

Institution: University of Portsmouth		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 32: Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
Title of case study: A House Through Time: Shaping a flagship TV series to achieve critical and financial success and inspiring the public to engage with house history		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 01/09/2016 to 31/07/2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Prof Deborah Sugg Ryan	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Design History & Theory; Associate Dean (Research)	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 01/09/2016 - date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 01/09/2016 to 31/12/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Research on house history conducted by Professor Deborah Sugg Ryan led to her influential role as consultant historian and 'super contributor' to all three series of BBC Two's <i>A House Through Time</i>. Her research shaped the programme, contributing to the broadcasting success and global reputation of UK based production company [text removed for publication]. The series brought critical acclaim and huge audiences averaging 2.73m and up to 4.16m, influencing the brand success of BBC Two. The series stimulated enquiries from British adults seeking to connect their stories of home and family with place and nation. It increased public interest and brought new audiences for house history to genealogy websites, archives and libraries. Through engagement on social media, it built and preserved the house history knowledge base for professional and non-professional historians.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Ryan is a design and cultural historian who joined the University of Portsmouth in 2016. Her research has 2 strands that explore the history of the architecture, design, decoration and material culture of the home: 1) the suburban interwar home (R1& R2); 2) the kitchen from 1850 to the present (R3-R5). Ryan's projects are grounded in primary research in museums, archives and libraries, supplemented by investigations into surviving printed and material culture sourced by her from places academics do not usually access such as car boot sales, fairs and online auctions. Genealogical research on the occupants of houses and their histories is an important component of her work. Her qualitative methods include textual, visual and object analysis.</p> <p>Ryan's underpinning research includes <i>Ideal Homes: 1918-39: Domestic Design and Suburban Modernism</i>, published by Manchester University Press in 2018 (R1). It focuses on the history of 'ordinary' suburban homes through a series of house histories of individual working and lower middle-class householders, with particular attention paid to gender. It also investigates design and material culture that falls outside the modernist canon of 'good design', proposing the notion of 'suburban Modernism'. The success of the book led to it being selected for publication in a new trade paperback imprint aimed at a wider general readership with a new introduction on how to do house history (R2).</p> <p>Ryan's second strand of underpinning research comprises work towards the completion of a monograph commissioned by Reaktion entitled <i>The Heart of the Home: The Design and Material Culture of the Modern Kitchen since 1850</i>. Her work so far includes: an invited essay in the catalogue to accompany the V&A's 2019 exhibition <i>Food: Bigger Than the Plate</i>, for which she was also on the advisory board; and an interactive digital visual essay for the Adam Matthew Digital electronic resource <i>Trade Catalogues and the American Home</i>, for which she was also on the editorial board (R3 & R4). In these essays, Ryan investigates the survival of the older kitchen-living-room form alongside the emergence of the modern 'laboratory' and open-plan kitchen. She focuses on the influence of vernacular and 'traditional' styles and the role of nostalgia and the ways in which they interplay with modernity and modernisms. Her observations are grounded in an analysis of class and gender relations and the kitchen as a social space. As part of her research on the history of communal kitchens, Ryan undertook an investigation into communal feeding in World War 2 British Restaurants (R5), which focuses on the hitherto neglected area of the role of design, decoration and material culture in their success.</p>		

3. References to the research

(R1) **Sugg Ryan, D.** (2018). *Ideal Homes, 1918-39: Domestic Design and Suburban Modernism* Manchester University Press. (available on request)

(R2) **Sugg Ryan, D.** (2020). *Ideal Homes: Uncovering the History and Design of the Interwar Home*, 2nd edition. Manchester University Press. (Submitted to REF2)

(R3) **Sugg Ryan, D.** (2017). *The American kitchen, 1850-1950: from workroom to heart of the home*. In *Trade Catalogues and the American Home*. Adam Matthew. (Submitted to REF2)

(R4) **Sugg Ryan, D.** (2019). From the “smart” kitchen to “kitchenism”. In M. Rosenthal & C. Flood (Eds) *Food: Eating Tomorrow* (pp. 100-109). V&A Publishing. (available on request)

