

<b>Institution:</b> Lancaster University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27, English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Transforming Public Understanding of Women Dramatists in Shakespeare's Time		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2000 to 2020		
<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>
Alison Findlay	Professor	September 1995 to present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> January 2014 to December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Professor Findlay's research has changed public understandings of drama by rehearsing and staging Lady Mary Wroth's <i>Love's Victory</i> (c.1614-19) at her ancestral home of Penshurst Place in Kent. This innovative form of literary tourism has revealed a lost theatre history, showing that women as well as men wrote performable plays in the age of Shakespeare. Findlay also deepened the public's engagement with Penshurst Place as home to the Sidney family of writers, leading to the creation of a 25-year strategy to exploit its literary heritage. Over 2,800 people from 62 different countries have engaged directly with the research through participation in rehearsals, workshops, talks, performances, an art exhibition, adult learning and online courses. Findlay's research has reached nearly 5 million people through media discussion and debate.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p><u>Challenging the concept of 'closet drama'</u></p> <p>Over the past 25 years, Findlay has challenged the accepted view that women did not write plays or perform in them before 1660 because of their exclusion from the professional theatres. Findlay has radically changed critical understanding of female dramatists of Shakespeare's age through textual, critical and practice-based research. In a seminal work <i>Women and Dramatic Production 1550-1700</i> (2000), Findlay, Hodgson-Wright and Williams overturned a longstanding critical definition of early English women's plays as 'closet drama' (supposedly not intended for performance, never performed, and therefore unperformable). Findlay went on to challenge perceptions by showing how household performances of women's drama played out the politics of gender in family dynasties and in the nation. Her 2015 article on Jane Lumley's translation of Euripides' <i>Iphigenia at Aulis</i> [R1] – the earliest known play by an Englishwoman – furthered understanding of the historical resonances of the play (connected to the execution of Lady Jane Grey) and showed how it resonated emotionally in 2014 for performers and spectators remembering sacrifices at the centenary of the First World War. Findlay's research led an all-female production by Rose Company Theatre (of which she is dramaturg) which toured to the North West, Cambridge and London and was filmed in 2014. By constructing speculative and actual productions, Findlay's novel approach has recuperated the lost theatre history of early women's dramatic writing, including that of the Sidney women writers (Jane Lumley, Mary Sidney Herbert and Mary Wroth).</p> <p><u>The power of settings in performance</u></p> <p>Findlay's 2006 monograph <i>Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama</i> [R2] examined how women manipulated dramatic venues and settings to renegotiate their place in society. It broadened public understanding of Shakespearean theatre beyond the London playhouses, discussing the geography, architecture and culture of non-commercial theatre venues as well as the opportunities they offered female actors before 1660. She revealed how drama and site-specific live performance – in homes and gardens, in courts, convents and academies, and on city streets – had the potential to reshape conventional gender roles and challenge religious orthodoxies, political power at court and family relationships. In 2009, Findlay's article on home and memory [R3] illuminated the power of performance to revivify Mary Sidney-Herbert's family history by using architecture. She discussed two plays, Mary</p>		

Sidney-Herbert's translation *The Tragedy of Antony* (1591) and Lady Mary Wroth's pastoral tragicomedy *Love's Victory* (c.1617-21) to explore how drama, as a genre, provides unique opportunities for remaking home as a woman's space. Findlay revealed how the scripts creatively manipulate relationships between domestic venues and settings to reshape memories and promote alternative constructions of a woman's place. Later, in 2015, Findlay's research on Lady Mary Wroth's experiences of marriage and mourning and their representation in *Love's Victory* [R4] provided new understandings of the literary connections between the Sidney-Herbert family and Shakespeare.

#### The original manuscript of *Love's Victory*

Since 2014, Findlay has had exclusive access to the only complete manuscript of Wroth's *Love's Victory* in the world. It is held at Penshurst Place and is privately owned by the Viscount De L'Isle, a descendant of the Sidney coterie (Mary Wroth, born a Sidney, was Mary Sidney Herbert's niece). *Love's Victory* is the first known original comedy written by an English woman and Findlay's unique collaboration with Penshurst Place enabled her to scrutinise the site and manuscript. Subsequently, in 'Dramatizing Penshurst' (2016; a special issue of the *Sidney Journal* [R5]) Findlay revealed the hitherto neglected genre of drama as a crucial part of the Sidney writings. An AHRC 'Follow-on-Funding' grant in 2018 enabled Findlay to carry out further groundbreaking practice-based research on *Love's Victory*. Between 2018 and 2020 she collaborated with Brennan (Leeds University), the Viscount De L'Isle and his son, and the research culminated in the first fully annotated edition of the Penshurst Manuscript by Manchester University Press [R6]. Their work has revealed new evidence on the dating of the play; on how the Penshurst manuscript is probably a family copy written to promote Wroth's alliance with the Herberts; that the Huntington manuscript (in the public domain) is an incomplete working copy, probably a performance script; that the play advertises Wroth's controlling authorial hand as a dramatist. The research has changed established biographical readings of the play by showing how the script is a dramatic prism through which glimpses of real-life figures and events shift from moment to moment, creating sympathetic identifications across genders for Wroth, for members of her family who acted, watched or read it, and for modern readers and audiences.

