

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of East Anglia		
Unit of Assessment: 27 - English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Transforming Norfolk's Historic Books and Manuscripts into New Resources for Innovation in Heritage, Creative, and Educational Practice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Between 2005 and 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:
Matthew Woodcock	Professor of Medieval and Early Modern Literature	2004 to present
Tom Roebuck	Lecturer in Renaissance Literature	2013 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Between 2015 and 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Through the 'Unlocking the Archive' (UTA) project, the research of UEA academics has enabled Norfolk's early modern printed books and manuscripts to become new sources of cultural, creative, and educational benefit in the East of England. The project began in 2015 by addressing a problem: the Norfolk Library and Information Service (NLIS) has a collection of c.2000 early modern learned books from which it was deriving no active benefit. By drawing on research into the early modern learned book, a template of strategies was created to tackle this problem. UTA has since expanded to work with the National Trust's Blickling Estate, Norfolk's graphic design community, and Norwich's schools. Online innovation during COVID-19 catalysed new collaborations nationally. The project has led to the following key impacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The '<i>fundamental transformation</i>' of NLIS's use of its historic book collections to bring new benefits to users and staff. • Establishing a new model for presenting learned books in National Trust libraries, by '<i>revolutionis[ing]</i>' the use of the library at Blickling Estate. • Turning Norfolk's collections into new sources of inspiration for the region's design industry, leading to changes in creative practice and new business opportunities. • The enhancement of Key Stage 1 and 2 teaching in key Norwich schools. • Building '<i>digital resilience</i>' for Norfolk's public library services, the National Trust, and Northumberland Libraries and Archives, enabling them to continue their mission of bringing collections to the public during COVID-19. 		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>'Did anyone read these books?'. This is the question most often asked by visitors to the kinds of historic libraries or book collections in which Norfolk is so rich. It is an important question: today, it is hard to imagine inhabiting the world of early-modern scholarship, where learned books (frequently written in Latin) were not merely objects of decoration for shelves. That early modern learned books <i>were</i> read, and indeed were fiercely and passionately debated by those of differing scholarly, political, and religious affiliations, is one of the key insights of Roebuck's research. Conducted between 2014 and 2020, his research offers a series of 'biographies' of key examples of the kinds of learned books weighing down the shelves of historic libraries: editions of ancient texts (taking the Jewish author Josephus as a case-study (3.5)); works of British 'antiquarian' scholarship, minutely reconstructing the nation's past (taking the most prominent such work, William Camden's <i>Britannia</i>, as an example (3.4)), and works of travel, archaeology, and ecclesiastical history (taking a pioneering study of the Near East as an example (3.3)). These articles are published in field-leading journals or books, such as Roebuck's contribution to an international collaborative research project based at Oxford's Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies in 2014. Roebuck uncovers in unparalleled detail the stories which lie behind these books,</p>		

from the motivations of the scholars who wrote them, to the great artisanal and commercial achievements of the publishers who printed them, to the labours of the readers who interpreted them. He shows that it was precisely these scholarly volumes which were regarded as ‘classics’ in their own day (3.4), and the equivalent of the most important achievements in today’s scientific disciplines, changing human understanding of history, belief, and our place in the world.

Woodcock’s research tackles a similar problem in the context of manuscript archives rather than in libraries of printed books. His research concerns the neglected archival documents of Norwich’s early modern past. Conducted between 2005 and 2019, Woodcock’s research on the soldier-poet, Thomas Churchyard, Elizabeth I’s 1578 royal progress at Norwich, and East Anglian drama and festivity, involved extensive work with early modern archives (especially those at the Norfolk Record Office). Funded by the Leverhulme Trust and an AHRC Leadership Fellowship (3.6, 3.7), Woodcock’s well-received biographical monograph (3.1), critical editions of key documents and records for the John Nichols project (3.2), and Records of Early English Drama project reconstructed a detailed account of Churchyard’s life and works, including his involvement in the 1578 progress. Moreover, Woodcock assembled and edited extensive evidence regarding the varieties of dramatic, musical, and festive entertainments staged in early modern Norwich, not only for royal visitors, but for the city itself. Woodcock’s research has shown that these seemingly dull manuscripts – often in the form of lists or other non-literary records – can provide valuable insights into the ways a city, like Norwich, used drama and festivity to establish and project its own political, economic, and religious identity, celebrating civic pride and confidence.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 *Thomas Churchyard: Pen, Sword, and Ego*
Woodcock, M. (Oxford University Press, 2016). ISBN: 978 0 19 968430 4
- 3.2 ‘Queen Elizabeth I in East Anglia, 1578’
Woodcock, M. in John Nichols’s *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. J. Archer, et al, 5 vols. (Oxford University Press, 2014), 2: 709-833.
 ISBN: 9780343925345
- 3.3 *‘Antiquarianism in the Near East: Thomas Smith (1638-1710) and His Journey to the Seven Churches of Asia’*
Roebuck, T. in Jane Grogan, ed. *Beyond Greece and Rome: The Ancient Near East in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 132-162. ISBN: 9780198767114
- 3.4 *Edmund Gibson’s 1695 Britannia and Late-Seventeenth-Century Antiquarian Scholarship.*
Roebuck, T. *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* (2020) 5(4) 427-481
 DOI: 10.1163/24055069-00504003
- 3.5 ‘Great Expectation Among the Learned’: *Edward Bernard’s Josephus in Restoration Oxford*,
Roebuck, T. *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* (2016): 23:3. 307-325.
 DOI: 10.1007/s12138-016-0405-7

