

Institution: University of Portsmouth		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 27: English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Reviving the Feminist History of Portsmouth		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2018		
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 Laurel Forster Dr Sue Bruley	Reader in Cultural History Reader in Modern History (Retired)	01/01/2005 - date 01/09/1988 - 31/08/2019
Period when the claimed impact occurred: July 2014 - Oct 2020 (and projects ongoing)		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact <p>The city of Portsmouth, dominated by its naval dockyard, has traditionally celebrated and commemorated the achievements of men, and was considered little touched by feminism. However, the research expertise of Dr Sue Bruley and Dr Laurel Forster, in collaboration with local community groups, has led to the rediscovery of a history of feminist campaigning since the 1960s. With Heritage Lottery Fund support, this project has had a positive impact upon its participants, the local community and a global audience. The women whose stories are now preserved forever have experienced validation and increased self-esteem. Wider groups who attended events and participated in the project now have a changed and better-informed understanding of this history. And a growing global audience, increasingly able to access this new record through archive availability and online media, is being educated and inspired to action by the potential power of ordinary women's life narratives and grassroots activism.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>The academic expertise of Bruley and Forster, demonstrated in research over a period of twenty years on British social and media narratives, has contributed to a substantial revision of the history of the British Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). Earlier accounts of the WLM tended to address the well-known feminists of the movement, and with a focus upon London-centric activism. This newly-uncovered feminist history redresses that balance and draws attention to the second-wave activism of local women, facing local issues.</p> <p>Bruley's research has developed over an extensive career, initially focussed upon women's history of the first half of the twentieth century, where it addressed topics including women's life-narration in the Second World War, and the contested history of labour and community activism in the mining towns of South Wales. Her later work (2013-2017) on second-wave feminism has brought to attention ways in which feminism was present and embedded in towns across the United Kingdom (R5). Bruley has worked with local networks and archives to highlight regional feminist communities in English towns, and her research offers a new understanding of the negotiations necessary for localised feminist activism (R2). As part of her research, Bruley has formed a ground-breaking analysis of a dispersed feminism as a political phenomenon of the later twentieth century, and the significance of consciousness-raising as an important contributing factor in this feminist process (R1). Throughout this work, Bruley's use of oral-history methodology has brought to light information and understandings that would otherwise have been hidden from conventional textual research.</p> <p>Forster's research specialism in feminist media histories, women's writing and narratives, and the representation of everyday women in the media, has brought both specific and wider context to the project (R6). Her 2015 writings on periodicals and broadcast magazines explore diverse implications and influences of women's media (R3). In particular, her research into the reporting of WLM activism enabled the project to identify national campaigns and issues, and to transpose these onto a local investigation. Her interviews and research concerning a local Southern Television programme, <i>Houseparty</i>, which facilitated women's conversation, and interests, brought understanding of regionality and individual feminisms to the project (R4).</p> <p>As feminist scholars, Bruley and Forster are committed to the necessary and productive overlap of academic and community approaches to history. Thus their first engagement with the specific story of Portsmouth and the WLM was a 2014 Portsmouth University conference: 'Situating</p>		

Women's Liberation: Historicising a Movement', convened by Bruley with Forster and Professor June Purvis. This built upon the three organisers' substantial research on the first and second 'waves' of feminism and their associations with the national Women's History Network. The conference welcomed local women as well as expert academic speakers. Non-academics were encouraged to address the whole conference and talk about their personal engagement with female politics. The academic papers were published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Women's History Review (WHR)*, and this special edition has become a standard resource, with subsequent republication as hardback book (Routledge, 2018), paperback, and kindle versions (December 2020). Significant community enthusiasm for a local history project, focussed upon Portsmouth women, was evident from the conference. This began a process of structured collaboration, detailed in Section 4, which would become the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)-supported project (G1).