### 3. References to the research

[R1] Alison Findlay, 'Reproducing *Iphigenia At Aulis*,' *Early Theatre*, 18:2 (2015), 133-48, ISSN 1206-9078. Article on 2013-14 Rose Theatre Company production of Lady Jane Lumley's *Iphigenia at Aulis* (c.1557). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.18.2.2553>. *Peer-reviewed journal*.

[R2] Alison Findlay, *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Held at HEI. *Peer-reviewed monograph*.

[R3] Alison Findlay, 'Dramatizing home and memory: Lady Mary Sidney and Lady Mary Wroth,' in *Home Cultures*, 6:2 (2009), 135-147. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174209X416562>. *Peer-reviewed item in international journal*.

[R4] Alison Findlay, 'Four Weddings, Two Funerals and Tragicomic Resurrection: *Love's Victory* and *Much Ado About Nothing*', in *Mary Wroth and Shakespeare*, ed. Paul Salzman and Marion Wynne-Davies (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 84-94. Held at HEI. *Peer-reviewed chapter*.

[R5] Alison Findlay, *Sidney Journal* (University of Massachusetts Center for Renaissance Studies) 1480-0926 Special Issue: 'Dramatizing Penshurst' ed. Alison Findlay, 34:1 (Spring 2016), with 'Preface' i-vi and essay '*Love's Victory* in Production at Penshurst' 107-21. Journal Published by the International Sidney Society (indexed in MLA International Bibliographies). Held at HEI. *Peer-reviewed special edition*.

[R6] Alison Findlay, Philip Sidney and Michael Brennan, Lady Mary Wroth, *Love's Victory* ed. Alison Findlay (80%), Philip Sidney and Michael G. Brennan (20%), Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021). Delayed output, Covid-19 related. <https://manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/search-results/?keyword=Love%27s+victory>. *Peer-reviewed scholarly edition*.

#### 4. Details of the impact

In an increasingly gender-aware society, Findlay's work on female representation in early modern theatre has very contemporary resonances. Very few are aware of the importance of early women's dramatic works, or the nuance of its context, but Findlay has strived to build awareness of this over the years. With access to the only complete version of *Love's Victory*, the Penshurst Place site, and an AHRC 'Follow-on-Funding' grant\* a unique opportunity was created to engage beneficiaries as participants within the practice-based research. There has been a direct impact on the understanding and knowledge of over 2,800 people from diverse groups: local communities, international tourists, artists, performance practitioners, adult/lifelong learners, educators, guides at Penshurst Place and young learners; as well as indirect impact on many more, potentially millions, through traditional and social media engagement. (\*GBP99,993; rated as 'top priority for funding' by AHRC peer-reviewers).

#### **Bringing new audiences to the work of a C17th female dramatist and redressing the gender balance in early modern theatre**

Findlay's insights on ancestral country houses and gardens as playing spaces [R2] led actors, musicians, staff at Penshurst Place, general public as visitors and local residents to discover *Love's Victory* as a highly performable text that has tangible connections to its household context. Findlay's research informed two staged readings of *Love's Victory* in 2014 and 2018 to the general public visiting the house. After the first reading, many of the 120 spectators (who were regulars at Shakespeare's Globe) testified to this being their first experience of a female-authored play predating those of Aphra Behn. These changed public perceptions of Lady Mary Wroth, women dramatists more broadly, and Penshurst Place as a physical space and site of literary and dramatic activity. The *Independent*, citing Findlay, reported that the play would be 'participating in the making of stage history' (2014, [S1]).