Grants

- 3.6 **Woodcock, M.** Project: ‘*Pen and sword: the life and writings of Thomas Churchyard, c. 1529–1604*’. Project dates: 2013-14. Funder: Leverhulme Trust grant. Grant value: GBP2,299.
- 3.7 **Woodcock, M.** Project: ‘*Accessing the Records of Early English Drama in Norwich, 1540-1642*’. Project dates: 2017-18. Funder: AHRC Leadership Fellowship. Grant value: GBP201,286.

4. Details of the impact

The Problem: Finding Value in Norwich’s Neglected Learned Books. Norfolk Heritage Centre (NHC), part of the Norfolk Library and Information Service (NLIS), holds a collection of c.2000 early modern learned printed books, with origins in the Norwich City Library, the first provincial civic library outside London, founded in 1608. Despite the significance of this collection, the NHC’s former librarian testifies that, before 2015, ‘[t]he Renaissance books in the NHC were used very rarely’, and even then, only through ‘very occasional requests from researchers and academics who knew of their existence’ (5.1). This collection is difficult to interpret for non-specialist

audiences. Its books are not Shakespeare's First Folio or other literary masterpieces famous today. Instead, they are the works of early modern scholarship, tailored to clergymen, written mostly in Latin. Realising that Roebuck's research into these kinds of learned books held the key to revivifying this collection, in 2015 UEA academics (supported by UEA's entire literature Medieval and Early-Modern Research Group, including post-docs, PGR, and even PGT students) founded the Unlocking the Archive (UTA) project. They created a template of activities to interpret this collection for the public for the first time, at the heart of which were live, hands-on, drop-in, 'book discovery days', where members of the public could turn the pages of these learned books and discover their stories.

A 'fundamental transformation': Putting Learned Books at the Heart of Norfolk's Community and NLIS's Mission. Events held between 2015 and 2019 were attended by c.750 people – '*record numbers*', as NHC's librarian testified (5.1). In 2019, NLIS invited UTA to bring its template of activities to King's Lynn Public Library (KLPL, in the deprived region of West Norfolk), home to another neglected collection of c.2000 learned books, with deep historic roots in the town. This saw another 200 people encounter King's Lynn's books. The 399 feedback forms collected across 3 events at NHC and KLPL between 2017 and 2019 (i.e. 57% of these events' overall attendees) record that 90% of visitors had never seen these historic books before (5.2). They prompted changes in people's perception of their own region's history. The owner of one of Norwich's most popular bookshops, for instance, felt that the learned books had '*shown that the Renaissance culture of Norwich is every bit as good as that of e.g. Florence*'; another visitor confessed themselves '*surprised at the treasures King's Lynn possesses*' (5.2). For the manager of KLPL, [REDACTED], what was '*even more special*' than seeing new library visitors travel long distances was '*to see some of our regular vulnerable customers join in and take an interest in the books*'. '*These included a homeless gentleman who first of all said he wasn't interested as he couldn't read, but begrudgingly went over to look; he then came and told me that he thought they were awesome and revealed he could read Latin*', as his father was of Roma heritage. [REDACTED] concludes that '*it felt like we had really engaged the community and inspired people to want to learn more*' (5.1).

While NLIS's users are the first of this project's key beneficiaries, even deeper and longer-lasting benefits have been felt by the institution and its staff. At a time of funding cuts, the UTA project has allowed the library to achieve its central missions. Events have broadened the library's user base: e.g. of the 250 people who attended the 2019 event at NHC, 37% had never visited NHC and a further 30% were not regular visitors (5.2). Together with public events, training workshops that communicated Roebuck's research insights to the library's staff have catalysed professional development, enabling the previously unused rare books to be integrated throughout the library's work. For instance, Community Librarian for Local Studies, [REDACTED], and Archive Specialist, [REDACTED], were then able for the first time to place the rare book collection at the heart of their work to inspire younger audiences, for instance by building one year's worth of activities around the books for a group of twelve children aged between 11 and 14 (the 'History Hunters'). '*I consider myself profoundly fortunate to have had the opportunity of being involved with UTA*', [REDACTED] explained, '*The enhancement of my professional development that has resulted has enabled me to develop engagement activities that would otherwise simply not have happened*'. As well as the 'History Hunters' group, these include '*public events based on the UTA model hosted at NHC in 2018 and 2020, each of which saw over a hundred people, including families and young people, engaging with the early modern books, but also encompass staff training and further public events such as 'Heritage Sunday' family events, numerous school and college group visits*', and reminiscence activities for older adults. In summary, the NLIS testifies that Roebuck's research insights have led to a '*fundamental transformation of the way we use our rare book collections*' (5.1).

