


<b>Institution:</b> University of Huddersfield		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Brontë Stones Project: Enhancing cultural participation and creativity through the Literary Landscape		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2013-2020		
<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>
Michael Stewart	Reader in Creative Writing	2007-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No</b>		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>The Brontë Stones project was designed to respond to the need for greater opportunities for cultural and creative participation by local and international communities in an area with pockets of high economic and cultural deprivation. In order to address this need, the project has produced unique and enduring cultural artefacts—the Brontë Stones engraved with poetry by four leading women writers and placed in the Yorkshire landscape of the Brontës [5.1, pp. 1-6]. The project has increased local engagement with the landscape, regenerated and preserved ancient public rights of ways, and provided an important stimulus to cultural tourism, contributing to the quality of the tourist experience. The project is underpinned directly by Dr Michael Stewart's field research findings that direct experience of the landscape, in relation to literary texts, can enhance creativity.</p>		
		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Dr Michael's Stewart's creative practice-led research as well as his literary critical research shares our understanding of the creative potential found in physical engagement with the landscape. This conviction informed the methodology he employed in his research in writing his novel <i>Ill Will</i> [3.1] carried out between 2014 and 2016. This research blends critical and historical research with field research. The connection between the work of the Brontës and the West Yorkshire landscape has typically been explored through a critical lens only. Stewart's field research sought to test assumptions supporting this body of literary criticism. This field research included Stewart walking the likely path Emily Brontë imagined Mr Earnshaw taking from Wuthering Heights to Liverpool over a three-day period in 2016. He describes this process in an interview with Catherine Clements, <i>Historia Magazine</i>, 'I did it in character, sort of method research'. He wrote as he walked 'so in a very direct way it [walking in the landscape] affected the writing. When you're walking through a landscape like Yorkshire, you're walking through history' and forming a connection to the past through landscape, 'which is a great resource for a writer' [5.7, p. 15]. He also undertook detailed observations of the moors over two years, noting the effects of weather, season, lighting, topography and flora/fauna of the region as well as the remnants of the industrial past and present-day poverty and racial diversity. This methodology informed the writing of the novel, <i>Ill Will</i> [3.1], and his critical essays 'Heathcliff, Race, and Adam Low's Documentary, <i>A Regular Black: The Hidden Wuthering Heights</i> [3.2] and 'Boiled Milk: Anne Brontë's Final Journey' [3.3]. Marta Bernabeu (2020) believes 'The novelty of this research lies primarily in the attempt to explore the idea of pain as a place to gather affective agency' through disturbing 'other characters affective and physical spaces'. Stewart's methodology</p>		

according to Bernabeu, creates a text where ‘the reader is witness to his affective and physical journey in *III Will*’ (pp. 102, 112).

These research findings, tested and explored again in *Boiled Milk: Anne Brontë’s Final Journey*, [3.3] make clear the importance of direct personal experience in the landscape to the critical understanding of and creative response to the Brontës’ novels and poetry. It shows how landscape can inspire the creative process and release the creative potential in individuals, and how this can promote the physical and mental health of local communities, as well as enhancing the wider international cultural community. The affective and physical journey that Dr Stewart creates in *III Will* [3.1] and *Boiled Milk* [3.3] was a direct result of his field and creative practice research. This suggested to him that providing an opportunity for others to explore the landscape of the Brontës, and engage with the creative responses of others: the poetry, the physical stones, engraving style and placement, and the narrative maps, would provide a potent stimulus for a number of impacts. These findings underpin Stewart’s design of the Brontë Stones project in 2016.

### 3. References to the research

1. Michael Stewart, [\*III Will: The Untold Story of Heathcliff\*](#) (London: HarperCollins, 2018).

Indicators of 2\*+ quality: Peer reviewed; positive post publication reviews and features in quality journals, including: *Independent* (31 March 2018), *Times Literary Supplement* (27 July 2018) and *New York Post* (Book of the Week, 26 January 2019). Critical exploration of *III Will* by M. Bernabeu, ‘Transgressing Boundaries’, *Oxford Research in English*, 2020, pp. 99-115, who writes, ‘*III Will* thus makes a significant contribution to the fields of Victorian, neo-Victorian and Brontë Studies’ (p. 102). [can be supplied on request]

2. Michael Stewart, [\*Heathcliff, Race, and Adam Low’s Documentary, A Regular Black: The Hidden Wuthering Heights\*](#)’ (with Claire O’Callaghan), *Brontë Studies*, 45.2 (2020). Indicators of 2\*+ quality: Peer-reviewed; Leading international journal for the study of the work of the Brontës, established 1895.

