

Institution: University of Warwick		
Unit of Assessment: D33 – Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
Title of case study: Exposing Amateur Theatricals and Maritime Creativity in the Royal Navy and Royal Museums Greenwich		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: January 2013 – September 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:
Nadine Holdsworth	Professor, Theatre and Performance Studies	January 2000 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 31st July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>The Royal Navy Theatre Association (RNTA) has been supporting amateur theatricals in the Royal Navy (RN) for over thirty years, yet the impact of this association has never been examined. Holdsworth's pioneering research project exploring its activities has enabled the RNTA, for the first time, to critically reflect on its practice and to articulate the important role theatre plays for serving personnel, the RN and the wider community. As a result, the RNTA has raised the profile of its work, the contribution it makes to the RN's public engagement strategy, successfully made the case for on-going funding and is experiencing renewed participation in theatre on naval bases. The research has also generated an enriched public understanding of the history, heritage and practice of theatre and performance in the RN and influenced curatorial practice by offering new ways for Royal Museums Greenwich, which narrates maritime history, to approach, understand and disseminate its collections.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Perhaps surprisingly, theatricals and performance rituals on land and at sea have been an integral part of the Royal Navy's culture for centuries. Serving personnel have designed and made sets, sewed costumes, written scripts, directed plays and performed numerous roles. Holdsworth's research is the first to analyse amateur theatricals in the Royal Navy during the 20th and 21st centuries, which covered a broad repertoire of practice including pantomimes, contemporary plays, productions of Shakespeare, concert parties and 'Crossing the Line' ceremonies.</p> <p>To facilitate this research, which was part of a broader AHRC-funded study into amateur theatre in England, Holdsworth approached the RNTA, which initiated a research partnership with backing from the RN and Ministry of Defence (MoD). Announcing its participation in the research, the then-RNTA Chairperson noted 'we firmly believe it has the potential to be of value to the Association [and] the wider Royal Naval community' (5.2). The research focused on two amateur theatre companies based on naval bases in the south of England: Collingwood RSC and the Admirals' Players. Key research questions co-generated by Holdsworth and the RNTA included: what role do these activities play in RN culture; how do theatricals function in relation to the hierarchies of the institution; what personal and professional benefits accrue to individual participants? To address these questions Holdsworth utilised the unique access enabled by the RNTA and a number of research methodologies. She embarked on a sustained period of primary research that entailed participant observation of rehearsals, committee meetings and awards ceremonies, attending productions, designing and conducting surveys and interviewing serving, retired and civilian personnel. Holdsworth consulted personal archives of scripts, publicity materials, programmes and production photographs that helped to situate the contemporary repertoire within a long history of practice and to ascertain dominant narratives</p>		

and visual representations associated with that practice. In conjunction with, and under direction from Holdsworth, the AHRC-funded PhD researcher Sarah Penny utilised archival collections to locate primary materials including log and commission books, service records, MOD policy documents, song sheets, publicity materials and diaries. All primary research materials were interpreted through interdisciplinary approaches drawn from theatre and performance studies, sociology, heritage studies and cultural geography and informed by ideas around tangible and intangible heritage, cultural value, invented traditions, community-building, soft power, craft and creativity.

The key research findings were that:

- Theatricals and performance rituals have played a sustained and significant role in the culture and heritage of the RN via the handing down of traditions, rituals and repertoires (3.1; 3.2; 3.3).
- Theatricals have served a political function both within the RN by maintaining hierarchies of power and externally through the operations of soft power in a global context (3.1; 3.3).
- The RN benefits from RNTA activities through its provision of positive recreational activity and the contribution it makes to its public engagement strategy by attracting members of local communities to naval bases for rehearsals and productions (3.1; 3.3; 3.4).
- Processes of rehearsal and performance have contributed to community-building and place-making by bringing together multi-generational serving and retired members of the RN with the local community to generate work for specific localities and heritage sites (3.1; 3.3; 3.4).
- Involvement in theatre impacts members' professional and personal lives through the development of theatre-specific and transferable skills such as confidence, teamwork, leadership, creative problem solving and project management (3.1; 3.4).
- Participation in making theatre contributes to the ability to survive in extreme circumstances and enhances work/life balance and well-being (3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5).

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

Peer Reviewed Publications:

1. **Holdsworth, Nadine**, Nicholson, Helen and Milling, Jane (2018) *The Ecologies of Amateur Theatre*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: 9781137508096 (winner of the TaPRA David Bradby Prize for Outstanding Research, 2019)
2. **Holdsworth, Nadine**, Milling, Jane and Nicholson, Helen (2017) *Theatre, performance and the amateur turn*. Contemporary Theatre Review, 27 (1). pp. 4-17.
doi:10.1080/10486801.2017.1266229
This was accompanied by Interventions, which includes 4 open access pieces including an 'Amateur Theatre in the Royal Navy' slideshow co-curated by Holdsworth, Nadine and Penny, Sarah: <https://www.contemporarytheatrereview.org/2017/amateur-theatre-royal-navy/>
3. **Holdsworth, Nadine** (2016) *Performing place, heritage and Henry V in Portsmouth historic dockyard*. Contemporary Theatre Review, 26 (2). pp. 196-210.
doi:10.1080/10486801.2016.1144054

