

<b>Institution:</b> De Montfort University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Shakespeare 400 Anniversary: Promoting the Cultural Heritage of Acting Companies in Shakespeare's England with the BBC		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2010–2016		
<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>
Professor Siobhan Keenan	Professor of Shakespeare and Renaissance Literature	1 January 2005–present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014–2020		
<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>Keenan's research on Shakespearean acting companies has produced significant benefits in the areas of cultural heritage and tourism since 2014. Her work helped to shape the regional focus of the BBC's Shakespeare 400 initiative (2016), leading to direct participation in programme-making and the development of cultural content, most notably the 'Shakespeare on Tour' website. These co-created cultural artefacts, in turn, stimulated interest in Shakespeare's local affiliations beyond London and Stratford-upon-Avon, and so played an important part in the preservation and renewal of Shakespeare's cultural heritage.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Keenan has been researching Shakespearean acting companies and the early modern theatre industry for more than 20 years, including throughout her time at DMU. Her research pays particular attention to the working practices of Shakespearean acting companies and how these practices shaped both the playwriting of Shakespeare and his peers and the development of professional, commercial theatre in England. Keenan's published outputs are primarily based on extensive archival research in national, metropolitan and regional archives, including the evidence of professional and amateur theatre preserved in unpublished early modern legal, civic, household and court records and letters. She also makes use of the published volumes of the British Academy funded Records of Early English Drama (REED) project (based at the University of Toronto, Canada), as well as surviving printed and manuscript plays from the era.</p> <p><i>Acting Companies and Their Plays in Shakespeare's London</i> (2014) [R2] demonstrates the importance of the creative collaboration between acting companies and playwrights, as well as the influence of audiences, patrons, playing spaces and staging practices on companies and their writers in and beyond the capital. It also makes the case for the centrality of the acting company in Shakespearean theatrical culture and for the continuing impact of touring traditions on company practices in this seminal era in English theatre history, an aspect of Renaissance theatre history neglected in many earlier accounts of this period. The significance of its contribution to early theatre studies has been widely acknowledged both nationally and internationally; it was selected as a <i>Choice Outstanding Academic Title</i> (OAT) for 2015.</p> <p>Keenan's research has also extended to the era's semi-professional and regionally based troupes, such as the Simpson acting company in Jacobean North Yorkshire; this company, led by two recusant Catholic shoemakers, performed a repertory of plays in the early 1600s that included <i>King Lear</i> and <i>Pericles</i>. Keenan's <i>Theatre Notebook</i> article on the company traces what we know about its career, identifying crucial parallels with the activities of its professional peers, including the use of an apprenticeship system to bind and train boy players [R1, R3].</p> <p>Keenan's discoveries about the professional theatre industry in early modern London and beyond have focused the field's attention on the commercial strategies employed by Shakespearean acting companies on stage and in the print marketplace, with a particular focus on the factors which contributed to the economic and artistic success of Shakespeare's main</p>		

acting company, the Lord Chamberlain's / King's Men. Keenan reveals that Shakespeare's sustained commercial and artistic success was all but unique in his day and tied to the collective commercial strategy and business practices of Shakespeare and his fellow company members, including their shared ownership of the theatres in which they performed. Her research also makes clear the complex interaction of commercial and artistic considerations for Shakespeare and his peers in their activities as playwrights and players [R4].

### 3. References to the research

- [R1] Keenan, S. (2013) 'The Simpson Players of Jacobean Yorkshire and the professional stage', *Theatre Notebook*, 67(1): 16–35; <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/506445/pdf>  
Peer-reviewed journal article.
- [R2] Keenan, S. (2014) *Acting Companies and Their Plays in Shakespeare's London*, The Arden Shakespeare, London: Bloomsbury; ISBN 9781408146637  
Peer-reviewed monograph; selected as a *Choice Outstanding Academic Title*, 2015.
- [R3] Keenan, S. (2014) 'Shakespeare on Tour', invited presentation, AHRC/BBC Collaborative Workshop on Shakespeare, 21 November 2014.  
  