A 'new way' of Presenting Learned Books in National Trust Libraries. With the reputation of UTA's work in the region growing, National Trust's (NT) Blickling Estate became the project's next key beneficiary, when it invited UTA to bring its template of activities to its library in 2018. Despite being home to NT's largest and most significant library (c.12,500 volumes), Blickling faced similar or even greater challenges to those of the NLIS. It is another difficult learned library, with many books of antiquarianism and ecclesiastical scholarship. Moreover, as [REDACTED], National Curator, Libraries, National Trust, explains, '*access to and interpretation of books has, in the past, proved*

one of our greatest challenges’ in the Trust (5.3). Despite ongoing vital work to catalogue Blickling’s library, the books remained hard to integrate into daily visitor experience of the property – a vital aim for Blickling. Between 2018 and 2019, around 1250 people attended UTA activities, and 100% of 111 pieces of evaluative feedback gathered in 2018 were positive, with one visitor, for instance, commenting that they felt *‘privileged to be able to see and touch these amazing books’* (5.4). The most lasting and significant benefit, however, has come to Blickling as an institution, its staff and volunteers. Between 2019 and 2020, UTA trained 36 of Blickling’s volunteers and staff members in the fundamentals of Roebuck’s research in the learned book through a mixture of in-person sessions and online resources (e.g. a video, ‘Did Anyone Read These Books?’), distilling the essence of Roebuck’s research insights). This gave volunteers new *‘knowledge’* and *‘confidence’* with which to interpret the books for the public (5.4). As well as using their new learning in their day-to-day role as house guides, volunteers were able to lead their own unique *‘book discovery day’* (October 2019), presenting the books to 450 visitors. Blickling’s General Manager, [REDACTED], describes how this project has transformed Blickling’s practice: *‘Roebuck’s research has helped revolutionise the way our supporters engage with our library. We have moved from essentially minimal engagement with a handful of volumes [...] to a structured and connected series of experiences’*, contributing to Blickling’s visitor *‘learning’* score achieving 5.7% higher than the NT average (5.4). [REDACTED] explains the significance of this partnership for Blickling and NT: *‘It is only with the involvement of the UTA project that we have been able to start working with the collection in a new way that truly befits its importance’*. *‘The project has been noticed across the Trust’*, he states, *‘and it has revealed to many the worth of our books and their potential to help tell the stories of our properties and inspire our visitors’*. In the post-COVID-19 era, he concludes, *‘There is great potential and willing to replicate the Blickling project at other Trust properties’* (5.3), e.g. Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk, where UTA’s template of activities was scheduled to have taken place in 2020 (put on hold by COVID-19).

A ‘new resource of inspiration’: Norfolk’s Learned Books Influencing Design Practice and Creating Business Opportunities. In 2015, Norwich graphic designer [REDACTED] was hired to design a visual identity for UTA and became inspired by Roebuck’s research into the learned book. This led him to organise a project, *‘New Impressions: Redesigning Norwich’s Renaissance Books’* (2017), in which 16 Norfolk-based graphic designers took part in a hands-on workshop about NHC’s learned books led by Roebuck. This influenced their creative practice, when they [produced prints based on what they discovered](#), with the books becoming, as he explained, *‘a new resource of inspiration which breaks with the usual modernist influences’*. This project offered a unique opportunity for commercial design professionals, usually in competition, to come together as a community. One designer, [REDACTED], described the benefit of *‘meeting local designers, who I’ve long since known of [...] but never actually met face to face – it was meeting them, seeing how they worked, seeing what they produced, that was the most incredible, enriching experience for me’*. The resulting exhibitions at NHC and Norwich School’s Crypt Gallery, seen by c.700 visitors, showcased Norwich’s design community. *‘New Impressions’* prints were peer-reviewed and judged to be of a *‘very high standard’* by leading industry professional, [REDACTED], founding partner of design agency North (responsible for the Tate Modern branding). [REDACTED] confirms that this project brought him new business opportunities as it both *‘increased my industry profile and led to new heritage project commissions’*, while *‘the paper company Fedrigoni UK – a sponsor of New Impressions – invited me to contribute to their publications’*, a major indicator of prestige in the design industry. Other designers have testified to ongoing influence on their practice, including [REDACTED], who designed a visual identity for Trust New Art projects at Blickling. By drawing inspiration directly from Blickling’s books to shape his final design, he commented that he was *‘continuing what we started with “New Impressions”’*. [REDACTED], Crypt Gallery Curator, explains that *‘New Impressions’*, as the first ever graphic design show at the Gallery, *‘demonstrated audience appetite’* for such shows, *‘making it possible’* for the Crypt to commission its hugely successful graphic design exhibition, *Share* (2019), which showcased *‘5 internationally-renowned design agencies’* (including North) for the first time since some of them exhibited at the Barbican Gallery in 2004. *‘[I]t was extraordinary for the Crypt Gallery to be able to bring together design work of that calibre in our region’*, [REDACTED] concludes (5.5).