3. Michael Stewart, [\*Boiled Milk: Anne Brontë’s Final Journey\*](#) (Huddersfield University Press, 2020), a special collectors’ edition booklet, to celebrate the birth of Anne Brontë. This piece will also be published in *Walking the Invisible: The Brontës’ Lives and Landscapes, Then and Now* (HarperCollins, 2021) Indicators of 2\*+ quality: academic peer review by HarperCollins and Huddersfield University Press.

### 4. Details of the impact

The Brontë Stones Project, through the production of unique cultural artefacts, has achieved three key impacts:

1. **Regeneration and preservation of ancient public right of ways.**
2. **Engaging marginalised and under-engaged audiences in increased creativity and cultural participation.**
3. **Developing stimuli to cultural tourism and contributing to the quality of the tourist experience.**

In 2015 Michael Stewart approached the Arts Council for funding for the Brontë Stones Project. In their response it was suggested that this project could enhance the larger Bradford Literature Festival grant application for support for the 2017 and 2018 festivals. Stewart’s Brontë Stones Project was subsequently included in the Brontë Strand of this successful Arts Council Grant, receiving £28,000 from this funder. Other funding for the Brontë Stones project was secured from the University of Huddersfield (£1,500), Bradford County Council (£5,000), the Brontë Parsonage (£1,000), and Provident Financial Group (£6,000). Its launch was the largest event of the 2018 Bradford Literature Festival, drawing in an audience of over 300 [5.2; 5.4; 5.6; 5.7]

The project features the four Brontë Stones, placed along a route beginning at the Brontë Birthplace, Thornton, West Yorkshire and ending at the Brontë Parsonage, Haworth. The four stones celebrate the work and vision of the Brontë sisters as impacted by the landscape. Dr Stewart commissioned four original poems by recognised international writers: Carol Ann Duffy (Charlotte Stone), Jackie Kay (Anne Stone), Jeanette Winterson (Three Sisters Stone), and Kate Bush (Emily Stone) [5.1]. The remit he gave to these poets in 2016 was based on his own research findings that direct engagement with the landscape was a powerful stimulus to creativity. Dr. Stewart asked these writers to engage creatively with the work of the Brontës

within the landscape. Bush commented that the stones, set 'in the enigmatic landscape where they lived and worked is a striking idea' [5.7, p. 6]. Jackie Kay commented she 'found the experience of working on the Stones project inspiring'. Kay explained that the Brontë Stones project, 'made me reimagine life for the Brontës and think of their relationship to the land ...it seemed fitting then that hers [Anne's] was the last stone to be put into the landscape!' [5.8]

After the commissioned poetry was submitted, Michael Stewart, drawing on his research in the Brontë landscape, then worked alongside the engraver Pip Hall in 2017-2018, to choose the most suitable stones, design the typeface and layout, and to site the stones in the landscape. The placement took into consideration accessibility, and Stewart designed a series of four walks, in collaboration with the Yorkshire cartographer Christopher Goddard, to enable the public to access the Brontë Stones and experience the poetry within the dramatic setting of the Yorkshire countryside. The maps feature both text and pen and ink drawings, putting the Brontë Stones in the context of ancient landscape features. The stones, the poetry, the trails and the maps were produced in response to the research findings from the underpinning research: that the experienced landscape can be a catalyst for creative output and provide a unique understanding of the process of artistic creation. [5.1, 5.7].

### **Impact 1: Regeneration, preservation and access to ancient public right of ways.**

The Brontë Stones trails utilise ancient public rights of way, identified by Stewart during his field research. Bradford City Councillor explains 'Prior to the project, some of these pathways were overgrown and inaccessible, and some of the stiles and gates were in disrepair'. These paths are now restored and fully accessible to local, national and international users. [5.2]. This regeneration of ancient rights of way, enhanced through the placement of the Brontë Stones, ensures they will be maintained and thus available for public use, including in creative engagement in projects like the '*Brontë Stones and Bradford Communities*' (see Impact 2). The Brontë Stones are now a part of the nation's cultural heritage. The director of the Bradford Literature Festival commented that 'It's a matter of great pride for us that the stones will stand in some of the most beautiful places in the county, bearing these moving, mysterious and playful literary works that the public can enjoy for years to come' [5.7, p. 7]

