

Institution: University of Sunderland		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: What do War Widow's Pensions tell us about women's social and political history? Raising public awareness		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2002-2013		
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:
Angela Smith	Professor of Language and Culture	2001-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Sociolinguistic analysis of contemporary documents relating to the awarding of War Widow's Pensions has shed new light on the experiences of women in early 20th Century Britain and on social and political attitudes towards them. The research had a significant influence on the content of an award-winning prime time history documentary, raising awareness of a rarely-discussed aspect of WW1 social history among nearly 3 million viewers. It has informed interested audiences through extensive invited lectures and enhanced the education of school pupils about women's political activism through a programme of events to mark the centenary of women's suffrage and of the first world war.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) Professor Smith's research and publications focus on gender, and she began examining the relationship between the state and British war widows at the University of Sunderland as part of her doctoral research. She continued to develop this research area following her employment at the institution, conducting the first and only study of the UK's war widows' pension scheme [R1].</p> <p>The research is based on the study (including close linguistic analysis) of a range of primary sources, including: 200 case files held in the Public Record Office/National Archive (released to the public in 1999); the centralised charity records of the British Red Cross and the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families' Association in London; the archive of the Women's Cooperative Guild in Hull; and a range of texts from both the State and charity sectors that dealt with British widows of the First World War housed at the Imperial War Museum, London. Smith's exploration of the pension files enabled her to inform staff in the National Archive about the way in which the files had been selected and organised, information that had been lost in the process of moving the files to that site.</p> <p>Smith's close linguistic analysis across a range of texts from both the State and charity sectors that dealt with British widows of the First World War reveals something of the lives of working-class families in a time when the welfare state was in its infancy. In particular, it shows how morality is tied into this early attempt at state support, something that has largely been hidden by post-1948 social welfare in the UK. The research found that the State displayed a distrust of war widows as women who had no male head of household, and yet singled them out as the first women in Britain to receive financial support from the State. This combination of patriarchy and middle-class morality were found to underpin an emergent system of surveillance that comes to be adopted in 1948 as an effective way to monitor the population [R4, R2].</p> <p>In tackling the question of how and why war widows came to see themselves as carers entitled to state remuneration for the care of their injured husbands prior to death, Smith explored the public representation of women during the war in recruitment posters. She argues that the unexpected legacy of the First World War includes the perception that women are expected to be carers by the State, and that this reinforces the war widows' own idea of State support for this</p>		

care, even when there is no social or cultural basis in the pre-1948 context to inspire such remunerated care [R3].

The sociolinguistic analysis of these texts and their social and historical context gave Smith a deep understanding both of the working-class widows' position in post-WW1 society and of social and political attitudes towards these women. The texts demonstrate the State's ingrained fear and suspicion of women without a man at the head of their household and encapsulate the unequal and oppressive attitudes that inspired the movement for women's suffrage, which adopted the cause of State support for war widows. The research also showed how this early welfare scheme influenced the later design of the welfare state, in particular the widow's pension.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1 'Pitied but Distrusted: a critical discourse analysis of British widows of the First World War' in 2002 (*Quaderns de Filologia, Estudis Linguistics*. Vol. VII (2002) 145-61. **Quality indicator:** Peer-reviewed journal article.

R2 *Discourses Surrounding British Widows of the First World War*. (2013) Bloomsbury, London **Quality indicator:** Peer-reviewed monograph.

R3 "The girl behind the man behind the gun": women as carers in recruitment posters of the First World War', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 2009, 1: 3 (223-241) **Quality indicator:** Peer-reviewed journal article.

R4 'Discourses of morality and truth in social welfare: the surveillance of British widows of the First World War', *Social Semiotics* (Vol 20, no. 5, November 2010) **Quality indicator:** Peer-reviewed journal article.

Note: This is a continued case study, and the underpinning research met the quality threshold in 2014

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Smith's research on War Widows pensions has informed the public through an advisory role on a hit TV show and through a series of public engagement and educational events reaching a broad range of audiences. The Chair of the War Widows' Association attests that "*you cannot tell the story of war if you don't tell the story of the women left behind.*" She credits Smith's research, disseminated through public engagement and television, with bringing their stories into the mainstream.

A House Through Time

In the summer of 2019, Smith was contacted by researchers working on the third series of BBC2's prime time history documentary **A House Through Time**. "*Prof. Smith was consulted due to the uniqueness of her research: hers was the most suitable and academically robust work available on widows' pensions and their impact. [...] Her contribution was two-fold: (1) we drew on her book, Discourses Surrounding British Widows of the First World War, to create a broad body of knowledge, which was refined through (2) expert advice and information she personally provided to the researchers and production team, on the topics of war widows' pensions, the social context of these pensions, and state surveillance as it affects war widows in receipt of these pensions. She also supported us with fact checking*" [S1].