3. References to the research

(R1) **Bruley, S.** (2013). Consciousness-Raising in Clapham; Women's Liberation as 'Lived Experience' in South London in the 1970s. *Women's History Review* 22(5), 717-738. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2013.769378>

(R2) **Bruley, S.** (2017). "It didn't just come out of nowhere did it?": The origins of the women's liberation movement in 1960s Britain. *Oral History* 45(1) 67-78. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26382544>

(R3) **Forster, L.** (2015). *Magazine Movements: Women's Culture, Feminisms and Media Form*. Bloomsbury, London.

(R4) **Forster, L.** (2014). 'Everything that makes up a Woman's Life': Feminism and Femininity in *Houseparty*. *Critical Studies in Television* 9(2), 94-116. <https://doi.org/10.7227/CST.9.2.6>

(R5) **Bruley, S.** (2016). Women's Liberation at the Grass Roots: a view from some English Towns, c.1968-1990. *Women's History Review* 25(5), 723-740. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2015.1132874>

(R6) **Forster, L.** (2016). Spreading the Word: Feminist print cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement. *Women's History Review* 25(5), 812-831. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2015.1132878>

Statement in support of underpinning research quality

Bruley and Forster have consistently published with prestigious publishers and in top quality journals, *Women's History Review* (journal of conference special issue) and *Critical Studies in Television* are the leading journals in their fields. Over Bruley's academic career, her work has achieved the respect of her peers and has been noted for its considered connections between "personal narratives" and "social distress" (*Journal of British Studies*), and containing a "Wealth of detail" (*History Today*).

(G1) **Bruley, S., Forster, L. & Jonsson, T.** *Women's Community Activism. The hidden heritage of a naval town*. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, September 2018-November 2019, (GBP76,000).

4. Details of the impact

The impact of Bruley and Forster's findings began with the community and activist response generated by the 2014 conference. Bruley and Forster guided and encouraged participation in a 'Women's Liberation Witness Day' (June 2015), and five further 'Witness' meetings (2015-2017), which brought together local ex-activists to talk about their experiences in a public forum. As women gave voice to their personal testimonies, other long-forgotten activists and fellow female campaigners were remembered. Word of mouth through Portsmouth's tight-knit community, led to a proliferation of individuals, campaign leaders and supporters of marginalised groups to be interviewed.

Bruley and Forster considered these early testimonials when preparing the HLF bid. Based on the findings of their own research, they devised a way of transposing individual life stories onto more general struggles women faced living and working in a naval city, and then onto even broader

national WLM concerns. They formed partnerships with the city's history centre, schools, community centres, and the University of the Third Age (U3A) Portsdown branch, to continue the work. Bruley and Forster sought advice from other academics and extended the reach of the project. They contacted women's ethnic minority groups in the city, involved the local council, reached out to a range of women's campaigning groups (concerned with issues from pensions to plastics) and harnessed the strong city interest in local history.

The successful HLF grant bid (G1, awarded December 2017, GBP76,000) was entirely dependent on the convincing combination of Bruley and Forster's initial research findings, their joint expertise, and the array of groups they had brought together to endorse its aims. The grant supported a committee of academics and local partners, and enabled a permanent voice to be given to female activists, creating an official record of the pioneering work of local women. Moreover, this project piloted a new methodology for engaging marginalised and underrepresented women's groups and local female activists. This involved training over 20 younger volunteers in interview techniques and Oral History practice, enabling them to interview nearly 60 older feminists, activists and women's groups. This brought about cross-generational and cross-cultural understanding. Additionally, volunteers from the U3A assisted with archiving for the City's History Centre. Such cascading of skills involved public bodies, local groups and interested individuals.

The project, with over 20 public talks, training events, community-centre visits and touring exhibitions, has rekindled interest in, and reawakened awareness of, a feminist history of late-twentieth-century Portsmouth. Lectures, 'memory days', touring exhibitions of the 'talking table', and a 'teachers' pack', enabled local communities to hear these new narratives. This project has catalysed a shift in understanding and placed women's pioneering action at the forefront of Portsmouth's history. Not only has the lived experience of the city's women been retrieved from the shadow of a male-dominated conventional history, but further layers have been added to it, revealing a multi-cultural history, paving the way for current generations to see their home city in a new, more inspiring light.

