

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> Royal Holloway, University of London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 History		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Transforming strategy and curatorial practices in museums to diversify their audiences in a challenging heritage climate		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2010-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Professor Jane Hamlett	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor of Modern British History	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2008-present
Dr Hannah Platts	Senior Lecturer in Ancient History	2016-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015-2020		
<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>Research from the Centre for the Study of the Body and Material Culture has contributed to the transformation of curatorial practices and strategy in two small museums - the Museum of The Home (formerly the Geffrye Museum) and Fishbourne Roman Palace. Historical research on the experience and materiality of home environments informed a successful exhibition at Museum of The Home and a virtual reality digital model at Fishbourne Roman Palace. The exhibitions supported public engagement programmes and activities that brought thousands of visitors into the museums and achieved greater diversity for the heritage sites. Visitors and school groups benefitted from reshaped content and interpretation, new technologies, and new innovative facilities for visitor interaction. The research continues to influence museum staff by informing long-term content and display strategies and developing the use of audience-facing digital and immersive technologies. The application of this research enables museums to employ enhanced data analysis and gain deeper understanding of audience engagement and experience.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The impact case study is based on the research of Professor Jane Hamlett and Dr Hannah Platts, who co-direct the Centre for the Study of the Body and Material Culture in the School of Humanities at Royal Holloway. Both work on the history of the home and specialise in material culture and its relationship with physical and sensory experiences. Hamlett's first monograph focused on the material world of the nineteenth-century middle-class home and its relationship with identities and emotions. Her second major research project and book explored how ideas of home and domesticity were deployed in institutions in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Platts, meanwhile, has explored multisensory experiences of Roman houses to reshape understandings of the lived environment of ancient dwellings. Her latest monograph analyses the sensory world of Roman houses and the means by which bodily experience in the home was controlled by owners in order to demonstrate power (R3). While both scholars focus on different historical periods, their shared interests provide a useful thematic focus for the CSBMC, enabling RHUL to build research strength in this area. CSBMC research events and activities have typically involved long-term temporal comparisons e.g. recent round tables on Home and Work and Sensory Experience and have often focused on bringing together scholars working within the academy with curators and heritage professionals.</p> <p>Between 2010 and 2013, Hamlett led 'At Home in the Institution' a major ESRC-funded survey of the relationship between the home and institutional life in nineteenth-century England, including a new study of institutions for the poor in Victorian London, including hostels, common lodging houses and a range of institutional solutions offered by charitable and philanthropic providers Hamlett's 2015 monograph <i>At Home in the Institution</i> (R1) focused in depth on common lodging</p>		

houses and institutional lodging houses created for single working-class men. Hamlett's study is the first systematic exploration of London's common lodging houses through registration records and the census alongside court records and archaeology. It is also the first analysis of the material world of large-scale lodging houses. With Rebecca Preston, Hamlett also published a chapter focused on Rowton Houses which accommodated thousands of working men in the capital from the late nineteenth century (R2). Overall, the 'At Home in the Institution' Project found that while ideas of domesticity and home often influenced the construction of institutional environments for the poor, they produced a range of responses in their inmates – from appreciation to rejection. While not underplaying the economic deprivation experienced by the London poor, the project looked closely at the material world to explore how the poor and destitute expressed their feelings and agency. The project drew on institutional records, social surveys, contemporary press reports and photography, as well as census records, personal accounts and archaeology to create a new interpretation of these material worlds.

From 2015 Platts has investigated multisensory responses within the Roman home, as evidenced within both literary and archaeological remains. Her 2016 chapter examines the problems posed by the primacy of sight in traditional methods used to understand domestic space (R4). Building on this, her 2019 monograph explores the means by which ancient Roman residence owners sought to influence the corporeal experiences of inhabitants and visitors to their dwellings in order to display social standing amongst peers and rivals (R3). This work enabled Virtual Reality (VR) reconstruction of a dwelling at Silchester. The digital model built presents the first multisensory reconstruction of an historic dwelling together with the first Interactive Sensory Map, which plots sound and smell on the footprint of the residence. This allows users to develop a deeper understanding of the lived or 'bodily' experience of the home in antiquity. Platts' project demonstrated that use of smells and sound in the VR model substantially altered audiences' perceptions of the dwelling, helping them consider different types of residences in antiquity (in particular contrasting between those of the wealthy and the poor). The research also highlighted the crucial role that curators have in developing innovative strategies for engaging audiences in the multivocal stories of ancient domesticity and daily life. The digital content displayed at Fishbourne was shared widely with other institutions, including museum, heritage and architectural practitioners and researchers. Developing this research into multisensory experience, Platts' funded project (2019-2020) explores how immersive and digital technologies can influence audience experience of museum and heritage sites. Together these activities, examining multisensory experience and digital and immersive technologies and their impact on audience engagement were used to develop an international AHRC-funded network that has facilitated knowledge exchange between museums in the UK and US (G2).