### **Impact 2: Engaging marginalised and under-engaged audiences in increased creativity and cultural participation**

The Brontë Stones trails have attracted participants from marginalised and under-engaged audiences. These trails border and at times traverse areas in the 10-25 percentile of the most economically deprived areas in the UK (UK Index of Multiple Deprivations). Stewart designed the *Brontë Stones Writing Challenge: Bradford Schools Writing Project*, drawing upon his research findings that direct personal experience in the landscape can provide a catalyst for the creative process enhancing confidence through cultural participation. In this project Stewart partnered with *First Story*, an organization that provides high-quality creative writing opportunities for young people in low-income communities. Brontë Parsonage staff were also involved. The project was originally conceived of as of a series of organized and guided walks on the Brontë Stones Trails, visits to the Brontë Parsonage and bespoke talks. All costs for participation were to be covered by the University of Huddersfield, including hiking equipment appropriate for the terrain, which was to be gifted to the student participants to encourage their continued engagement with the landscape. First Story participation was to be funded through the Arts Council and other funding and a well-known writer would be commissioned to work with the students on this project. The walks were to be followed up by writer / mentors working with the six schools to generate creative writing outputs. An orientation walk led by Michael Stewart and six teachers from the participating schools was completed, and the walks with the students and the follow up creative writing sessions were scheduled. At this point the U.K. was placed in lockdown by the Covid Pandemic and these planned activities could not be undertaken [5.3]. Instead the project was redesigned for virtual delivery. A film curating a walk along the Brontë Stones trail has been produced and additional drone footage of the stones and the surrounding landscape was made available on YouTube and Facebook [5.4]. These were used in place of the planned guided walks in the landscape. In December 2020, Twenty-five students from three Bradford area schools (University Academy Keithley, Co-op Academy Grange, Appleton Academy) produced poems inspired by the Brontë Stones, using the drone footage and the

poetry inscribed on the stones. The renowned rapper and playwright Testament was commissioned to work with the students and provide mentorship. The resulting 25 poems were entered into a poetry contest, as part of the project [5.1, pp. 21-45]. Student responses were positive, for example: 'I really enjoyed working on this project. It made me write in a different way'. 'I learned so much about the Brontë Sisters. It made them feel more real' [5.3]. Testament also created his own poem inspired by the Brontë Stones as part of the project which he performs in a short film. He describes the experience engaging with the Stones in the creation of poetry as 'profound'. The experience also gave him fresh insight into the Brontë's legacy. His poem powerfully depicts the 'collision between the contemporary and the historical' [5.1, p.9; 5.9]. His reading of this poem was viewed over 800 times on Facebook on the first day it was posted [5.3].

Visitors to the Brontë Stones Trail include those from 'BAME backgrounds, and socially deprived parts of Bradford, [who] have, as a result of this project, accessed the landscape for the first time' [5.2]. Bradford Council included the Brontë trails into their programme of twice monthly walks in order to involve the community in the health and wellbeing benefits of access to rural spaces [5.2]. Councillor Dunbar describes the way in which the Brontë Stones project has been important in delivering health benefits to the area: 'inactivity levels cost the local authority on average £24 million per year. Practical, accessible and engaging solutions such as the Brontë Stones project play a real part in turning this around' [5.2].

The placement of the Anne Stone in Parson's Field, adjacent to the Brontë Parsonage was chosen to make the landscape accessible to people with restricted mobility. An easy access path, and a bench situated next to the Anne Stone, enables those with restricted mobility to enjoy Kay's poem and the creative design of the stone, set within the dramatic landscape that inspired the Brontës. The Outreach and Partnership's Officer at the Brontë Parsonage Museum explains, 'We were keen to make the landscape accessible to those with mobility limitations, and this is why Michael and I took the decision to site the Anne Stone in Parson's Field, which is accessible to wheelchair users. We have since seen an increase in under-engaged users' [5.6].

The Covid pandemic has disproportionately affected the BAME communities in Bradford, Calderdale and West Yorkshire. The use of the trails has become a vital resource for these communities during the initial phase of lockdown in the U.K. in March 2020 and the subsequent imposition of restrictions in Bradford, Calderdale and West Yorkshire in July 2020, Tier 3 restrictions in October 2020 and the second Lockdown in November. The Director of the Bronte Birthplace in Thornton, where the Bronte Stones trail begins, writes that during the 'Covid pandemic, we have seen an increase of visitors and walkers to the Bronte Stones. We estimate, so far, that over 6,000 people have engaged with the project' [5.5]. The Brontë Stones project has also enabled those shielding or with mobility issues, or who cannot otherwise physically go into the landscape to enter the landscape of the Brontë's virtually through a curated film and raw drone footage made available through YouTube [5.4]. These videos have been viewed over 11,000 times, from across the world [5.4]. The Brontë Stones documentary also premiered at 'Brontë2020: A virtual event to support the Brontë Parsonage', which attracted 250 participants globally. Indicative participant comments include; 'Thanks to Michael Stewart for his film—I'm determined to walk the trail at some point. All very special'; 'looking forward to doing the trail once I am able to get back to Haworth'. [5.4, p. 4]

### **Impact 3: Developing stimuli to local and international cultural tourism and contributing to the quality of the tourist experience.**

