

<b>Institution:</b> University of Gloucestershire		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA28 (History)		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Cheltenham: Diaspora		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2018 to present.		
<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>
Dr. David Howell	Lecturer in History	Present
Dr. Erin Peters	Senior Lecturer in Early Modern History	Present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2018 to present.		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Migration themes are of growing importance as national research priority areas. The Cheltenham: Diaspora project enhanced understanding of the range of local historical migration narratives among participants and local community groups. The project enhanced participants' sense of relevance and value in their histories and the importance of their place in the local community, while broadening local appreciations of these narratives through public exhibitions. This project is developing a history of the Cheltenham mosque, and partnerships with educational institutions in Nigeria. These activities enhance the sense of value on historical narratives within participant communities, and wider demographics engaging with related exhibitions.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The project team has identified a limited evidence base for multi-cultural narratives in historical accounts of the town, and indeed Cheltenham more generally. Addressing this historical imbalance and bias which has neglected a significant proportion of community voices in Cheltenham was of importance. It was felt imperative to give voice to these narratives given the vulnerability of oral histories and the intangible forms of heritage associated with those who were interviewed for the project. The project has served to create opportunities to identify and record narratives of migration in Cheltenham, and has also helped to safeguard traditions and practices evident within migrant communities that might otherwise be left in decline. The first stage of safeguarding is the identification and recording of intangible forms of heritage, and this has served as the primary motivation for the first phase of the project.</p> <p>Research is split between archival work and the recording of oral histories. Archival research initially focused on University records, exploring the earliest examples of international students attending the teacher training college (originally based at the current Francis Close Hall campus). Extensive work has been carried out in the Gloucestershire Archives, exploring narratives of ayahs coming from India to live and work in Cheltenham. The Cheltenham: Diaspora project makes use of established community links with local organisations, including the West End Partnership. These have been used to identify potential project participants for recording contemporary oral histories. Introductions have been established with members of local communities who have migration-based family histories to share. Extensive use has been made of social media groups (such as 'South Africans in Cheltenham' on Facebook), to interact with diasporic groups in the area. Time has been spent with members of the Cheltenham Hindu, Jewish and Muslim communities, recording the growth of the respective religious institutions. Further elements of the research have led to the development of</p>		

international links, notably the Crimm'd research centre in Lagos, Nigeria, which has assisted in the exploration of the life story of one of the earliest international students to attend Francis Close Hall.

Research activity is led by Dr David Howell. His work has focused on intangible heritage, neglected community historical narratives, and has previously worked with homeless communities in Cardiff, exploring their use of heritage sites as places of refuge. Dr Micky Gibbard has assisted in developing links with both the Greek and Syro-Malabar communities in Cheltenham, while Dr Ruth Atherton has engaged with the 'Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees' organisation. Significant contributions have been made by seven undergraduate student researchers, who joined the project as part of the university's 'Your Future Plan' placement programme.

Project updates are available to wider public audiences through two social media platforms, Twitter and Facebook. A pop-up exhibition was displayed in Cheltenham's Chapel Arts Gallery as part of the 2019 Gloucester History Festival. On-going research work includes interview transcription, digitising research materials, making the project archive available in an online format, and digitising the project exhibition (while the physical exhibition continues to tour with local partners).

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

Howell, D., 2020. Expanding Heritage Horizons through the Cheltenham: A Diaspora Project. *Present Pasts*, 10(1), p.1. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/pp.81>.

In addition, the project team has looked to distribute materials relevant to the project through more accessible means, targeting local community publications, including the *Cheltenham Viewpoint* community magazine.

Virtual exhibition: <https://cc4hh.co.uk/cheltenham-diaspora/cheltenham-diaspora-exhibition/>

See also: Howell, D., 2018. Contemporising custom: The re-imagining of the Mari Lwyd. *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 13, pp. 66-79., for a consideration of methodological research perspectives on intangible heritage in community contexts.

