

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Nottingham		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> History		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Nottingham's Historic Green Spaces: Protecting, Popularising and Increasing Engagement		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2000-2016		
<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>
Prof. John Beckett Dr Jonathan Coope	Professor of History Research Fellow	01/10/1979-31/08/2020. 01/02/2013-31/01/2014; 01/02/2016-30/09/2016.
Dr Judith Mills	Research Fellow	01/02/2013-31/01/2014; 01/02/2016-30/09/2016.
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2013-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Public green spaces make a major contribution to the health and happiness of urban citizens and visitors. Nottingham's green spaces occupy almost 20% of the city, and the oldest public green spaces continue to perform a vital role in the city's civic offer and the lives of inhabitants and visitors. However, their origins and development are not fully understood, and there is a disconnect between the historical significance and the contemporary management and use of these green spaces. Research led by Beckett has filled this gap and has been essential in creating a meaningful and sustainable connection between past and present. This has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• informed policy, shaped practice and enhanced protection for Nottingham's historic green spaces</li> <li>• fostered capacity for community and volunteer-led research and empowered citizens to protect local heritage</li> <li>• popularised Nottingham's historic green spaces through increased public awareness and engagement and enhanced understanding</li> </ul>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Research, led by Beckett, has demonstrated the <b>pivotal role</b> of Nottingham's <b>historic green spaces past and present</b>. Nottingham was one of the most densely built, overcrowded towns in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century England, ravaged by poverty, disease and death [3.1, 3.4]. It was also the <b>first</b> major industrial town to provide open 'green' spaces for the purposes of <b>health and recreation</b> in response to national legislation. The <b>1845 Nottingham Enclosure Act</b> set aside 130 acres of land to provide <b>open 'green' spaces for the townspeople</b>. These were the Forest Recreation Ground, the Arboretum, Church (Rock) and General Cemeteries, several smaller parks and cricket grounds and the 'walks' (Queen's Walk, Elm Avenue, Corporation Oaks and Robin Hood Chase) [3.1]. Beckett's research, the first to consider these Enclosure spaces together as a <b>planned scheme</b>, led to a better understanding of planned green spaces in urban history.</p> <p>Beckett's extensive research has charted the history of these green spaces, examining their <b>creation and development</b> and the combined role of government, local authority and philanthropic involvement in ensuring Nottingham had <b>accessible green spaces</b> [3.1-3.4]. The research has been critical in understanding the <b>crucial role</b> green spaces have played in Nottingham's history and the lives of <b>Nottingham people</b>, and the <b>diverse uses made of them</b> [3.1]. They provided focal points for recreation, celebrations, sports and natural history. They were also <b>contested spaces</b>: pivotal to health and recreation but also perceived as the focus for crime and antisocial behaviour; public spaces open to everyone but under threat of encroachment; and intended to be free but subject to controversial admission charges. They were central to the lives of townspeople, civic pride and cultural emulation. Their origins, and diverse and contested usage, have affected <b>decision making and perceptions</b> about these green spaces throughout their history [3.1]. Beyond the significance to Nottingham, Beckett demonstrated that these green spaces constitute one of the <b>most ambitious schemes of urban improvement</b> in mid-nineteenth century Britain [3.1].</p> <p>These ideas are developed through Beckett's close examination of the <b>next phases of greening the city</b> and its suburban hinterland [3.2]. The creation of public parks and other</p>		

green open spaces was a key part of **urban policy making**, and Beckett demonstrated the importance of Nottingham as a case study for understanding wider issues and implications of **shaping urban spaces**. Moreover, Beckett highlighted how the debates and issues that were integral to the creation and development of these green spaces remain **pivotal today**: health and recreation, contested space, responding to legislation and local demand [3.2].

Beckett's expertise in the theory and application of **local history** [3.5] was **paramount** in leading and stimulating co-produced research [3.7-3.9]. Beckett's work stressed the **importance of connecting with communities** [3.5]. Together with Beckett and Paul Elliott (University of Derby) as the academic leads, Coope and Mills (research fellows) regularly met with community partners and coordinated community-led research. Coope and Mills demonstrated the beneficial impact of this community engagement on **shaping research agendas and connecting past histories with contemporary communities** [3.6]. Beckett, Coope and Mills led the co-produced research but developed their research agenda in response to community partners, ensuring it addressed the concerns and needs of **local communities**. [3.1].

The research has highlighted the **vital role** of green spaces in urban centres over time and the relevance of the 1845 legislation for policy, protection and use today. Through its multi-disciplinary community-led nature, 'The Social World of Green Spaces' project, led by Beckett and working with Nottingham City Council, the Open Spaces Forum, Friends of the Forest and of Nottingham Arboretum, Nottingham Women's History Group, Framework Housing, the Mapperley and Sherwood History Group and the Nottinghamshire Local History Association, has **connected the forward-thinking initiatives of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century with protection of, and engagement with, green spaces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**.

