REF2021

Institution: King's College London

Unit of Assessment: 28 History

Title of case study: Historical Pageants in Britain: Community Identity, Memory and the Performance of the Past

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005–present

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:
Prof Paul Readman	Professor	From 01/09/2002
Prof Arthur Burns	Professor	From 01/09/1992
Dr Paul N. Caton	Senior Research Software Analyst	From 01/09/2010
Dr Alex Hutton	PDRA and Leverhulme ECRF	01/10/2015 – 31/09/2020
Dr Tom Hulme	PDRA	01/11/2013 – 01/10/2015
Dr Charlotte Tupman	Research Associate	01/03/2010 – 01/06/2015

Period when the claimed impact occurred: Nov 2013 – Dec 2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

1. Summary of the impact

Historical pageants were very popular across much of 20th-century Britain. Hundreds of thousands of people were involved as performers and organisers; millions more as supporters and spectators. Pageants are still staged in some places today and their wider legacy is apparent in the popularity of 'living history' and historical re-enactment societies. Yet their ongoing cultural significance had gone unappreciated. The Redress of the Past project changed this by recovering pageants as one of the most important forms of popular and public history in 20th-century Britain. Building from the project's evolving research database, hosted on an interactive website, this research shaped the cultural agendas of museums and other groups. It effected change in cultural programmes and led to new curatorial practices. It led to real cultural and social benefit for individuals, organisations and community audiences, with a focus on co-production and strengthening the link between communities past and present. The project's impact continues to evolve, most recently through the production of new cultural resources that draw on the performance aspects of pageants.

2. Underpinning research

Original research by Readman on the 'place of the past' in early 20th-century British culture revealed the significance of the pageant movement to local and national identity, popular historical consciousness and community memory. This work [1] led to an application for AHRC funding to study historical pageantry across the whole of the 20th century. The resulting project (AH/K003887/1) involved extensive research in archives and libraries around the UK. Its outputs showed, for the first time, the scale and variety of the pageant movement from its origins in 1905. The research opened a whole new field of scholarly inquiry, as well as forming the basis of a programme of public engagement, supported by AHRC follow-on funding (AH/S011382/1).

Database proves the range and persistence of pageant phenomenon
The project's major output has been an open-access, searchable database of pageants [2]. Based on three years of original research in libraries and archives across the UK, the database maps pageants across time and space/place, giving details of 650+ pageants. It includes extensive analytical essays on each pageant, some of which have been co-produced with non-academic collaborators, and many of which draw on input from members of the public. Totalling c1.5m words, the database is the definitive resource for the study of historical pageants in Britain – for academics, students and the public at large.

The past mattered to changing communities
Extensive archival research uncovered neglected materials that transformed our understanding of what history meant to communities across Britain. We now know what aspects of the past mattered

most to ordinary people and where and when it mattered [3,5]. Pageants were not typically conservative or nostalgic spectacles; the reverse was often the case. The performance of history was a crucial means of addressing contemporary concerns and of enlisting the past in the service of the present and the future. Pageants were an important channel for the promotion of popular education; they were designed to instruct as well as to entertain [6]. In doing so, their focus was on the needs, values and aspirations of present-day communities [4].

Civic identity persisted throughout the 20th century, and is still vital
Pageants were connected to a 'progressive' sense of community identity. This evidence of the continuing vitality of civic cultures [2,3] overturns the claims of much recent scholarship; local and national identities were mutually supportive, at least until the 1960s. Often associated with anniversaries [1], the pride of locality celebrated in pageants fed into wider national loyalties; this was true in Wales and Scotland as well as England [2,3]. Across the UK, pageants were a vital means by which history was mobilised in the service of identity formation.

3. References to the research

1. Readman, P. (2005). The place of the past in English culture, c.1890–1914. *Past & Present*, 186, 147–199. doi:10.1093/pastj/gti008.