Keenan was one of 14 academics chosen to present at the workshop, following a competitive AHRC call which received 94 applications. The workshop was arranged to help the BBC with its plans to mark the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death in 2016 and brought together the 14 selected academics and over 20 BBC delegates, including a range of senior editorial, commissioning and programming staff.
- [R4] Keenan, S. (2016) 'Shakespeare and the market in his own day', in D. Shellard and S. Keenan (eds) *Shakespeare's Cultural Capital: His Economic Impact from the Sixteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; ISBN 1137583150. pp 13–31.  
  
Peer-reviewed book chapter.

### 4. Details of the impact

Keenan's research on Shakespearean acting companies has achieved cultural benefit for BBC audiences and for British tourism and heritage via her collaboration on a regional approach to the BBC's Shakespeare 400 public programming and the co-creation of resources which preserve Shakespeare's cultural heritage and promote interest in places visited by Shakespearean players. This collaboration started with her invited presentation ('Shakespeare on Tour') at a 2014 AHRC/BBC workshop, designed to help the BBC with its programming plans for the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death [R3].

#### (1) CO-CREATED CULTURAL ARTEFACTS / PRESERVING SHAKESPEARE'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

##### 'Shakespeare on Tour'

'Shakespeare on Tour' is a web resource of around 200 short essays about Shakespeare and Shakespearean performances in and beyond London, from his own day to the present [C1a], inspired by Keenan's research presentation [R3] and the British Library's playbill collection. Keenan collaborated closely with the BBC Head of Programmes, English Regions and a research student at the British Library (BL) to develop the resource.

Keenan identified key performance locations visited by Shakespearean acting companies that could be the basis of essays for the site and brought in REED's Director of Research and other scholars involved in the REED project as collaborating researchers and essay writers. Keenan authored 16 essays for the site. Drawing on her scholarship about the centrality of acting companies and touring in Shakespearean England, Keenan provided stories about the places where such companies performed, enhancing public knowledge of the rich regional dimension of Shakespearean theatre.

The online resource was launched on the BBC website (21 March 2016). Keenan promoted the research via BBC television and radio interviews, including with *East Midlands Today* (7 March 2016), and Radio Oxford (18 March 2016) and, globally, via a BBC Radio 3 'Essay' about 'Shakespeare Beyond London' (broadcast 29 April 2016; available as a podcast) [C2].

'Shakespeare on Tour' had received over 270,000 page views globally before the end of 2016, pointing to its significant audience reach [C1b]. The BBC Head of Programmes, English Regions highlights the value of the project to the BBC and its users, as well as the importance of Keenan's research expertise to its development: 'Shakespeare on Tour is a brilliant illustration of how well the BBC can deliver original and compelling stories to its audience only through meaningful partnership. ... Throughout the whole course of this ... project, we were able to reference the stories against the knowledge held by Siobhan, by REED [and] the British Library' [C3].

### **Countryfile Shakespeare special**

In April 2016 Keenan was the academic consultant for a feature on the touring of Shakespeare's company for the BBC's first *Countryfile* Shakespeare special. The feature, which saw Keenan appear alongside Judi Dench, was inspired by her BBC essay about the King's Men's visit to Fordwich. The feature was the subject of considerable advance press coverage, including articles in *The Independent* [C4a], *The Huffington Post* [C4b] and *The Guardian* [C7]. The programme was broadcast on BBC1 (24 April 2016) with an average of 6,393,000 viewers and a high score of 82 on the Audience Appreciation Index [C5]. The episode's director emphasises the importance of Keenan's research to the feature: 'Her expert knowledge [and] ability to bring to life the details of Shakespeare's players ... revealed new aspects of the Bard's life and plays not only to our audience, but even to a veteran Shakespearean actor' like Dench [C6] who observed, 'it was wonderful to learn that Shakespeare had toured with his company' [C7]. A number of viewers responded in similar terms, tweeting comments such as 'Learnt a lot about #thebard I didn't know', and 'Shakespeare is amazing, I learnt loads [of] new stuff', highlighting how the programme enriched their knowledge of Shakespeare and their awareness of his regional connections, as in the case of the viewer who commented, 'My folks live 5 mins away from Fordwich – been there many a time! Never knew about the Shakespeare connection!' [C8].