### 3. References to the research

[3.1] Beckett, J., Elliott, P., Mills, J., and Coope, J., *Nottingham's Victorian Green Spaces* (Peregrine Press, University of Derby, 2020). ISBN: 1912312034

[3.2] Beckett, J., 'Public parks and urban development during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Nottingham', *Midland History*, 45/1 (2020), 75-94.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0047729X.2020.1712078>

[3.3] Mills, J., 'The transformation of green space in old and new Nottingham', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 118 (2014), 93-114. [Available on Request].

[3.4] Beckett, J. ed., *A Centenary History of Nottingham* (Phillimore, Chichester, 2006). ISBN: 978-1912312030

[3.5] Beckett, J., *Writing Local History* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2007). ISBN: 978-0-7190-7660-2.

[3.6] Coope, J., Mills, J., 'Reflections on a co-production project: the social world of Nottingham's Green Spaces project', *Local Historian*, 44/4 (2014), 335-40. [Available on Request].

[3.7] AHRC Connected Communities. PI: E. Harvey. Named Researcher: **J. Beckett**. AH/J01348X/1. Writing our History, Digging Our Past. £500. 01/02/2012-31/12/2012.

[3.8] AHRC Community Heritage Development Award. PI: **J. Beckett**. AH/K007718/1. Social World of Nottingham's Green Spaces Community History Project. £66.312. 02/2013-01/2014.

[3.9] AHRC Follow on Funding for Impact and Engagement. PI: **J. Beckett**. AH/N006402/1. Social World of Nottingham's Green Spaces. £73,862. 02/2016-12/2016.

### 4. Details of the impact

Beckett and the 'Green Spaces' project team have created a **meaningful and sustainable connection between past and present management and uses** of Nottingham's green spaces. Nottingham's **oldest public green spaces**, created in response to 1845 legislation, continue to **perform a vital role** in the lives of inhabitants and visitors. However, their origins and development are not always fully understood, which has put parks and green spaces at risk of encroachment. Working with Nottingham City Council (NCC: who own, manage and promote these green spaces) and the Open Spaces Forum (OCF: who work in partnership with NCC and bring together other stakeholders to protect and enhance open and green space in the city), the Green Spaces project has **informed their policies and protected green spaces**. The project has also **enhanced understanding** of the significance of these interconnected historic green spaces as a planned scheme and raised the profile of lesser known green spaces. The project has foregrounded the original ethos of open spaces for

everyone, for recreation and health, as embodied in the 1845 Enclosure Act. Working with **diverse project beneficiaries** including Friends organisations, community history researchers, mental health groups and the wider public, the project has **increased public awareness and enhanced understanding** of these green spaces. Co-production, which has been central to this project, **has fostered capacity** for community and volunteer-led research and **empowered citizens** to protect local heritage.

### **1. Informing policy, shaping practice and enhancing protection**

Parks and open spaces occupy a key role within NCC's leisure and culture portfolio, and Beckett's work has been pivotal in **informing policy, shaping practice and enhancing protection** for Nottingham's historic green spaces [5.3]. The Parks and Open Spaces Development Manager said the increased knowledge base provided by Beckett, which would otherwise *'not have been easily available'*, has *'enhanced the Council's ability to protect and promote these spaces'* by providing the historic context and justification for their protection and long-term preservation [5.3]. Bespoke Fact Files, compiled in direct response to demand for further information from the NCC, have provided *'concise, accessible and factual information...which is invaluable for overcoming challenges concerning continuity of staff and capacity to undertake original research in terms of time and expertise'* [5.3]. The research has also shaped the annually updated management plans for individual parks and open spaces, ensuring they are *'appropriate and legal within the context of the history of a particular green space'* [5.3]. The research has *'informed a review of policy and strategy relating to the management and maintenance of green spaces. The Future Parks Accelerator Project, a 25-year strategy for the City's parks, benefitted from the project research and again the history and background of these parks, especially the links with health'* [5.3].

Improved knowledge and understanding of the **1845 Nottingham Enclosure Act** and creation of these green spaces is **crucial in enhancing protection** as it *'has a bearing on how sites can be used and developed today and the project findings have help[ed] to challenge inappropriate pressures on sites'* [5.3]. The Open Spaces Champion and Trustee of the Open Spaces Forum highlighted that the project research has been used to challenge *'threats and encroachments onto public land'*, and *'having the research findings easily available...[is] an important resource to help ensure that the spaces continue to be managed and development [sic] in an appropriate way, especially when funding is tight'* [5.10]. Beckett's involvement ensured that all the open green spaces created by Nottingham's 1845 Enclosure Act were considered collectively as *'a planned scheme'*, *'something that no one or no other group had done before'* but that is *'fundamental to the heritage of the City'* [5.10]. The research has also been **instrumental in addressing contemporary issues of accessibility and contested space**, as it demonstrates *'there have always been tensions'* but that *'they are not and never have been an excuse to stop people using the parks'* [5.10].