2. Bartie, A., **Caton**, **P. N.**, Fleming, L., Freeman, M., **Hulme**, **T.**, **Hutton**, **A.** & **Readman**, **P.** (2017). *The Redress of the Past: Historical Pageants in Britain* website. URL to website cloned on 7 December 2020: https://ref2021.historicalpageants.ac.uk/

3. Bartie, A., Fleming, L., Freeman, M., **Hutton, A.** & **Readman**, **P.** (2020). *Restaging the Past: Historical Pageants, Culture and Society in Modern Britain*. London: UCL Press. Including chapters by **Readman**, **Hutton, Burns** and **Hulme**. doi:10.2307/j.ctv13xprsc.

4. Bartie, A., Fleming, L., Freeman, M., **Hulme**, **T.**, **Readman**, **P.** & **Tupman**, **C.** (2017). 'And those who live, how shall I tell their fame?' Historical pageants, collective remembrance and the First World War, 1919–39. *Historical Research*, 90(249), 636–661. doi:10.1111/1468-2281.12189.

5. Bartie, A., Fleming, L., Freeman, M., **Hulme**, **T.**, **Hutton**, **A.** & **Readman**, **P.** (2018). 'Historical pageants and the medieval past in 20th-century England'. *English Historical Review*, 133(563), 866–902. doi:10.1093/ehr/cey158.

6. Bartie, A., Fleming, L., Freeman, M, **Hulme, T**., **Hutton**, **A.** & **Readman**, **P.** (2019). 'History taught in the pageant way': education through historical performance in 20th-century Britain. *History of Education*, 48(2), 156–179. doi:10.1080/0046760X.2018.1516811.

4. Details of the impact

Sharing, preserving and promoting community history and independent research
The key research output of the project is the database [2]. After the launch of this *"amazing resource"* [F pp.31–3] in autumn 2016, usage of the *Redress of the Past* website increased significantly, attracting c3,500 visits a month by early 2017. This rose to c5,400 a month by year's end, with total hits for 2017 exceeding 470,000. In 2018, total visits reached c55,000; hits exceeded 2.9m. The award of follow-on funding heightened engagement, with the website attracting more than 9,000 visits in November 2019; total hits for 2019 exceeded 6.5m. Usage reached a peak in February 2020, before COVID-19: visits for that month exceeded 21,000 [A].

The database benefits family and local historians and community groups, changing the way independent historians conduct their research. This is attested to by family history publications highlighting the project as beneficial to their users' interests and as opening new avenues of inquiry. Soon after its launch, the database [2] was acclaimed as a *"major new online resource"* for family historians in the May 2017 issue of *Family Tree* magazine [D pp.45–6]. *Local History News* featured the project as its cover story, stating that its readers would find *"excellent subjects for family, community, and oral history projects"* in the database [D pp.101–3]. Now reaching 650+ entries, the database featured in the leading UK family history magazine *Who Do You Think You Are?* in June 2020. It has become an established part of family and local historians' toolsets.

Impact on family/local historians is attested to by individuals and groups who have relied on the database in their work. Isabel Sullivan, archivist at Surrey History Centre, has used it (a *"reliable and in depth specialist resource"*) for articles in local history publications [G]. The co-ordinator of the Sherborne Pageant Known Participants Project told Readman how it *"inspired [the Society] to get going on this once again and with more determination towards writing the profiles"* [D]. While itself a research output, the database has proven an innovative means for community