(R5) **Sugg Ryan, D.** (2020). The curious history of government-funded British Restaurants in World War 2. Blogpost in FindMyPast.co.uk, 22 June 2020

<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/blog/history/british-restaurants>)

Evidence of quality of research

R1 was awarded the 2020 Historians of British Art Prize Book Prize for Exemplary Scholarship in the Period after 1800 and was shortlisted for the 2018 Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain Alice David Hitchcock Memorial Medallion for an outstanding contribution to architectural history. It has been reviewed widely and positively in peer-reviewed journals in architectural, design, social and cultural history. Design historian Kristina Wilson said it ‘*makes an important contribution to the history of design... [Sugg Ryan] reminds us to study objects and architectural designs that fall outside of the canon of Modernism and asks us to reconsider how we actually define Modernism*’ (*Journal of Design History*). Social historian Caitríona Beaumont said, ‘*The book is well written, convincingly argued and successfully merges design history, social and gender history in what is undoubtedly an important new contribution to twentieth-century British history*’ (*Cercles: Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone*). Non-academic housing historian, author and blogger John Boughton described it as ‘*a superb evocation of interwar living as expressed in its homes and furnishings. (It) skilfully interweaves social and design history and beautifully melds the academic and personal... It’s that rare thing - a book that will appeal to academic specialists and the general reader*’ (<https://bit.ly/2JMRvZS>)

4. Details of the impact

Contributing to the broadcasting success and global reputation of a UK based TV company

[Text removed for publication] is an independent production company, part of [text removed for publication]. It has made TV since 1982 for a global audience – from documentary to factual entertainment and from children’s to drama. Ryan is consultant historian to their series *A House Through Time (AHTT)*, commissioned by BBC Two in 2017, which tells the story of one house and all those who have lived in it chronologically through 4 episodes. It works like a detective story, using clues from the house’s location, construction, interior decoration and contents to chart the waxing and waning fortunes of its changing occupants and link them together with national events happening over the house’s lifetime. [Text removed for publication] engaged with research undertaken by, and in collaboration with, Ryan to inform the approach and content of the series concept when it was in development in 2016-17 because of ‘*her expertise in the history of the home, especially in relation to architecture, design, interiors and material culture*’ (S1). As consultant and onscreen academic ‘super contributor’ in 11 of the 12 episodes of the 3 series broadcast to date (S2), Ryan contributed to the huge success of AHTT and the subsequent commissioning of 3 more series (S3). She worked closely with [text removed for publication], as well as with the directors, producers and researchers on each episode. Ryan gave the production team access to her work in progress and manuscript for *Ideal Homes* (R1) before it was published in March 2018, and it fed directly into series 1, particularly informing the content on the domestic lives of ‘ordinary’ working people. *Ideal Homes*, together with Ryan’s work in progress on her kitchen monograph and related outputs (R3-R5) fed into series 2 and 3 (broadcast in 2019 and 2020 respectively) which each focused on a different property and so on the life stories of different people and families. For her onscreen contributions, Ryan generated her own content, some taken directly from her academic research, e.g. series 1, episode 3 (R1 & R2) and series 3, episode 4 (R5) (S2).

Ryan's contribution to the overall success of the programme, to its content and visual flair is acknowledged by [text removed for publication]. She says, Ryan *'has provided us with robust evidence and contributions to support and strengthen A House Through Time... as the consultant responsible for advising on how the layout, design, furnishing, decoration and material culture of the house in each series changed over time. She has advised on and influenced the content of episodes, including working with the picture researchers on archive film clips and pictures. She has helped us to access many new archive sources. [She] contributed to the visual flair and academic rigour of the series and, I believe, helped us to achieve high viewing figures...The overall success of the series, in which she has played an important part, has led to its recommission by BBC2 for a fourth series to be broadcast in 2021. Audience research has shown that viewers have a high appreciation of the design content of the series, and of Professor Sugg Ryan's contribution'* (S1). In turn, the programme has brought [text removed for publication] industry accolades, having been highly commended in the prestigious Grierson Trust British Documentary Awards in 2018 in the Best Historical Documentary category with specific reference to 'its incredible historical research'. Further nominations were forthcoming in 2018 (Best Constructed Documentary Series) and 2020 (Best Historical Documentary). AHTT won the Voice of the Viewer and Listener Award for Excellence in Broadcasting 2018 for Best TV News and Factual.