The project has **shaped** the Parks Department's **public engagement strategies** and directly led to **better visibility of the histories** of local parks. *'Part of the role of the Parks Development Team is to engage with Citizens and local communities, to get "buy-in" and respect for places; this can be difficult and the history project was a different and longer-lasting way for us to engage...and a means of promoting a better understanding of our spaces by the general public'* [5.3]. Community engagement activities, underpinned by Beckett's research and led by the project team, enabled the council to *'engage with park-users in both traditional and innovative ways'* [5.3]. These included illustrated interpretation panels designed for the Arboretum, the Forest Pavilion, and Queen's Walk Park; a series of downloadable trails and creative performances in parks. The significance of the Enclosure Tree Trail is that it allowed NCC *'to join the historic spaces together into one walk that explores different parts of the City and highlights the historic importance of the spaces'* [5.3]. These initiatives led NCC to *'look for alternate uses for historic spaces'* and *'inspired future engagement'* [5.3]. The project resources have raised the profile of the Enclosure spaces and brought them to the attention of a wider public. This is crucial as parks are *'increasingly dependent on volunteers to keep them maintained'* which means *'parks need to have high profiles'* [5.10]. The 'Green Spaces' project has shaped the development and management of Nottingham's parks and green open spaces for at least the next quarter of a decade [5.3].

### **2. Fostering capacity for community and volunteer-led research and empowering citizens to protect local heritage**

The project fostered **meaningful and sustainable relationships** between local history and community groups and with the University of Nottingham. **Co-production** was at the heart of the 'Green Spaces' project, with community partners fully integrated throughout. These included Friends of the Forest and of Nottingham Arboretum, Nottingham Women Group, Mapperley and Sherwood History group and the Nottinghamshire Local History Association. Volunteers reflected that *'everyone felt integral to the team...that all their contributions were valuable...'* [5.2] and *'mutual trust was established between the project team and the community groups'* [5.1]. Beckett's expertise in **facilitating and coordinating** large community history projects, was **instrumental** to this.

The project **facilitated interconnections between researchers and community groups**, and explored the **intersections between past and present uses** of the green spaces. Two interdisciplinary events, 'Social History of Public Urban Green Spaces' (January 2014), brought together a range of stakeholders and beneficiaries including project volunteers, local historians, representatives of NCC and external academics. These were pivotal in identifying community research agendas and led to sustained communication, collaboration and co-production. [5.8, p.8]. This also motivated and inspired research activities in existing local history groups [5.1, 5.2], and led to knowledge exchange across a diverse range of groups who *'realised that we all had overlapping and inter-related interests and agendas... resulting in greater communication and collaboration amongst previously disparate [groups]'* [5.1].

The project provided a **new skill base amongst volunteers and increased capacity for research to protect heritage**. Project volunteers were **empowered** by the collaborative processes underpinning the co-production, which were informed by Beckett's research on, and expertise in, the practice of local and community history. One volunteer reflected: *'It was led by the academic team but we all worked together in a genuine collaboration...I worked closely with Jonathan Coope to research the impact of war on Nottingham's parks...[We] gave a joint presentation on 'Parks in Wartime' at the annual anniversary of the opening of the Arboretum [and have] jointly written a series of articles for the project website'* [5.2]. Volunteers went on to **successfully apply the expertise and skills acquired to other research projects** across the East Midlands, providing **increased research and archival capacity** in the cultural, museum and archive sector. Volunteer A highlighted that the project *'encouraged me to participate in and contribute to another community history'* [5.1]; whilst volunteer B stated that *'it made me a better and more efficient researcher and gave me the confidence to do more research...I am now an active member of the Great Central Railway heritage group and I have been able to use the research experience gained on the green spaces project to great advantage'* [5.2]. By fostering community-led research in partnership with the academic team, the project ensured the transferability and sustainability of skills with applied outcomes.

### **3. Popularising Nottingham's historic green spaces through increased and enriched public awareness and understanding**

Community engagement initiatives have **increased awareness of the connections between the historic creation and contemporary uses** of parks and green open spaces **and the links between each of these green spaces**. Beckett's role was crucial as he was *'the first to research all the open spaces'* created by the 1845 Enclosure Act, *'examining not just the 19<sup>th</sup> century creation of the spaces but also 20<sup>th</sup> century developments, threats to space...and how the use of the spaces has changed over time'* [5.3]. This has **enriched understanding of and engagement with** well-known parks and open spaces: *'The spaces are accessible but thanks to the work of the University of Nottingham, the stories behind them have become more accessible too!'* [5.7].

