munro joined a guided walk based on Davies’ book (devised and led by a Manchester tour guide: 5.5j). Subsequent productions of *Scuttlers* (2015–17) include: City & Islington College; RADA; Wakefield Theatre Royal; Dublin Academy of the Arts; and North East Scotland College (5.5e–i). ‘Scuttler Gangs of Manchester’ tours attracted 700 participants (Oct. 2013–2019: 5.5j–m).

Novelist Emma Hornby acknowledged her reliance on *The Gangs of Manchester* when researching her fictional account of scuttlers, *Manchester Moll* (2017). She confirmed (5.6): “your book was the only in-depth work I have come across on the subject ... You really bring the era, the people and emotions, to life in your book and give a real sense of the time. Works such as your[s] are invaluable to novelists.” Commercial uses include a range of t-shirts by clothing manufacturer, Good Measure (2016: 5.7a–b), while White Rabbit Creative, a design and marketing agency, announced their relocation to new offices in 2017 by creating prints “based around the scuttlers theme” (and acknowledging their use of Davies’ research: 5.7d).

Enhancing public understanding through broadcast and social media

Davies’ work has been widely discussed on social media, amplified by Davies’ own media appearances. His *BBC History Extra* podcast on ‘peaky blinders’ (2019) attracted 119,701 listens. His related article on Glasgow’s Billy Boys for the *History Extra* website was viewed 35,067 times (5.8a). The hip-hop artist, Akala, has been a prominent user of Davies’ research, repeatedly citing both *The Gangs of Manchester* and *City of Gangs* when discussing gangs and ‘knife-crime’ on Twitter and on television (5.9a–g). He uses Davies’ findings to show that these are not ‘black’ problems, since they pre-date the growth of black communities in Britain’s cities. He cited Davies on Channel 4 News in 2019 (5.9d). An interview segment tweeted by Channel 4 attracted 2,400,000 viewers, 25,924 retweets and 52,352 likes (5.9f). Akala retweeted it to his own 211,700 followers, citing Davies’ books. One follower responded: “The [mainstream media] love to fetishize black on black crime like [it’s] something particularly unique to our dna. The Glasgow point destroys that whole agenda stone dead!” (5.9g).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1: Davies Mitchell Library.pdf Email from Principal Librarian for Reader Development.

5.2: Davies prison education.pdf Emails from Scottish Prison Service staff; Area Manager, Fife College; resident tutors at HMP Barlinnie; magazine extracts; questionnaires.

5.3: Davies television production companies.pdf Correspondence; viewing figures.

5.4: Davies theatrical productions (Angel Meadow).pdf Correspondence; interview with actor.

5.5: Davies theatrical productions (Scuttlers).pdf Acknowledgement by Rona Munro; correspondence (including walking tours); screenshots detailing additional productions.

5.6: Davies novelist Emma Hornby.pdf *Manchester Moll*: correspondence and screenshot.

5.7: Davies commercial uses.pdf Correspondence and screenshots.

5.8: Davies History extra.pdf Correspondence detailing website hits and listening figures.

5.9: Davies Akala.pdf Screenshots from Twitter and Channel 4 News.