Influencing BBC Two brand success: bringing critical acclaim and increasing audiences

A House Through Time has become an integral part of the BBC Two brand and bolstered its popularity. Ryan helped the programme connect people's lives to the times in which they lived through the interpretation of rich archival material, something that resonated strongly with the channel's vision (S5). To date British people have watched over 32 million hours of AHTT on BBC Two and BBC iPlayer. The majority of episodes have been in the top 5 most watched programmes per week for the channel, with each episode having achieved between 2.2 and 4.2 million viewers, (series 3, episode 1 achieving first place), an exceptional performance for a historical series (S4). Ryan has also helped to promote AHTT, at the request of BBC press Office. She gave interviews to radio (e.g. BBC Radio 4 *You and Yours*), and press (e.g. *Daily Mail*) as well as writing for *The Conversation* and other news outlets (<https://bit.ly/37xzWVK>). She gave talks and public lectures, including with AHTT presenter Professor David Olusoga 'Behind the Scenes of a House Through Time', Manchester Museum, 21 April 2019, moving online in 2020 e.g. 'Researching Your House History', Manchester University Press Armchair Event with Melanie Backe-Hansen (<https://bit.ly/36FL5EF>).

AHTT's critical acclaim and viewing figures have led to it being recommissioned 3 times, which is very unusual for a history series. BBC Commissioning Editor for History Simon Young says: *'A House Through Time is a stand-out production achievement and a firm favourite in the schedules amongst viewers; series three was watched by more than three million viewers. It's a vitally important returning show, reflecting the BBC's ambition for history programmes that connect the bigger sweeps of our nation's past to individual lives lived all over the country'* (S5). BBC Two Controller Patrick Holland described Ryan as an *'exemplary academic super contributor'* for her work on AHTT at the Edinburgh Television Festival AHTV Specialist Factual Event on 5 February 2020.

Increasing public interest and bringing new audiences for house history in genealogy websites, archives and libraries

Series 1 of *A House Through Time* initiated a growth in appetite among adults in Britain for more information about domestic design and material culture, particularly in ways that enable them to connect the past of ordinary homes and families to a wider national story. Ryan's research and complementary media activity helped make the connection between individual lives and the national picture inspiring tens of thousands of British adults to move from being 'audiences' for Ryan's research to active investigators, going online to find information for themselves.

Ryan's involvement in AHTT increased interest in house history for users of FindMyPast.co.uk and has directed new users to their site. FindMyPast is a global player in the family history market with worldwide sites containing billions of digitised records. They also own the British Newspaper Archive, digitising and publishing the world's largest collection of British and Irish newspapers

online in partnership with the British Library. In 2020 Ryan was introduced by [text removed for publication] to FindMyPast to help promote AHTT among their users. Ryan's Facebook Live interview for FindMyPast on the 20th century home on 4 June 2020 has been viewed 37.2k times to date (<https://bit.ly/3qsQWVS>). Niall Cullen, FindMyPast's senior content strategist, said it is *'one of our most popular interviews this year, [it] received high levels of positive viewer engagement (37,000 views, 226 comments and 91 likes to date)...* Ryan was invited to write guest posts for their blog on 'How to use the 1939 Register to find the wartime history of your house' (<https://bit.ly/3mH0fPK>) on 8 June 2020 and '9 ways to find out what your house was like generations ago' (<https://bit.ly/3ll78ie>) on 15 June 2020, which have received over 30,000 page views to date. Cullen said, *'House history is consistently one of our best-performing content topics on our blog and social channels, so Prof Sugg Ryan's expertise has been invaluable... [her] research has enabled us to educate our existing users, as well as attracting new ones, in the use of our resources to undertake house history. Her posts for us have appeared high in monthly Google searches for house history, using search engine optimization keywords such as "who lived in my house", which have directed people to our site... [T]housands of website visits... can also be attributed to ... Ryan's content'* (S6). FindMyPast have subsequently invited Ryan to do further events with them. Other websites on house history such as tracemyhouse.com, the leading house history website founded in 2014 by Keith Searle, professional freelance house historian, author and genealogist, also benefited. He says, AHTT *'increased the interest in house history overnight and suddenly the hits on my site increased from a modest 1,000 per week to 12-1300'* (S7).