Subsequently two AHRC-funded, fully costumed performances were staged at Penshurst Place in September 2018. Findlay shared her research findings through short introductory talks and written programme notes to capacity audiences of 100 (matinee) and 92 (evening) along with additional guests from the Sidney family and staff of Penshurst Place. A post-performance survey completed by 126 spectators showed that engagement with the research had resulted in 74% being made newly aware of Lady Mary Wroth; 75% said it had expanded their knowledge of theatre in the age of Shakespeare; 74% said it had changed their understanding of women's writing. One audience member said, 'it has made me aware of the criminal waste of women's creativity, enforced by the male-centred, professional stage' [S2]. The production attracted extensive attention from media and social media, with a combined reach of nearly 5 million people. Articles in the *Daily Telegraph* and *De Volkskrant* (September 2018, 1.47 million combined) and an interview on BBC R4's *Today programme* (September 2018, 3.8 million) made readers and listeners aware of Wroth's play and its family context. Locally, the *Kent and Sussex Courier* and *Kent Messenger* (September 2018, 92,000 combined) and BBC South East News cited Findlay's research [S1].

In May 2018, a group of local Canterbury residents (15 youths, the Marlowe Theatre Director and Liaison Officer) performed an interactive script-in-hand reading of *Love's Victory* in the medieval Hall of the Marlowe Kit (the outreach centre of the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury). The reading was directed by Findlay who shared her insights into female playwrights before and during the reading. Afterwards, the group testified to being newly aware of a changed gender-balance in their regional theatre history (previously dominated by Christopher Marlowe) [S3].

#### **Stimulating and enriching cultural tourism at Penshurst Place**

In addition to the staged readings and fully costumed performances, open rehearsals of *Love's Victory* in gardens and Hall at Penshurst in 2016 and 2018 created an entirely new immersive form of literary tourism at the site, bringing visitors and actors into the play as co-producers. Their comments fed into the rehearsals, which they found '...absolutely fascinating to be part of rediscovering this play'. Findlay's research on the play [R6] prompted an organic growth of understanding about *Love's Victory* in its Penshurst context through research-led discussions with actors and visitors during workshops and rehearsals. Locals said the experience 'left me uplifted' while visitors from the Netherlands, Australia

and California felt it 'bring[s] pages to life' [S2]. Both staff and visitors became aware of Penshurst's significance as home to a coterie of male and female writers (pre-dating the Wordsworths and the Shelleys by some 200 years), whose work transformed the literary landscape of early modern England.

Findlay's work on site embedded knowledge about Wroth and the family of writers for Penshurst's staff, allowing them to pass on to visitors their deeper understanding of the architecture, paintings and gardens of Penshurst: 'I never realised it was such a literary hub' [S2]. The official @PenshurstPlace account's tweets increased by 1.9% (versus an average of 1.15% for 2018 and 1.03% in 2017) due to *Love's Victory*, and were seen by 24,200 followers. On Facebook, posts reached 2,500 people, with over 100 engagements [S4]. Viscount de L'Isle and the Penshurst Estate confirmed that Findlay's research 'brought home the possibilities of engaging more with the Estate's literary heritage' and subsequently resulted in the inauguration of a 25-year strategy to exploit this. Their new approach to attracting visitors to the house and the gardens both on site and through publicity channels includes changes to the guidebook, 'with a view to driving visitor numbers and event income' [S4].

### **Increasing understanding, learning and skills in educational contexts**

Findlay's research on women's writing and theatre in Shakespeare's age has been made available through traditional and online routes, generating a variety of impacts by adding significantly to the content of teaching in schools, universities and adult learning.

Online learning: The research was made publicly available in 2016 through the web resource *Shakespeare and His Sisters* and has raised awareness of women's drama in its Shakespearean context [S5]. Users include schools, actors, schools and prospective visitors to Penshurst. The research also reached the public through a FutureLearn MOOC (massive online open course) [S6], having run twice since May 2020. Entitled 'Penshurst Place and the Sidney Family of Writers', the MOOC has increased awareness and understanding of the range of writings by Wroth's coterie for over 1,400 participants from 62 countries (including the UK, USA and Canada, France, Germany, Holland, Denmark, Japan, Australia and NZ, Russia, India, China, Africa and South America). Learners engaged in an ongoing dialogue about the live, site-specific work at Penshurst Place (exhibition, rehearsals and performances) by commenting within the MOOC and the 'Dramatizing Penshurst' section of the *Shakespeare and His Sisters* web resource. It broadened and deepened understanding of the topics 'Penshurst', 'The Sidneys and Love', 'Household Theatre' and 'The Sidneys and Religion', with 96% of learners stating they had gained new knowledge [S6]. Participants commented that they had 'a better understanding of the Sidney family and their influence on early English literature' and that 'this type of drama written by women for private performance in the household was completely new and I have really enjoyed it'. Learners commented that 'very imaginative' creative writing shared by the group enhanced appreciation of the 'very interesting and gripping plot'. One teacher said 'the course provided me with a fantastic backdrop against which to base some of my teaching this year on the Early Modern period' offering 'vital reaction and counter-commentary to the expected male strategies and performances of wooing' [S6].