historians to share their work, thereby engaging new audiences in new ways. Members of the public have contributed to the database, including information about pageants that might otherwise have been forgotten. These contributions are fully acknowledged as part of the entry. One local historian wrote of seeing their pageant entry: *"It has been both a pleasure and a profit. A pleasure because it is a cheering, positive project and a profit as I have unearthed more information for our own records"* [D]. In a similar vein, in March 2017, the *Greenwood Tree* (Somerset and Dorset Family History Society) featured an article on the 1929 Dorset pageant. Its author remarked of the database: *"Your extremely detailed accounts of English pageants took my breath away surely making 'Historical Pageants' the preferred 'go-to' website"*. The database also benefited local groups that have built on the research to bring their communities together around pageants. In December 2018, a local historian sought the team's help in 'scripting' a New Year Social Evening to be hosted at Saffron Walden Library. The social featured performed readings from and reflections on Saffron Walden's 1910 pageant, which featured on the database. Our research *"proved invaluable"* [D] in making the event possible. More generally, the real-world benefit of the collaboration between the project and local/independent researchers led to the co-creation of a new resource: the *"invaluable"* [I] Local History Study Guide [F], with contributions by local/independent researchers, archivists, project partners and academics, which details how pageant research can be *"very useful"* [G] in illuminating community history.

Changes to cultural programmes and curatorial practices
The research underpinned five exhibitions that had an important impact on curatorial practice and on local communities, establishing a new and demonstrably reproducible model for co-creative public engagement. The impact on curatorial practice was to change attitudes towards local history and inspire new collaborations between academics, museums and communities. The research findings relating to civic identities [3], the medieval past [5] and especially those presented in the database [2] formed the basis of these collaborations. The awards of AHRC funding for the research led museums and other bodies to participate in the co-creation of these exhibitions (and linked activities) as formal project partners [C]. Three exhibitions took place during the first phase of funding: at Moyse's Hall, Bury St Edmunds; Tullie House Museum, Carlisle, which was opened by the mayor; and Scarborough Art Gallery, which was so popular it was restaged at Scarborough Library before being exhibited again at the North Yorkshire County Record Office. The second phase resulted in two more exhibitions: at Cecil Sharp House, London, and St Albans Museum.

Each exhibition directly resulted from the research. The research effected change in the cultural agenda of partner organisations. Curators came to understand the wider significance of their pageant collections and their relationship to local history, memory and identity formation. In Bury St Edmunds, the local group Bury St Edmunds Magna Carta 800 collaborated on the exhibition and associated events, which were integrated into their 800th anniversary programme [J]. In Scarborough, the project *"awakened"* new interest in local history. The Scarborough Archaeological & Historical Society had long emphasised archaeology over history; it was *"not until our involvement in the pageants project [that] further important historical work [was] done by the society"* [I] as part of their contribution to the Scarborough Art Gallery exhibition. In St Albans, the audience development manager at the Museum said the research was *"essential for us to make the exhibition happen"* [E]. In all cases, the exhibition content was based on the research findings, leading to changes in attitudes to local history. The Tullie House curator saw the research evolve and spotted an opportunity as he came to understand the significance of their collection: *"As the research progressed the museum gained further information about contextualising its Pageant collections. It therefore provided the incentive to develop a temporary exhibition that was co-curated between Tullie House and the [project] Team"*. He worked closely with the project, particularly in writing exhibition material. In his subsequent work at another museum, he *"often use[d] the project as a good example of collaborative working"* [F pp.47–50].

The events programme at St Albans built on work done in the first phase – including a study day held in St Albans Museum. This led to the decision that the St Albans pageants merited a major exhibition [D,E]. As in Carlisle, the research *"allowed us to examine our pageant collection ... and now we would like to use what we have learned in a more imaginative way to allow audiences to connect with this vibrant part of the St Albans story"* [C]. The St Albans curators had been aware of the Museum's pageant collection, but not of its wider significance, which is what the project research provided. The research also led to collaboration with Trestle Theatre, who staged scenes from the 1953 St Albans Pageant to a sold-out audience at the museum. Feedback

highlighted the event's 'immediacy' and participatory feel. The audience felt they were taking part, while also learning about a vital link with their past: *"What a great idea and wonderful tradition to take forward in this 'digital' Time"* [D]. For the curators, the legacy of this exhibition and its events programme is that they *"now have a much clearer understanding of this period of St Albans' past"* and *"[t]he items in our collection that relate to pageants have deeper contextual information allowing future curators to understand their significance"* [E].