## **(2) IMPACTING SHAKESPEAREAN TOURISM/HERITAGE**

As a result of the public dissemination of her work with the BBC, several of Keenan's stories have fed into tourist and heritage materials promoting interest in regional places visited by Shakespearean players, including Leicester, Londesborough Hall, Wilton House and Nottingham, where Keenan's story about Shakespeare's company's visit to the city was read by the author of a post on 'Shakespeare and Nottingham', which references the visit, for the Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature literary locations blog [C9a–C9d]. Keenan's BBC stories have also attracted wider engagement with Shakespeare's regional heritage, providing part of the inspiration, for example, for a blog about 'William Shakespeare: Traces in Kent' [C10].

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

- [C1a] Shakespeare on Tour: BBC web resource; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03fcz11>
- [C1b] Shakespeare on Tour: information about page views provided via email by Senior Producer, BBC English Regions, 15 September 2016.
- [C2] Siobhan Keenan, 'Shakespeare Beyond London' (BBC Radio 3 'Essay'), recorded live before a public audience in King Edward VI Grammar School, Stratford-upon-Avon on 24 April 2016; broadcast 29 April 2016 and available as a podcast; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0786977>
- [C3] Testimonial from the BBC Head of Programmes, English Regions, 14 April 2016.
- [C4a] Advance press publicity for the BBC *Countryfile* Shakespeare special: *The Independent*, 20 April 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/judi-dench-make-countryfile-debut-honour-william-shakespeare-a6992401.html>; and

- [C4b] *The Huffington Post*, 20 April 2016, [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/countryfile-judi-dench-william-shakespeare-special-400th-anniversary-death\\_uk\\_57173554e4b0f22f021a622f](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/countryfile-judi-dench-william-shakespeare-special-400th-anniversary-death_uk_57173554e4b0f22f021a622f)
- [C5] BBC *Countryfile* Shakespeare special, audience information, provided via email by the Director of the *Countryfile* Shakespeare special, 26 August 2016.
- [C6] Testimonial from the Director of the *Countryfile* Shakespeare special, provided via email, 26 August 2016.
- [C7] 'Judi Dench to be in Countryfile's Shakespeare special', *The Guardian*, 19 April 2016; <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2016/apr/19/judi-dench-to-be-in-countryfiles-shakespeare-special>
- [C8] Social media: selected responses to the *Countryfile* Shakespeare special on Twitter, 24–25 April 2016.
- [C9a] Leicester: the visit of Shakespeare's company to Leicester in his lifetime (1606) and the company's possible performance at the Guildhall (as discussed in Keenan's 'Shakespeare on Tour' story about the city) is now mentioned in the tourist materials used to promote visits to the Guildhall on the city's 'Visit Leicester website' and the Guildhall's own website, available at <https://www.visitleicester.info/see-and-do/leicester-guildhall-p692741> and <https://www.leicestermuseums.org/leicester-guildhall/>
- [C9b] Nottingham: 'Shakespeare and Nottingham', 6 September 2019; <https://nottinghamcityofliterature.com/blog/literary-locations-35-the-playwright>. The blog's author confirmed, via email, that he consulted the 'Shakespeare on Tour' story as part of his research for the blog (26 October 2020).
- [C9c] Londesborough Hall: the visits by Shakespeare's acting company to Londesborough Hall (as discussed in Keenan's 'Shakespeare on Tour' story about Londesborough) are mentioned in an exhibition which ran at Skidby Mill Museum in 2016 (July–November), 'Gone but not forgotten: Lost East Riding houses and their occupants'; available as a PDF: <https://eastridingmuseums.eastriding.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/EasySite/StyleData/culture/downloads/museums/past-exhibits/skidby-mill/gone-but-not-forgotten-lost-houses.pdf>
- [C9d] Wilton House: Keenan's 'Shakespeare on Tour' story about the 1603 visit by Shakespeare's company to Wilton House is cited in a Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre blog, highlighting Shakespeare's links with Wiltshire, 'William Shakespeare in Wiltshire', 17 May 2016; <https://wshc.org.uk/blog/item/william-shakespeare-in-wiltshire.html>
- [C10] 'William Shakespeare: Traces in Kent'; <https://kentliterature.com/william-shakespeare-traces-in-kent/>, 11 May 2020. The author of the blog confirmed, via email, that 'Shakespeare on Tour' (including Keenan's essays) was the source for the information about Shakespearean players' visits to Kent included in the blog post (1 December 2020).