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

The Diaspora project was primarily focused on increasing understanding and awareness of contemporary and historic migration narratives in Cheltenham. It was also anticipated that the project would change attitudes towards migration.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, planned community events have not been possible. Therefore feedback has been concentrated on visitor comment books, an online survey and testimonials from individuals participating in the project.

#### Exhibitions.

The Diaspora project produced pop-up exhibitions hosted by Chapel Arts gallery and the Cheltenham Community Resource Hub. Future exhibitions will be held by the Quaker Meeting House and the Springbank Resource Centre. In addition, the exhibition was digitised and made freely available to the public. This proved to be an effective means of continuing audience engagement within the context of Covid-19 movement restrictions. Prior to lockdown measures, visitor comments were gathered in exhibition books. These more qualitative public responses to the exhibitions have revealed an increased sense of empowerment for participants, a heightened profile and status for migrant communities in the context of Cheltenham's history, and increased visibility and appreciation of local intangible forms of heritage.

Feedback was also (and continues to be) sourced from project participants through interview statements and a post-project questionnaire.

### **Surveys.**

At time of writing, an online post-exhibition survey has gathered fifty responses. This survey remains live and it is anticipated that additional responses will continue to be generated

50 percent of respondents came from Cheltenham, while 14 percent of respondents came from outside of the UK. 60 percent of respondents had lived or worked in Cheltenham at one point during their lives.

Reflecting the impact of Covid restrictions, 80 percent of respondents had engaged with the online exhibition or social media platforms linked to the project, as opposed to only 18 percent to have attended one of the pop-up exhibitions.

#### Understanding and Awareness:

Survey results were highly encouraging, indicating a very positive response to the project.

84 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project has enhanced their understanding of the history of the area, while 86 percent positively acknowledged an increase in their knowledge of ethnic diversity within Cheltenham. 88 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project has successfully raised public awareness regarding the history of migration within Cheltenham.

#### Project benefits:

A broad range of benefits, generated by the project, were cited by respondents.

95 percent felt they were more aware of migrant communities in Cheltenham.

85 percent cited that the online archive material had raised their awareness of hidden histories in the area.

83 percent felt they now had a greater understanding of diversity within Cheltenham.

77 percent of respondents felt the project has helped them to think differently about Cheltenham.

Also of note, 52 percent of respondents cited their pride in the area, as a consequence of the exhibition.

20 percent of responses came from people who identified themselves as being members of migrant communities within Cheltenham, and that the project had successfully increased their representation within the area.

Additional comments provided within the survey described the project as having been 'very positive' and 'wonderful' to participate in. One respondent wrote that Diaspora had been 'a hugely important project, giving a platform to Asian voices in Cheltenham where otherwise our stories are not told'. Of note, a number of responses came from Nigeria, stating that 'we love to see Nigerian history and our heroes risen'.

Testimonials were also collected from project participants, and partners who assisted in the development of the project.

Bernice Thompson from Cheltenham West End Partnership, one of the host venues for the pop-up exhibition stated that 'Diaspora filled an important gap' and that '(T)his body of research, focused on an area which has developed as the most ethnically diverse part of Cheltenham, is of huge value for community integration'.

J Szczuka, a relative of a member of the Polish Ex-Combatants Association, whose stories are told within the Diaspora project, commented that '(I)t is a source of pride to see our community histories on display, adding that '(T)his exhibition finally gave this story of sacrifice and loss a position of prominence that it deserves.'

Dr Raphael James of the Crimm'd research centre, Lagos, who assisted in developing research exploring Nigerian migration narratives in Cheltenham cited that '(M)any of the students to use the Crimm'd centre have now seen the exhibition on your website and have been inspired by the prominence given to this great figure of the Oyo family', indicating that the impact of the Diaspora project has been international.

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

1. Bernice Thompson from Cheltenham West End Partnership
2. J Szczuka, a relative of a member of the Polish Ex-Combatants Association
3. Dr Raphael James of the Crimm'd Research Centre, Lagos
4. Diaspora Survey Results