The research [esp. 2] resulted in the preservation of at-risk archival material. The collection of David Clarke, a leading figure in post-1945 pageantry, reveals the changing experience of pageants, including behind-the-scenes insights about acting, music and set design. It is an important resource for cultural, theatre and performance history. The research led to the discovery of this material and was the *"main impetus"* [G] for its deposition in record offices and archives. In the words of one archivist (Surrey History Centre), *"the vast bulk"* of the Clarke material *"came to us due to the impetus of your project"*. The Centre also *"advertised the collection as a top hit of the year via the National Archives when they released their accessions to repositories 2018 report"* [D]. This material is of long-term heritage value. This has been shown by its use in work undertaken in collaboration with the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS). Clarke was interested in English folk culture and our research pointed to the important interconnections between the folk revival and historical pageantry more generally [1,2]. This gave EFDSS an opportunity to take *"exciting new approaches"* to their own material and to hold an *"engaging, accessible and original exhibition"* based on the project findings [H]. As well as being *"popular among our members and regular users of the building"*, EFDSS was *"pleased that the exhibition has drawn new visitors … who were previously unaware of us as an organisation"*. The collaboration is an example of the research changing the curatorial programme of a heritage body and benefiting it by bringing in new audiences. Attendees at the launch enjoyed the focus on folk musical detail and many had no prior knowledge of pageants or the overlaps with song/dance. They learnt that pageants *"celebrated the folk history of ordinary people by ordinary people"* [D].

Promoting understanding of history and enhancing community identity

Public audiences have been major beneficiaries of the research. The exhibitions and events based on the research have enabled communities to connect their past and present. This is evident from visitor numbers and their movingly personal comments. The exhibition at St Albans had 19,000+ visitors [E]; that at Carlisle had 6,000+ [B]. For the Tullie House curator, the exhibition *"reconnect[ed] local people with the museum"* and *"enabl[ed] many of the local community to connect with their past and celebrate their contribution to … Carlisle's Historical Pageants"* [B]. This link between history and community identity is attested to by comments from visitors to all the exhibitions. A visitor to the Scarborough exhibition said, *"My ideas of Scarborough as a strong community, proud of its history & heritage have been strengthened. For so many people to have invested so much time & money it's surely testament to their pride in the town and desire to promote it to others"*. In Bury St Edmunds, one attendee at a pageant film evening linked to the exhibition wrote: *"This was a fascinating evening. Bury seems to be a very vibrant town with enthusiastic people today. This is clearly the culture from at least 100 years ago … Bury people are proud of their heritage, love their town and always willing to celebrate"* [D p.9]. In Carlisle, a visitor said that *"The opportunity to learn about previous pageants … was wonderful. Historical pageants are a terrific way of bringing communities together and creating cohesion between past, present and future ...This exhibition has enabled [people to] remember, relive and celebrate the city's history"* [D p.24]. That similar comments were made in different parts of the UK shows how effectively the research spread knowledge about pageants and encouraged people to think differently about local history and identity. People reported that they had learnt about pageantry, their towns (*"I learnt lots about Bury St Edmunds and its history"*) and history more generally (it *"added a new dimension to our knowledge of social history"*); and they had been stimulated to learn more [D pp.55–6]. The research evoked powerful personal memories, which were then often shared at engagement events; it helped individuals locate pageants in their life stories [6 pp.173–8; D pp.79–81; F pp.53–5]. Responses went beyond nostalgia; the research elicited reflection on social relations and community life. An attendee at a talk in Sherborne, Dorset, was *"interested to find out more about the selection of cast for the pageant, and to discover whether social status played a part in this"* [D p.74]. A visitor to St Albans summed up what they learnt at the exhibition: *"Why pageants took place, who the main people were, the social implications, the production, coordination, the great numbers of people involved, the episodes in each pageant, the*

memorabilia to mark the events", while also noting: *"I loved the artwork for the posters & publicity"* [D]. This combination of enjoyment and gaining new knowledge was echoed in comments at all five exhibitions and their associated events.