The Brontë Stones Project has received national and international attention through mainstream and social media that has stimulated interest and tourism in the area [5.7]. Events using the Brontë Stones featured in the Bradford Literature Festival (BLF) programme in 2018, 2019, 2020 with a total of 75 participants, many international (25 places per year are offered for this event). These participants have commented positively on the impact of the project. On the BLF launch walk, one participant responded that she had 'learned loads I didn't know before – especially about Thornton and the five years the family spent there'. Another participant commented that 'the walk was wonderful. I came from Atlantic City in the US. I learned quite a bit about Anne'. *Pennine Prospects*, in 2018 and 2019 included the walks on the four Brontë Stones trails, with 50 participants [5.4]. This was the first time this organization had programmed a Brontë themed walk. *Common Ground Reading and Walking*, USA, utilised the Brontë Stones

in their programme in 2018, with 20 American participants walking the Brontë Stones trail lead by Stewart [5.4]. The Brontë Parsonage hosted a Brontë Stones walk with 25 participants in 2018, again led by Stewart. Stewart's public lecture at Chapel Allerton Library, discussed the relationship between his novel *Ill Will*, and the development of the Brontë Stones Project, with 35 participants. He also gave the Walter Swan Lecture, Ilkley Literature Festival, 2019 which again explored this relationship between the novel and the Brontë Stones Project with 80 participants in attendance [5.4].

The project also seeks to engage individuals and groups of walkers through the distribution of the Brontë Stones trails maps. Over 5,000 maps have been sold in outlets across the region: The Parsonage Museum, Haworth; The Bookcase, Hebden Bridge; Book Corner, Halifax; The Brontë Birthplace, Thornton; Plenty Café, Thornton; Salt Mill Bookshop, Saltaire; Whitby Bookshop, Whitby. This indicates further engagement with the Brontë Stones trails and contributes to the local economy. The Outreach and Partnerships Officer at the Brontë Parsonage Museum, notes 'The Brontë Stones project has generated interest in the landscape that is so unique to the area ... [and has] presented me with programming opportunities.' She further comments that 'the Brontë Stones project has certainly captured the imagination of many visitors, both local and from overseas, and continues to enrich our museum activity' [5.6]. The owner of the Brontë Birthplace, Mr Mark De Luca explains the Brontë Stones trails have 'proved popular' resulting in 'a large increase in the number of walkers whom are new accessing the area's rural spaces' [5.5]. He says that the project has had a positive impact on the Birthplace, the 'increase in both tourist numbers and visitors, revenue from map sales and the additional press and publicity regarding the project has seen positive financial benefits both directly to the birthplace and in-directly with the other surrounding businesses on Market Street and within the village' [5.5].

The Brontë Stones project has brought widespread media attention to the area, promoting the Brontë Stones trails, the Brontë Birthplace, the Brontë Parsonage, and the Bradford Literature Festival. The launch of the Brontë Stones was widely reported in social media and in print. These include features in the *Independent* (18 March 2018); *The Guardian* (8 July 2018); *The Telegraph* (2018); *The Times* (26 April 2018); *TLS* (27 July 2018); and *Historia Magazine* (21 March 2018) [5.7]. Stewart was interviewed on BBC Countryfile (average audience 9 million) talking about the project; BBC Breakfast (average audience 6 million) discussing his novel, *Ill Will* and the Brontë Stones project (30 July 2018); and also appears in a French documentary called *Kate Bush, La Sorcière du Son* (September 2019 on ARTE Channel). The Brontë Stones are also featured in two forthcoming documentaries. Mark Radcliffe's documentary on Kate Bush will feature the Emily Stone (airing early 2021). Gyles Brandreth's *Britain by Book* will be broadcast in Spring, 2021 [5.4]. Both will include the drone footage commissioned by the Brontë Stones project and bring additional attention to the area. The Brontë Stones project has stimulated interest in the area both nationally and internationally, contributing to the development of public engagement projects that serve the local communities, encouraging local, national and international visitors to explore the West Yorkshire countryside more widely, and contributing positively to the economy of the region.

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

- 5.1: Portfolio of Poems, Maps, and Brontë Stones in situ.
- 5.2: Bradford Council Testimonial Letter
- 5.3: Bronte Stones Writing Challenge: Bradford Schools writing project in collaboration with First Story chart of events.
- 5.4: Chart of Bronte Stone Events and Engagement
- 5.5: Birthplace, Thornton Testimonial Letter
- 5.6: Brontë Museum, Haworth Testimonial Letter
- 5.7: Media Articles portfolio
- 5.8: Jackie Kay Testimonial Letter
- 5.9: Testament Testimonial Letter