Increasing Awareness of Women's Activism

The general programme of public lectures and informal events at various city venues, attracted audiences of up to 150, included women and men, age ranges of 8 to 80, with professional and amateur interest in local history. Attendees reported learning *"A huge amount"* [text removed for publication], with some expressing an intention to continue the work: *"I'll definitely be following up with some research of my own"*. Older attendees, such as [text removed for publication], appreciated the recovered narratives which *"brought back many memories and changes in society during my life [...] Children need to know this social history"*. These events also inspired future women's activism, as teenager [text removed for publication] said: *"The lecture was extremely inspirational as it teaches women to stand up for their rights"* (S6).

[Text removed for publication], a local councillor, said: *"The booklet taught me incredible amounts. Also the diverse range of women. [...] The story about CND being a major presence in Pompey blew my mind."* Cross-generational education of women's activism was evidenced, as [text removed for publication] explained how: *"My daughter (11) and son (18) [...] were really impacted by all the stories and what women have done to improve life in our city. And impacted by CND and Mums being arrested!!"* Augmented perceptions of Portsmouth women's contributions are now a valued cultural history. [Text removed for publication] noted: *"I found it both interesting and reassuring to hear of the project and its importance to those taking part [...] it should be a more important part of Pompey history [...] at the City Museum or a display at the Guildhall or other public places"* (S6).

Enhancing Skills and Dialogue in Gathering Women's Narratives

As part of the Project methodology, younger women were trained to interview older women. As well as providing concrete upskilling for this group, it also promoted intergenerational dialogue, and delivered a stimulus to further reflection. [Text removed for publication] commented: *"It's a really interesting project and I think that it's something necessary for every community"* (S6). All learnt new interviewing techniques, [text removed for publication] said, *"I'm excited about learning new skills"*, and went on to attend the oral training and videoing skills courses too (S6). Indrani

Krishan was impressed by the achievements of women: *"Each of them has different abilities, and they have accomplished their dream and stand as a woman"* and was pleased to extend her skillset: *"this event increases my knowledge of qualitative methods. As a PhD research student, I have learnt the techniques to conduct the focus group discussion, and it benefits me in the near future"* (S5).

Augmenting Women's Self-esteem and Social Acknowledgement

It was important to capture and record stories of women's activism before these first-hand accounts were lost forever. Acknowledging women's rights campaigning and battles for local improvements has elevated the self-esteem of older women, whose work traditionally took second place to men's. Interviewee Pat Smith reflected upon her newly-awoken comprehension of her working life in the context of the national picture of women battling sex discrimination in the workplace: *"This project [...] had a profound impact on me, a realisation of how far I have come personally and professionally since I first started work in 1977. [...] It has helped me to understand what discrimination means in the workplace and in life. It also made me feel very proud to be amongst other pioneering women, who lived in Portsmouth"* (S5). The Project has had a broader impact too, as dispersed families have now understood, with great pride, the role played by their older female relatives. [Text removed for publication] noted: *"It has been great for my family (living in different continents) to celebrate our Mum's story"* (S6). Such pride was especially clear in the 'Testimonial Video', which articulates how the Project empowered its participants (S2).

Interviewees have achieved recognition through autobiographical testimonies and understanding of their position in society. Rosy Bremer, a 1980s Greenham common activist, observed: *"the only other time I have spoken about the work I did [...] was when I was being prosecuted and sent to prison. [...] I would be happy to think that children growing up in Portsmouth might be able to learn about some of the reasons people might oppose the military's actions against people in other countries. These opinions are little represented in the city. [...] The project definitely benefited me by benefiting the community and the city in which I live. Stories which were previously known to only a few women now have a greater chance of being told and being heard"* (S5).