The information Smith was able to provide convinced the producer to approach a twenty-minute segment (a third) of Episode 3 from a broader social history perspective rather than focussing on the story of one woman. The series producer explains "*Professor Smith was very helpful with our research, not just in providing background information, but helping us to shape the editorial angle of our World War I story. Before we talked with her we hadn't intended to discuss the predicament of war widows in WWI, but her insights helped us to understand much more clearly the issues that our featured characters faced. While the First World War feels very familiar, it is unusual that it is considered through a female, domestic lens. More specifically, how a woman was provided for after the death of her husband in military service is an untold story. Working with Prof. Smith and drawing on her research and knowledge meant that we could create a*

storyline that would explore the impact of the war on women and children, and provide our audience with a truly original insight into war widows' social positions, their pensions, and how they mourned." [S1].

The live episode attracted approximately 3 million viewers [S2], with more watching on iPlayer. It generated a wave of positive feedback on Twitter, with the war widows segment attracting particular comment and discussion. Responses show that the research input achieved its aim, with viewers highlighting the previously unknown elements, such as the surveillance of the widows ("*Blimey did the govt have the sex police just to keep an eye on those pesky widows from romping or what they're only human*") and **being prompted to think more specifically about the 'hidden' aspect of women's lives in conventional history**, leading some to reflect on how this can be viewed from more than a century later: "*What I love about A House Through Time is it gives time and attention evenly to lives that are not usually thought about considerably, or taken seriously, or noticed at all*", "*What we see time and again in A House Through Time is that throughout history, women have drawn the short straw*", "[Presenter] David Olusoga tells the stories I wished I could have heard when I was at school learning about Palmerstone, Gladstone and Disraeli" [S3].

The Chair of the War Widows' Association says Smith's contribution was critical: "*In order for them to be protected from ill-treatment, it is essential that War Widows are made visible, and their contributions during and after wartime are known. It is only programmes like A House Through Time that can bring this knowledge into mainstream understanding of the Wars. Prof. Smith's contribution to the programme ensured that the plight of a historically invisible group of women was discussed before (inter)national audiences*" [S4].

Invited public talks

Smith has been much in demand in the REF period as a speaker to both general and specialist audiences [S5]. In July 2018 she was invited by the **War Widows Association** to talk to a group of 30 of their members in Fort George, Inverness, sharing her knowledge on the condition of war widows in the early 20th Century and how the pension originated and evolved over time.

She is a regular speaker at the **University of the Third Age** in Newcastle and Sunderland, and has given four talks attended by some 450 people, most of whom are of an age to know or be related to someone in receipt of a war widow's pension and many of whom receive a state widow's pension themselves, modelled closely on the war widow's pension.

In a talk to a **Women's Institute** meeting in 2014, Smith spoke about the position of women in relation to the state at a time of growing political activism, as reflected in wartime visual representations of women and official documents around war widows.

To mark the 2014 centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, Smith was asked to give a talk to 25 **Friends of the Bowes Museum at Barnard Castle** as part of their commemoration programme, to ensure that the impact of the war on women and children was highlighted as well as the better-known experiences of the men who fought.

Educational events

Smith has delivered four education events to schools both as part of the **Vote 100** centenary of women's suffrage in 2018 and to support the **GCSE History syllabus** on Women's Political Activism (1918 to 2018) [S5]. Attended by 120 pupils from six schools, these events explored the social attitudes to women revealed in the source texts and the inequalities they reveal in the treatment of men and women. For example, the share of the pension allocated to female dependents was subject to stringent moral conditions while that allocated to male dependents was not.

After 30 pupils (male and female) from St Wilfred's secondary school attended one of these events a teacher reports an increased engagement in tackling gender issues as a result of the event, arranging a range of activities promoting gender equality to mark International Women's

Day. *"Students became far more knowledgeable about gender issues, and discuss these more openly."* [S6].

She also advised Beamish Living Museum on their hugely successful schools programme to mark the centenary of the outbreak of WW1, attended by 300 pupils from five schools [S7].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

S1 Letter from the Series Producer of A House Through Time

S2 Viewing figures for Series 3, Episode 3 of A House Through Time

S3 Collated Tweets about Series 3, Episode 3 of A House Through Time

S4 Written testimonial from Chair of War Widows' Association

S5 Details of all public engagement and educational events

S6 Statement of Support from Teacher, St Wilfred's Catholic Secondary School

S7 Newsletter from Beamish reporting the sessions