### 3. References to the research

**R1. Monograph:** Jane Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution: Material Life in Asylums, Lodging Houses and Schools in Victorian and Edwardian England*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), chapters five and six. Available from HEI on request. Published by an academic press, peer reviewed.

*"Based on meticulous and wide-ranging research, this book opens up fresh approaches to the study of institutions by looking beyond rule books and the records of state agencies with their 'disciplinary' ambitions, to unearth complex experiences of life within institutions, skilfully blending analysis of material culture and space with critical interpretation of narratives of institutional life gleaned from biographies and popular representations."* – Professor Alastair Owens, Queen Mary, University of London, UK.

**R2. Chapter:** J. Hamlett and R. Preston, "'A Veritable Palace for the Hard-Working Labourer'?", in J. Hamlett et. al., *Residential Institutions, 1725-1970* (Pickering and Chatto, 2013), pp.93-107. Available from HEI on request. Published by an academic press, peer reviewed.

**R3. Monograph:** H. Platts, *Multisensory Experience in Ancient Rome: Power and Space in Roman Houses* (Bloomsbury Academic), 2019. Available from HEI on request. Published by an academic press, peer reviewed. *"[Platts] moves between interpretive and analytical processes and integrates artefactual data, the analysis of house remains and literary depictions to reconstruct possible multisensory experiences. She likewise taps into a rich body of emergent scholarship that shapes our understanding of 'multisensory living' in urban and domestic spaces. P's examination of multisensory experiences within the household is current and exciting,*

*contributing insightful interpretations of the domestic sphere to the field of sensory studies.” – Cristina Hernandez, University of Leicester.*

**R4. Chapter:** H. Platts, ‘Approaching a Lived Experience of Ancient Domestic Space?’ in *Spatial Cultures*, Eds: S. Griffiths and A. Lünen (Routledge, 2016) pp: 43-53. Available from HEI on request. Published by an academic press, peer reviewed.

#### **Grants and Funding**

**G1.** Jane Hamlett *At Home in the Institution: Asylum, School and Lodging House Interiors in South East England, 1845-1914* ESRC First Research Grant: GBP 229,791.56, 1/1/10-1/06/13.

**G2** Hannah Platts *Transatlantic Perspectives on the Use of Data Science in Museums and Heritage* AHRC International Network Grant: GBP 42, 286, 1/2/19 – 1/12/20

#### **4. Details of the impact**

Since 2015, Hamlett and Platts have used their research to work with museums to transform strategy and curatorial practices and to diversify audiences. Both collaborate with small museums – Museum of The Home and Fishbourne Roman Palace – to enhance visitor experience, learning and curatorial practices. At a time when all museums are under increasing financial pressure, ideas, content and interpretation provided by them have underpinned temporary exhibitions drawing in visitors and generating income. Their research has helped museums to explore creatively what they display to visitors and how it is exhibited, and to develop a clearer understanding of audience experience. Between 2016 and 2020 Platts and Hamlett have developed their relationships with both museums, contributing to longer-term strategy. Platts’ work has also formed the basis of an international network for digital knowledge-sharing across the museum and heritage sector.

#### **Homes of the Homeless 2015 – A New Direction for the Museum of The Home**

Working with Museum of The Home from 2013, Hamlett co-curated ‘Homes of the Homeless’ – an exhibition that explored the lives and places inhabited by the poor and homeless in Victorian London. It ran from March to July 2015. The central idea behind the exhibition – to tell a new story about the lives of the poor through their material environments – was developed from the research methods pioneered by Hamlett’s ESRC Project At Home in the Institution. ‘*Working with academics in this way was valuable because it allowed us to bring in more material across the museum – it provided content for the exhibition, but it was content that had been interpreted and worked with – so it was material that we could use with confidence.*’ Eleanor John, Director of Collections, Learning and Engagement (S1). The exhibition allowed the curatorial team to develop innovative new formats for visitor interaction. Visitors were invited to pick oakum (rough rope) and to try out a ‘coffin bed’ from a Victorian homeless shelter. “*Great exhibition, love the oakum being displayed have researched this but never actually felt what it’s like.*” Kirsty, visitor (S2). 7,133 came to the exhibition, generating approximately GBP35,665 (estimate based on GBP5 charge per ticket). 455 visitors commented in the visitors’ book, and overall satisfaction was very high with 93% of comments rating the exhibition positively (S2).