Extending Awareness of Ethnic Diversity

An unexpected but very welcome outcome of the project has been a hugely positive impact upon a number of minority groups in the Portsmouth area, including Chinese wives and Bangladeshi daughters (S4). The diversity of women's lives and contributions in Portsmouth has achieved greater visibility, significance and acknowledgement. The testimony of Marie Costa, of the Nigerian Ebo people, chair of the Portsmouth African Women's Forum, demonstrates how vital the collaborative nature of the project was to achieving this: *"At first, we thought that this project has 'nothing' for us [...] However, as the meetings continued over the two years, we realised that perhaps we had a contribution to make to the project as we have been trying to re-shape Portsmouth to include women from Africa who [...] have enriched Portsmouth's social, economic and cultural life."* By contributing their life narratives, women from the African Women's Forum gained a sense of belonging: *"With encouragement from the leaders of the Hidden Histories project, we began to feel part of it, enjoying the processes involved. We have grown in confidence, interacting with other women outside our comfort zone, learning their own achievements as well as verbalising our thoughts. Being recorded for the project, has made AWF members feel important and part of Portsmouth's history."*

Like other women, Marie Costa understands how the Project has enhanced the profile and standing of women in Portsmouth: *"I could not have envisaged the ultimate result and benefits of the project to members of African Women's Forum – being involved in academic research, inclusion in the booklet written about Portsmouth's Hidden History' of activists women, names on plaque mounted in the centre of Portsmouth for posterity and the continuing building of positive relationship with our local University and City which we have come to call 'Home'. We are thrilled [...]"* (S5). The significance of this engagement was marked by the unveiling of a Project-inspired artwork celebrating participants' autobiographies at the multicultural women's group, 'Chat over Chai' on International Women's Day, when attendees took pleasure in *"seeing their names and trying to find words they had used in their interviews"* (S3).

Contributing to Wider Understanding of Women's Activism

This project has catalysed a shift in understanding and placed women's pioneering action at the forefront of Portsmouth history. The project has impacted wider audiences of internationally-recognised museums and educational charities. The Imperial War Museum's 'Connecting, Sharing, Learning' project will access the interviews to engage audiences aged over 70 who have been restricted by COVID (S8). The national women's-rights charity, FiLiA, was drawn to engage with the Portsmouth example through the project's outcomes, and is now planning to hold its national conference in Portsmouth (October 2021): *"We were especially interested and excited to promote the archive. To have this accessible resource available to the public is a huge benefit to women and I'm sure will be used by women from a variety of backgrounds"* (S10). In October 2020 they recorded a podcast about the Project: *"Our Podcasts are [...] accessed by women across the globe. We typically get over 6,000 people accessing them [...] The connections made between women and the learning from the podcasts is [...] a way for Women's voices to be heard. Our supporters tell us this [...] builds their knowledge and confidence in Women's issues, history and rights"* (S10).

Creating Enduring Memory

Art remains an important form of feminist expression. Mandy Webb, activist and textile artist, was inspired to create a "Wall of Words": *"As many of these women have protested at some time in their lives, I imagine they have made placards, they may even have painted graffiti, so I decided to put their own words in this style on the wall surrounding the plaque"* (S3). This was developed as a commemorative poster and reproduced in the project booklet (S4). In recognition of the project's significance to the city, Portsmouth City Council is sponsoring a permanent bronze, inspired by Webb's artwork, in the Guildhall Square as a lasting legacy.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- (S1) Slides and scripts from public lectures, held at UoP and city libraries 2019.
- (S2) Testimonial Video of participants describing how much the project meant to them 2019.
- (S3) Mandy Webb's artwork, poster.
- (S4) Project booklet and commemorative poster as posted to all participants.
- (S5) Testimonial Letters received, including Marie Costa, Pat Smith, Rosy Bremer etc 2020.
- (S6) Feedback forms from all events and talks held around the city.
- (S7) Final project report written for the Heritage Lottery Fund 24/03/2020.
- (S8) Statements relating to the Imperial War Museum project 13/01/2021.
- (S9) Media reports and statistics 2018.
- (S10) FiLiA podcast and letter (see <https://filia.org.uk/about-the-conference>) 23/11/2020.