Reports (delivered to the RNTA's AGM in February 2017):

4. **Holdsworth, Nadine** (2017) *Making Theatre with the Royal Navy*.
https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/theatre_s/research/seminar/making_theatre_with_the_royal_navy_report_web.pdf
5. Nicholson, Helen, **Holdsworth, Nadine** and Milling, Jane (2016) *Reflecting on Amateur Theatre Research*.
https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/scapvc/theatre/theatre_performance_research/impactful_research/amateur_theatre_reports/reflecting_on_amateur_theatre.pdf

AHRC Grant: Nicholson, Helen (PI), **Holdsworth, Nadine** and Milling, Jane. Amateur Dramatics: Crafting Communities in Time and Space' (AH/K001922/1), July 2013-February 2017. **GBP378,247**

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

The Royal Navy Theatre Association (RNTA), founded in 1985, is an umbrella organisation that supports the work of long-running amateur theatre groups based on Naval Training Estates, Naval Bases and Air Stations. At the time of Holdsworth's research the RNTA had over 200 members involved in 4 theatre groups based in the South of England and Gibraltar. These groups include serving Royal Navy personnel, Ministry of Defence staff and local community members who come together via a love of theatre to produce pantomimes, an outdoor Shakespeare performance and a show for the annual Spring Festival that reach audiences in excess of 3,000 annually. Although the RNTA is an established organisation, highly valued by its members and audiences, in recent years it has experienced a decline in participation and engagement by serving personnel. As a result of this decline the prospect of reduced support loomed as financial constraints began to bite and more resource was directed towards sport over cultural pursuits. The former Second Sea Lord (the second highest ranking officer in the RN, with responsibility for personnel) and RNTA President identified the problem and its ramifications writing 'the strength of the RNTA is that it brings together those in uniform, civil servants and members of the local communities. If the group becomes unbalanced, especially without uniformed members, then its relevance becomes harder to justify' (5.1). This precarious situation prompted the RNTA to partner with Holdsworth in this deep and sustained research project between 2014 and 2017. Holdsworth's research has had a significant impact on securing the future health of theatre within the RNTA by increasing awareness of the value of its work and the impact of theatre making on individuals, the RN and the wider community. Her work has been instrumental in helping to secure sustained future funding and renewed engagement with the RNTA, which has contributed to preserving and enhancing a notable feature of naval and community life.

Evidencing the benefits of theatre within the Royal Navy

Holdsworth's research provided the RNTA with a new and compelling evidence-based narrative on how participation in performances helps build communities (both within the RN and between the RN and the local population) and develops transferable skills such as team work, leadership and project management that are crucial to maintain operational effectiveness in the RN. Research findings also illuminated the critical nature of theatre-making to work-life balance, well-being and community relations. Further, it successfully aligned these outcomes to the wider strategic objectives of the Naval Service. 5 years after the research commenced, the then-Chairperson of the RNTA (2014-2017) confirmed that 'having an independent analysis with significant academic provenance and rigour has made a significant difference in furthering the cause of Amateur Theatre within the Royal Naval Service' (5.3) and the incoming Chairperson (2017-) made it clear that he too would 'use your research to promote the benefits of amateur theatre within our organisation' (5.4). In the context of decreased funding for theatre making in favour of sport, Holdsworth's insights offered a 'new perspective' (5.5) and provided robust evidence that enabled the RNTA to fully articulate the wide and diverse benefits of participation in theatre and to argue how it achieves its mission 'to enhance the confidence, team-working and leadership qualities of service and civilian personnel through the medium of drama'

(<https://www.facebook.com/pg/RNTheatre/about/> [Accessed 15.10.2020]). The research also situated the theatre produced by RNTA members as part of a longstanding and significant tradition of theatricals in the RN that secured its place as part of the RN's rich cultural heritage.

Holdsworth produced two research reports (3.4 and 3.5) that she presented to the RNTA committee and distributed to members. The evidence-based dialogue facilitated by the reports has meant the RNTA have successfully secured continuing resources (space, funding, infra-structural support) which has led to more sustainable futures for theatre groups in the RN. The improved profile of the RNTA's activities within the RN has reinvigorated the companies and prompted increased participation. Holdsworth's reports have been integral to 'those charged with continuing to justify why social activities such as Amateur Theatre deserve to be funded at a time when competing resources and the pressure to focus entirely on work and not play is stronger than ever' (RNTA Chairperson, 5.3). Holdsworth's report 'Making Theatre with the Royal Navy' (3.4) transformed understandings among senior officials of the benefits of theatre making for serving personnel, the RN and its wider engagement with local communities as participants and audiences. The RNTA distributed the report to senior officers responsible for the welfare of RN personnel and Captains in charge of naval establishments across the UK to assert the wide benefits of enabling theatre groups to not only keep going, but also expand in number. The RNTA Chairperson recognised that Holdsworth's research has been instrumental in securing the future vitality of the RNTA stating that 'the reports have been used to increase understanding of the role played by the RNTA for serving personnel, the RN and the local community, encouraging self-reflection on current practice and making the case for continued/increased support and resource...[leading to] an upsurge in interest in the RNTA with, potentially 2 more clubs wishing to take part in the annual Theatre Festival next year' (5.3).