The project enabled **Nottingham residents to discover, appreciate and enjoy green spaces in new ways**. In 2016, Excavate produced a **community play** and ten 'talking-head' videos based on the project research. This **immersive theatre** performance took place across multiple historic green spaces in the city including the Arboretum, Queen's Walk and The Forest. The **multi-site performances** connected a **wide-ranging audience** with a **tangible past** and **enriched public understanding** about *'the link between the parks and how vital there were (and are!)'* [5.3]. Approximately 400 people watched the play: 97% of respondents said it was an effective way to learn about history and heritage and 92% said it had **changed their understanding of the history or importance of Nottingham's parks** [5.11]. The event *'brought history to life'*, relating *'the places we know'* to histories *'never really spoken of'*, in a

'very accessible way' and *'transformed...understanding of how our green spaces came about'* [5.11]. The play crucially explored why that history is **still important to 21<sup>st</sup> century park-users**. Its central message of how the **1845 Nottingham Enclosure Act** created **accessible open spaces**, how this was challenged historically, and the **key role Nottingham citizens played** (and continue to play) in ensuring Nottingham's green spaces remain accessible for everyone, **inspired visitors**: *'I came away feeling inspired: I want to find out more'* [5.11]. Beckett's pioneering work on the inter-relationship between the green spaces informed the production of the play. *'Artistically it pushed us in a way that we haven't been pushed before, in that we have never created a site specific show for multiple sites with the need to alter the script in subtle ways for each performance'* [5.5]. The play **changed Excavate's approach to stage performance** and **led to new artistic partnerships**, which *'have continued since...and now become a feature of our work'* [5.5]. The success of the play has since cascaded to influence **similar engagement activities across the city** [5.3].

Exhibitions **raised the profile** of the Enclosure green spaces and enabled venues to deliver on their mission to **serve local communities**. The co-curated 'Nottingham's Historic Green Spaces' exhibition (2016) and the re-display of exhibition panels in the Arboretum café and Forest Pavilion, **promoted the work of volunteer and community researchers** and **enhanced understanding of the historical significance**. The exhibition also enabled local studies librarians to *'deepen knowledge of their own collections'* which contributed to their professional development and showcased the resources of Nottingham City Library. This is *'very important'* because *'the library service has not been very good at publicising what it holds and what it does'*. **Demand for information** about the Arboretum and Forest by library visitors is high and yet there was *'very little accessible information about these spaces'*. The exhibition, website and project resources have enabled the library *'to meet the interest in the history and protection of green spaces'* [5.4] The project therefore increased the ability of the library to engage with their audience.

The project has popularised green spaces amongst **diverse audiences**, with beneficiaries including schoolchildren and vulnerable adults [5.8]. Creative activities, including a **poetry competition**, workshops and Victorian games, engaged young people (c. 100) and encouraged them to appreciate **green spaces as interactive learning environments** [5.8]. The project **changed the practice** of the Framework Housing Association's 'Nature in Mind', a **mental health project for vulnerable adults** hosted in Nottingham's parks and open green spaces: *'As a result of the activities Nature in Mind did with the University of Nottingham's Green Spaces project, we now use the Arboretum on a regular basis. The project introduced us to the Friends of the Arboretum and we are working with them to organise further events'*. The benefits of these sustained activities and partnerships include *'social contact, fresh air and exercise, and learning about the nature and heritage of local green spaces'* [5.6].

The project website [5.9] remains an important platform for **knowledge exchange**, **showcasing** the co-produced research, **enabling new visitors** to engage with multi-media resources and **promoting popular participation** with the **histories** of Nottingham's green spaces and **heritage protection**. During 2016, 3,520 people (12,473 page views) used the website, including from Europe, America and Australia as well as the UK. From 2017 to 2020, 13,084 users have accessed the website, including 3,704 new users in 2020 alone [5.9].

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1. Testimony from Community Volunteer 1
- 5.2. Testimony from Community Volunteer 2
- 5.3. Testimony from Parks & Open Spaces Development Manager, Nottingham City Council
- 5.4. Testimony from former Nottingham Local Studies Librarian
- 5.5. Testimony from playwright and artistic director (Excavate)
- 5.6. Testimony from Project Worker for Nature in Mind/Framework Housing Association
- 5.7. Testimony from Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner
- 5.8. Nottingham Historic Green Spaces Community Engagement Photo Album, 2013-16
- 5.9. Project Website - Visitor Data Analytics and PDF of website
- 5.10. Testimony of Open Spaces Champion and Trustee of Open Spaces Forum
- 5.11. Survey feedback about community play
- 5.12. Nottingham Historic Green Spaces Fact Files