AHTT also prompted numerous archives and libraries to produce guides and put on events on how to do house history. For example, Bury Archives and Local History produced a guide in 2019 because *'The return of the BBC's hugely popular series, A House through Time, has generated lots of enquiries from the local community asking how they go about tracing the history of their house. As a result we thought we'd put together a guide on resources we hold here at Bury Archives which can help you on your journey'* (S8). In 2020 Bristol Archives, who were a major source for the research for series 3, put on 'House Research from Home', a Zoom talk by archivist Annie Lovejoy for people *'inspired by the new series of A House Through Time... to show you how to investigate the stories of local houses and find out about the people who have lived there'* (S9). It was so popular it sold out and was repeated. Other organisations responding similarly to the demand from British adults include The Keep, Herts Archives, Dorset History Centre and Edinburgh Libraries. Historic England and the National Archives have both updated guides to doing house history on their websites.

Building and preserving the house history knowledge base for professional and non-professional historians

Ryan's support on social media by live-tweeting series 1 and 2 of AHTT (which does not have a BBC Twitter account) and founding and co-hosting Twitter #HouseHistoryHour to coincide with series 3, helped AHTT to *'engage with individual viewers'* by discussing *'issues raised in the series'* (S1). Co-host Searle says due to #HouseHistoryHour, hits on his tracemyhouse.com website *'have increased ... now regularly topping 2,000 per week... It is clear that all the co-hosts of #HouseHistoryHour have learned and benefited from each other's expertise and Prof Sugg Ryan's vision. It has also raised the profile of house history, which has benefited us as professionals in the field'* (S6). @HouseHistoryHr has attracted 1,679 followers to date. As well as interested amateurs in the UK (and in the USA, Australia and other countries), it has particularly found followers among professionals in related fields including house historians, local historians, genealogists, archivists, librarians, curators, heritage professionals, estate agents and novelists.

#HouseHistoryHour was launched in May 2020, partly as a response for in-person events being unable to proceed due to COVID. It takes place every Thursday at 1900 GMT, hosted by @HouseHistoryHr, a house history dedicated Twitter account created by Ryan (S10). It comprises an hour of discussion on different aspects of undertaking house history, giving tips and advice and sharing research. It is co-hosted by Ryan and professional house historians who undertake paid commissions for house history, invited talks, teaching, books and articles on how to do house history: Melanie Backe-Hansen (research consultant for AHTT and co-author of the AHTT book), Gill Blanchard, Karen Averby, Nick Barratt, Ellen C. Leslie, Keith Searle and Cathy Soughton.

Special invited guest hosts have included the development producer for AHTT, house historians, local historians, genealogists, archivists and heritage professionals.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

(S1) Testimonial from [text removed for publication] 2020

(S2) Series 1-3, A House Through Time, [text removed for publication] for BBC Two (available on request)

(S3) A House Through Time: BBC Two programme website with broadcast dates

<https://bbc.in/33Go4Qk>

(S4) A House Through Time viewing figures (available on request)

(S5) BBC Media Centre, 'A House Through Time series four is coming to BBC Two'

<https://bbc.in/36CjQed> accessed 2/12/2020

(S6) Testimonial from Neil Cullen, Senior Content Strategist, Findmypast November 2020

(S7) Testimonial from Keith Searle, House Historian 12/11/2020

(S8) Bury Archives & Local History: Your House Through Time: A Guide for Tracing your House History, 1 May 2019 <https://bit.ly/39Uoq9Z> accessed 13/11/2020

(S9) Bristol Museums: House Research from Home, 29 June 2020 <https://bit.ly/2JMXbDa> accessed 13/11/2020

(S10) Twitter: @HouseHistoryHr <https://twitter.co10m/househistoryhr?lang=en-gb>