The exhibition marked a new direction for Museum of The Home, where the idea of homelessness had not been addressed before. ‘*Strategically we wanted to move beyond the middle-class home, which was the main focus of the museum’s permanent display – so the exhibition allowed us to extend our remit, not just in terms of understanding homelessness but in terms of rethinking what it meant.*’ Eleanor John (S1). The visitors’ comments document a strong positive response to the choice to represent the homeless. 72 comments explicitly mentioned homelessness and government, for example: “*A superb exhibition & counterpoint to the middling sort room exhibits – A reminder of why I am voting today.*” Jean, visitor (S2). It received positive coverage in the broadsheet press and was described as “*compelling*” by the art critic Richard Dorment in *The Telegraph* (circulation Jan. 2015 494,675) (S4). The exhibition was also used to produce a session for Key Stages 2 and 3 and a British Sign Language Tour.

Hamlett’s research underpinned a parallel project ‘What Makes a Home?’, run by Museum of The Home and New Horizon, a day centre in Kings Cross that works with young people who are vulnerable, homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This project drew on Hamlett’s research and utilised nineteenth and early twentieth-century texts and images selected by the At Home in the Institution project research team.

Museum of The Home staff, led by Young Person's Programme Manager Rachael Crofts, worked with 41 young people from New Horizon to explore images and testimony relating to homelessness in Victorian London. The young people created poetry, artwork and films for a parallel exhibition 'Home & Hope: Young people's experiences of homelessness today' (S4). This was displayed alongside 'Homes of the Homeless' in the museum's lower concourse. It is estimated that this was seen by approximately 60,000 visitors (S3). This was the first time the museum had co-curated an exhibition with a group of marginalised young people and it was also the first time that this group had visited the museum. *'For a group that I've never managed to get into the museum before, who felt that the museum had nothing to offer them, this is phenomenal and to me demonstrates how well given the chance and the space to speak, young people can talk about their personal experiences of both home and homelessness and it can create a powerfully emotive exhibition based on historical content that all the museum's visitors can enjoy.'* Rachael Crofts, Young Persons' Programme Manager (S1).

In July 2016 Museum of The Home received planning permission for the 'Unlocking the Geffrye' project – a GBP1,800,000 redevelopment of the museum and its site – including the creation of a new gallery themed around 'Home'. The work that Hamlett had carried out with the museum in creating 'Homes of the Homeless' made a substantial contribution to the design and choice of content for the new gallery. *'Working on Homes of the Homeless had an impact on planning and developing the new home gallery as it changed how people in the museum thought about home – that home is not a universal experience and the need to be aware of diversity. We ended up with a section showing the different range of circumstances in which people lived – acknowledging precarious situations and impermanent homes.'* Emma Hardy, Collections Manager (S1). Material from 'Homes of the Homeless' and 'Home and Hope' will appear in the new gallery. The content and approach pioneered in 'Homes of the Homeless' has continued to be shared across the sector – in 2018 Museum of The Home curator Hannah Fleming and Hamlett published an article reflecting on their collaborative relationship (S5).

### **Sensations of Roman Life 2016 – Transforming Visitor Experience at Fishbourne**

Sensations of Roman Life was an exhibition co-curated by Platts and Ewart (Lecturer in Digital Technologies in the Built Environment, *University of Reading*) at Fishbourne Roman Villa in Oct 2016. The exhibition presented a Virtual Reality model of a Roman villa reconstructing House 1 Insula IX from Silchester using excavation reports. As well as a visual reconstruction of the dwelling and its environs, the model was also programmed with sounds and smells that reflected the archaeological finds of daily life in and around the dwelling.