Adult Education: Findlay changed the ways adult specialist interest groups understood their local history and environment by using innovative ways of transmitting the research to learners and specialists. Collaborating with Kent Adult Education service between 2016 and 2018, online and in person, she discussed her research with tutors who then drew on the published and in-progress research to redesign their classes for over 60 students [S5]. Their enhanced understanding and learning materials enabled learners to engage fully in the team's production of *Love's Victory* by creating artworks which reflected their deeper understandings of painting, art history, botanical illustration, collage and calligraphy, influenced by the work of Wroth. The artworks were exhibited in the Garden Restaurant at Penshurst Place throughout September 2018, enabling further reach to local audiences, and are now exhibited electronically on the *Shakespeare and His Sisters* web resource [S5]. Adult students of calligraphy employed their new understanding by creating pages for a 'Book of Fortunes', a crucial prop which featured prominently in the 2018 productions.

Members of the Cinq Ports Scribes (6 expert calligraphers) drew on new understandings of Wroth's love sonnets [R6, S5] to create a decorative 'Crown of Sonnets' for exhibition in the Baron's Hall during September 2018, further extending the reach to new audiences. Findlay presented her findings on manuscript writings to 12 archivists and specialist historians at the Kent History and Library Centre in October 2018, and curated an interactive exhibition of archival material relating to the Sidneys, Penshurst Place and Lady Rachel Fane (a contemporary of Wroth) there in November 2019 for 41 participants. The Chief Archivist remarked of the changed thinking around manuscripts: 'I can't remember [an exhibition] that so intimately shared and broke open the texts of original archival documents and manuscripts so effectively' [S7].

In universities: Undergraduates' understanding of the construction and performability of a play by a female contemporary of Shakespeare was enhanced by reading the play sequentially in parts and responding in creative/critical coursework. Students said studying *Love's Victory* 'allowed me to delve beyond plays that I would have expected to study on a literature course', and 'had a large impact not only on my analysis of other works, but also on my own creative writing' [S8].

In schools: Between 2017 and 2020 more than 450 pupils and teachers benefited from Findlay's research-informed workshops and talks on the Penshurst manuscript, bringing new feminist perspectives to texts determined by the National Curriculum. Teachers noted that Findlay's research 'will provide more content for A03 [GCSE English Literature] to teach and deliver to students – getting them to look at it from a different angle' [S9]. Her expertise and practice-based methods have also influenced 15 leading teachers of English through their engagement with the research during a leadership training day, an event hosted by the Prince's Trust in June 2019. Praising the interaction, participants will go on to cascade the ideas across schools in the North West, with one saying it was '...inspiring and empowering and gave me the courage to share and build into our curriculum' [S10]. Findlay's research has changed perceptions of gender, theatre, and the local environment amongst A-level students, who reported 'I like the way women are in a position of power' and 'It allowed us [two males], to have a new feminist perspective on the play [Othello] which was refreshing and useful' [S9]. A student from Canterbury realised 'there was more to Penshurst Place than I originally believed' and another was enabled to 'see common themes between Shakespeare and Wroth's work' [S9]. An example of Findlay's work on how to teach Shakespeare alongside women's drama was circulated to teachers in the BSA's *Teaching Shakespeare* 19 (summer 2020 edition, circulation approximately 1,000 people) [S11], further extending the reach of her research. At a time when an understanding of gender representation has become more relevant than ever, the adoption of Findlay's research has contributed, and continues to contribute, to that goal.

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

[S1] Selection of media reports and coverage (BBC Radio 4, Radio 5 Live, Newspapers).

[S2] Summary of responses from participants to the rehearsals and performances (2018).

[S3] Testimonial from former Head of Artistic Productions at the Marlowe Kit (2021).

[S4] Testimonial from project collaborator, Penshurst Place (2020).

[S5] Examples of co-creation of the production in calligraphy, art work, rehearsals are collected on the website <http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/shakespeare-and-his-sisters/>.

[S6] Feedback from learners participating in the 'Penshurst Place and the Sidney Family of Writers' MOOC (2020 to 2021).

[S7] Statement from the Chief Archivist, Kent History and Library Centre and participant feedback (2018).

[S8] Undergraduate Testimonials and examples of work (2018).

[S9] Summary of comments from written feedback forms completed by school pupils and teachers (2017 to 2020).

[S10] Letter from the Prince's Trust (2019).

[S11] Findlay, 'Performing Gender as Research and Teaching', *Teaching Shakespeare*, 19 [https://www.britishshakespeare.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/TeachingShakespeare19\\_AW\\_WEB\\_2.pdf](https://www.britishshakespeare.ws/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/TeachingShakespeare19_AW_WEB_2.pdf).