Using Norfolk’s Manuscripts to ‘enhance and invigorate’ Teaching in Key Norwich Schools. While Norfolk’s heritage institutions and creative industries were benefiting from Roebuck’s

research on learned printed books, Woodcock was extending the scope of the UTA project by using his research on Norfolk's archival documents to shape curriculum development in Norwich's schools (2018-20). In collaboration with [REDACTED], founder of Curious Spark Ltd – a company which works with schools and communities to develop cultural heritage projects – alongside the Forum Trust, Woodcock developed an educational pack, 'Putting on a Pageant' (PoP). This allows primary school children to explore the records of Elizabeth I's 1578 visit to Norwich (3.2) in an accessible and exciting format, providing a new resource to teach core subjects and skills in National Curriculum Key Stages 1 and 2. The pack was launched at Charles Darwin Primary, a new school which had been opened only in September 2016 with an above-regional-average percentage of students on free school meals. PoP helped this new school situate themselves within Norwich's heritage by giving them *'something to hook their local history curriculum on to'*, as [REDACTED] explains. The teachers *'loved the story'* of Elizabeth's progress, she goes on, and immediately *'saw the potential of the visual and dramatic nature of getting children's imaginations going'*. The pack was then rolled out to c.100 Year 4 students at Avenue Junior School, enabling teachers to synthesise teaching of local history and literacy. Teachers testified to the *'immersive'* value of using drama to *'enhance and invigorate our existing English teaching'* at this more established school, while a workshop based on PoP for all the teachers and teaching assistants at the school *'gave them a lot of confidence'* as they developed *'this unique, new way of teaching two subjects'* (5.6).

'UTA is leading the way': Building Digital Resilience during COVID-19. Before COVID-19, the national significance of UTA's project had been recognised. Its collaboration with NLIS was highlighted in Arts Council research as one of three leading exemplars of collaboration between universities and public libraries nationally (5.7), as a result of which UTA was asked to share its *'learning with a wider public library audience'* at a Carnegie UK Trust 'Engaging Libraries' event (November 2019). When COVID-19 paused all in-person activities at its partner institutions, UTA launched a new digital resource, ['Discover Historic Books'](#), using Roebuck's research insights to present key learned books from each partner's collection to the public with a uniquely immersive user interface. The website had 8000 visits from c.5600 individuals globally from July to December 2020 and was the subject of *Fine Books & Collections'* most-read article in 2020, with over 20,000 readers (5.8). It led to a new partnership with Northumberland Libraries and Archives (Northumberland County Council), highlights of whose 18th- and 19th-century books were added to the site in December 2020 (5.9), confirming the NLIS's prediction that the UTA project *'has laid a template for other public libraries in the country to follow'* (5.1). NLIS stated that the site allowed them to *'increase digital adaptability and resilience'* and keep connected to their users during COVID-19, e.g. through digital events for Heritage Open Days 2020 (5.1). *'At a time when the entire cultural/heritage sector is desperately seeking virtual avenues to best share information and collections with the research community and general public'*, the National Curator of NT's Libraries concluded, *'UTA is leading the way'* (5.3).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Testimonial of Head of Libraries and Information, Norfolk County Council (2020), and other interviews/emails from NLIS staff.
- 5.2 Analysis of NLIS Events' Visitor Numbers / Feedback (2017-19).
- 5.3 Statement from National Curator, Libraries, National Trust (2020).
- 5.4 Testimonial of General Manager, Blickling Estate, National Trust & Visitor/Volunteer Feedback (2018-20).
- 5.5 Feedback from Graphic Designers on 'New Impressions' project.
- 5.6 Interview with Director of Curious Spark, 2021 and Report on PoP (2020).
- 5.7 Katie Pekacar, 'The potential of library-university partnerships' (Arts Council England).
- 5.8 Alex Johnson, 'Discover the UK's Historic Books' and evidence of readership.
- 5.9 Statement from Head of Archives, Northumberland Archives, Northumberland.