The experience was a key part of activities put on at Fishbourne. The BBC news reported on it positively: *"The experience is proving popular at Fishbourne Roman Palace near Chichester"* BBC South reporter (S8). It received approximately 1,400 visitors who paid to access the museum and see the VR model. 860 visitors recorded their responses through questionnaires and quizzes. Many emphasised how it made them think about how the model was *"very different from Fishbourne life"* e.g. Lucas, visitor (S7) and how it brought the experience to life for them, *"I actually felt as though I was walking through a Roman village with the sounds, sights and even smells"* Hannah, visitor (S8). Likewise impact of the smells and sounds in the model is demonstrated by the number of visitors who recorded a changed perception of the physical experience of life in the Roman home *"When you walked to where the cows and pigs were, you could smell a lot of poo"* unnamed visitor testimony recorded by BBC South (S8). Audience feedback demonstrated on average there was a 28% increase in understanding the olfactory experience and a 41% increase in understanding the auditory experience of life in the Roman house, which suggests audiences gained a substantially improved understanding of daily life in Roman Britain (S7).

Display of this model at Fishbourne Roman Palace played a key role in changing their public engagement and education programmes. This was the first VR display onsite, and it paved the way for a VR reconstruction of the palace's East Wing as part of a larger project called 'Skills for the Future'. *"Dr Platts' VR model...at Fishbourne emphasised to us how keen visitors were to be able to navigate digital models as they wished [and] highlight[ed] the value of digital recreations of highly fragmentary sites...we have now developed our own VR reconstruction of the Eastern Courtyard...[and] we are continuing to explore further possible uses of immersive technologies."* Rob Symmons, Fishbourne Roman Palace curator (S6).

**2017-2019 Informing Museum Practices**

From 2016, Hamlett and Platts continued to work with small museums, organising collaborative workshops with curators (including Jorvik, Science Museum) on re-creating sensory experiences in museums (2018) and understanding the use of domestic technologies (2019) for the home. The Centre for the Study of the Body and Material Culture has served as a platform for knowledge exchange on the use of digital and immersive technologies.

Platts 'collaboration with psychologists, electronic engineers, computer scientists, designers and museums has informed museums and heritage sites in how immersive technologies and multisensory experiences can increase audience engagement. Through workshops with museum partners Egham Museum, Royal Holloway Picture Gallery, Fishbourne Roman Palace and the Design Museum, heritage professionals and visitors have been encouraged to re-examine their perceptions of their engagement with the historic past. [text removed for publication] (S10).

In 2019 Platts drew on these activities to develop her AHRC International Network *Transatlantic Perspectives on the Use of Data Science in Museums and Heritage*. The new network shared knowledge with a new range of partners including Historic Royal Palaces, Colonial Williamsburg (Virginia, US), the Franklin Institute (Philadelphia, US), Sussex Past, the JORVIK Group, RHUL Picture Gallery and technology experts Mechdyne and Smartify. The way in which the network is improving curatorial practice is demonstrated by testimony from collaborators: [text removed for publication] The Franklin Institute (S9). This work into digital and immersive technologies has transformed policies at numerous sites around engaging with technological approaches to enhance curatorial strategies and practices: "*the implementation of new audience-facing digital technologies might give us enhanced understanding as to how our visitors engage with and respond to Fishbourne.... Importantly such insight does not just impact the day-to-day running and strategic planning...of Fishbourne but rather is of significant and on-going value to the practices of the other heritage sites and museums run by....SussexPast.*" Rob Symmons, Fishbourne Roman Palace curator (S6).

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

**S1** Testimony from former Museum of The Home/Geffrye\* Staff including Eleanor John, Emma Hardy and Rachael Crofts. \*The Museum rebranded as the Museum of The Home in 2020.

**S2** Visitor's Comments Book Report – Homes of the Homeless.

**S3** Extract from ACE Report for Geffrye Museum on 'Home and Hope'.

**S4** Richard Dorment, 'Homes of the Homeless – Geffrye Museum: Review,' *The Telegraph* 20 April 2015 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-reviews/11550299/Homes-of-the-Homeless-Geffrye-Museum-review-compelling.html>

**S5** Jane Hamlett and Hannah Fleming, 'Curating Homes of the Homeless', *Journal of Victorian Culture* (2018) 23:2, pp.207-219. Peer-reviewed article written by Hamlett and Fleming, curator from the Geffrye Museum, reflecting on the creation of the exhibition and its public reception.

**S6** Testimony from Fishbourne Roman Palace Curator Rob Symmons.

**S7** Visitor Feedback and Quiz Results Report – Sensations of Roman Life.

**S8** BBC South and RHUL's features on the Sensations of Roman Life Project.

**S9** Testimony from Network partners of the value and learning from Platts AHRC International UK-US Network on digital approaches and data science in museums.

**S10** Testimony from an attendee of the Wastelands event.