Co-production was integral to the project agenda. For the Tullie House curator, the exhibition was *"a new model of co-curation for the museum"* [F pp.47–50]. Costumes, photographs and local memories featured in the exhibition, the latter through newly recorded oral history testimonies deriving from the project research. The community activity took place after a co-ordinated appeal by Tullie House Museum and local media, including BBC Cumbria. Memories of taking part in the 1977 pageant drew many to the exhibition, but visitors with no knowledge of pageants came along too [D]. Co-produced events took various forms. The research for the St Albans exhibition gave rise to an event hosted by the son of the producer of the 1948 St Albans Pageant. As noted above, St Albans Museum was also the venue for re-performed scenes from the 1953 pageant. One scene required a very special prop: the dragon slain by St George. 238 local children and parents participated in a *"drop-in dragon-making workshop"*, bringing vital footfall to the museum and material benefit to parents during the school holiday. One parent wrote, *"Historic[al] pageants are fun & a good way of involving families with children in history"*. In Bury St Edmunds, the exhibition sparked community-led activity, including a reunion of 1959 pageant participants. Eighteen people came, many quite elderly. An email sent by the organiser to attendees suggested it become a regular event: *"It seemed that everyone enjoyed it and I felt that it was more like a family reunion, with everyone chatting away to each other from the moment you arrived"*. In the words of Alan Baxter of Bury St Edmunds Magna Carta 800: *"people who took part in the reunion felt that they had contributed to something that mattered and it raised their self-esteem"* [J]. This event had a positive social benefit that would not have been possible without the research.

Changes to creative output and benefit to other heritage organisations and charities
The first phase of the project showed music to have been an important but overlooked aspect of 20th-century pageantry [1,2]. The second phase has led to the creation of new recordings of pageant music. The singer Amanda Boyd has arranged and recorded new versions of pageant music, which she sung live at Trestle Theatre's performance in St Albans [D]. Amanda's recordings are available on her website. Instrumental pageant music is now available thanks to the project research. PhD student Parker Gordon has put together a website with recordings of many unique pageant pieces [D pp.34–5]. Parker also performed at St Albans and, with Amanda, will do so again at an Historical Pageants Day in collaboration with EFDSS in London in August 2021.

The research influenced the activities of charitable organisations. In three cases (Charles Kingsley 200; Windrose Rural Media Trust (WRMT); Axbridge Pageant Association), the research fed into Heritage Lottery Funding applications, backed by letters of support from the pageants project; two of the three were successful. One (£5,000) helped fund a pageant as part of the Charles Kingsley 200th anniversary festival, in which the project team participated [D pp.30–1]. The other (£67,000) funded WRMT's work in preserving archive film, including film of pageants. The research led directly to a larger collaboration with WRMT, the aim of which is the creation of a new documentary film about pageants (funding has been secured as part of the AHRC follow-on award). In the words of the Director of WRMT, the collaboration has *"greatly expanded the opportunities for us as film-makers"*, not least through the recording – often for the first time – of original pageant music [K].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

A. Redress of the Past website usage statistics: http://histpag-webstats.dighum.kcl.ac.uk/
B. Report on pageants exhibition from Edwin Rutherford, curator at Tullie House.
C. Letters of support from AHRC Project Partners.
D. Summary of public engagement/feedback: The Redress of the Past.
E. St Albans Museum: testimonial letter.
F. Historical Pageants: Local History Study Guide.
G. Surrey History Centre (Isabel Sullivan): testimonial letter.
H. English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS): testimonial letter.
I. Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society (SAHS): testimonial letter.
J. Magna Carta 800: testimonial letter.
K. Windrose Rural Media Trust: testimonial letter