Enhancing RNTA members understanding, practice and confidence

The questions posed by the research and its research methods encouraged RNTA groups and individuals to reflect on their practice, which led to an enhanced awareness of their working methods, theatrical repertoire, performance strategies; what it means to make amateur theatre in spaces associated with the RN and the wider cultural value of that practice. The unique and embedded partnership between Holdsworth and the RNTA led to Holdsworth becoming the RNTA Festival Adjudicator for the 2016 Spring Festival, a role made possible by the research conducted over the previous years that facilitated trust in her critical judgments and expertise. After seeing shows produced by four companies (in England and Gibraltar), Holdsworth followed up with immediate oral feedback on elements of the production (performance, staging and interpretation) and a written report on strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. This targeted feedback on practice resulted in further reflection on performance and staging decisions to inform future work (5.3). This activity was also documented and analysed within *The Ecologies of Amateur Theatre* (3.1) in terms of its relationship to the heritage and culture of the RN.

An RNTA Chairperson has commended the importance of Holdsworth's research for 'the value that it has brought to a bunch of keen amateurs in understanding why we do what we do' and for stressing the cultural value of the RNTA's work by situating it in a tradition stretching back hundreds of years (5.3). Through conversations, interviews, filling out surveys and engagement with research publications, RNTA members have reflected on their practice and gained a deeper understanding of how their theatre making contributes to their personal, family and professional lives and how it has affected their friendships, work/life balance and enhanced their 'confidence', 'teamwork', 'presentational and organisational and interpersonal skills' (5.6). An example of how the research has impacted individuals by profiling their creative practice and propelling them to realise their full potential is provided by the photographer who has documented the RNTA's productions since 2003. The enhanced visibility, credibility and confidence gained by having her work showcased in project reports and publications (3.1; 3.4; 3.5) prompted her, with advice and encouragement from Holdsworth, to approach other amateur groups in the south of England and to apply for a job to translate her amateur work to a professional context at the New Theatre Royal in Portsmouth. She confirms 'I think my success at interview was underpinned by the

confidence I have drawn from my images being chosen to illustrate the research...It has boosted my confidence in the standard of work that I can produce' (5.7).

Showcasing the archives: telling the story of the Royal Navy

One of the most significant impacts of this research was on Royal Museums Greenwich (RMG) and the National Maritime Museum (NMM), sites where the story of maritime history and the Royal Navy is narrated. According to RMG's Senior Curator: Research,

The purpose of Royal Museums Greenwich includes enriching people's understanding of the sea and maritime history. Holdsworth and Penny's research has helped us to do this by discovering what the archive can tell us about maritime theatricals, by putting this in historical context and by providing new information to share with our on-line visitors. The history of theatricality at sea is a new angle to our engagement with the public' (5.8).

Specifically, the research has influenced curatorial practice by propelling RMG to look at its collections in new ways and explore the potential offered by the themes of maritime creativity and performance at sea to expose and illuminate previously neglected sources in its 20th Century collections. Sarah Penny, under the supervision of Holdsworth, provided 2 guest posts on 'Festive Theatricals' and 'Crossing the Line Ceremonies' (Dec 2016 and Jan 2017) on RMG's blog, and was interviewed on Solent TV about the project (14 December 2017, 5.10). Holdsworth and Penny also co-curated an open access slide show for *Contemporary Theatre Review's Interventions* dedicated to amateur theatre in the Royal Navy (3.2). As such, the project has generated an enhanced profile and an enriched cultural awareness and understanding of the history, heritage and practice of a varied theatrical and creative repertoire in the Royal Navy. During the summer of 2019, Holdsworth partnered with RMG and supervised work that located relevant materials in the archive, objects store and Brass Foundry photographic collection. According to the RMG Curator: 'This project has located an often under-exploited wealth of material pertaining to maritime creative practices and performances, including scrapbooks, photo albums, handmade magazines, playbills, ditty boxes, embroidery and diary entries recording the performance and reception of creative practice' (5.8). These materials will be used by RMG which is digitising key examples from these findings for use in future planned activities including a public exhibition on Maritime Creativity to include sound, photography, film, objects and archival material, as well as allied gallery talks and publications (5.8).

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

1. Statement from former Second Sea Lord and President of the RNTA, 18 August 2017
2. Statement from RNTA member former Chairperson of RNTA, 7 March 2012
3. Statement from RNTA member and former Chairperson of RNTA (2014-2017), 19 May 2017
4. Email from RNTA Chairperson (2017-), 11 May 2017
5. Feedback questionnaires completed after the presentation of Research Reports at the RNTA's AGM, 3 February 2017
6. Responses to Survey Monkey sent to RNTA members, launched 14 April 2015
7. Statement from photographer and RNTA member. 13 November 2018
8. Statement from Senior Curator: Research, RMG, 22 January 2020
9. RMG Blogs
10. Interview with Solent TV: <https://youtu.be/XzpH-VxwMNw> and screenshot