

Institution: University of Portsmouth
Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature
Title of case study: The Home of Great (Crime) Writing: Developing Portsmouth as a Literary and Cultural Centre
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Dr Christopher Pittard's research focuses on Victorian popular culture and representations of criminality. This work played a significant part in developing Portsmouth City Council's cultural and tourism strategies, informing the council's literature strategy and the <i>Home of Great Writing</i> programme, and strengthening the reputation of Portsmouth as a thriving literary city. Public engagement activities have raised awareness locally, nationally and internationally, of the city's significant associations with Arthur Conan Doyle and Charles Dickens. These initiatives are central facets of the Local Authority's strategy for economic development and have shaped Cultural Services' ongoing policy commitments.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The underpinning research was undertaken by Dr Christopher Pittard (Senior Lecturer in English Literature, University of Portsmouth) following his appointment at Portsmouth in 2009, expanding the work for which he had already established a significant reputation (for instance, in 2006 his work on Arthur Conan Doyle and the <i>Strand Magazine</i> won the VanArsdel Prize for research in the field of Victorian periodicals). Pittard's work at Portsmouth focused on nineteenth-century detective fiction, especially on how material means of production shaped the evolution of the genre, the intersections between Victorian science, criminology, and crime writing, and on the ways in which material and moral purity became central themes in Victorian crime narratives. The historical focus of this work begins with Charles Dickens's reinvention and development of crime writing and narrative mystery in the mid-nineteenth century (for instance, developing detective fiction in <i>Bleak House</i> (1852-3) and playing with the conventions of sensation fiction in <i>Great Expectations</i> (1861)) to Arthur Conan Doyle's success with Sherlock Holmes in the 1890s and his influence on other practitioners of late Victorian detective fiction.</p> <p>Since 2009, Pittard has published one monograph (reference 1) and two book chapters (2, 3) on this area, all of which have been particularly well received internationally. Throughout this work, Pittard has shown how these themes both reflected and satirised a contemporary discourse of degeneration in which criminality was equated with dirt and disease and where national boundaries were guarded against criminal threats. This work is therefore as much concerned with representations of popular perceptions of crime, as with representations of crime itself (in other words, distinguishing between texts about crime, and texts about <i>reading about</i> crime). Drawing attention to the way in which the discourses of crime and impurity invaded cultural productions such as advertisements for soap, Pittard's research highlights the ideological influence of such media, and of new technologies such as forensic science (in particular technologies of identification such as fingerprinting) and material developments in periodical publishing. Pittard's research also shows how detective fiction has in turn become obsessed with the idea of purity, illustrating how a genre concerned with policing the impure itself became subject to the same fear of contamination, demonstrating intersections between the fear of criminality and of 'impure' social behaviour. Extending this notion, Pittard's work addresses the convergence of medical discourse and detective fiction in the 1890s, including the way in which these discourses were appropriated for political purposes by antivivisectionist campaigns, and how medical explorations of criminality raised questions related to moral</p>

purity.

Pittard's research is significant in that it constitutes an interdisciplinary reconsideration of the cultural investment in crime narratives, and an examination of what constitutes crime within culture. His work on figures closely related to Portsmouth's literary heritage played a crucial role in the development of local government policy on cultural tourism, while Pittard's focus on the importance of specific modes of dissemination in reinforcing ideologies of criminality has informed council-led events dealing with public fear of crime.

3. References to the research

1) Christopher Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2011. (ISBN: 978-0754668138). This monograph has received several excellent reviews in both academic journals and the wider press. Examples include Heather Worthington's assessment in *Review of English Studies* that '*Purity and Contamination* is rich in ideas, analysis, and information, offering new perspectives on familiar texts and introducing archival material that has received little if any critical attention,' Worthington finding the discussion 'innovative and persuasive', and describing the book as 'a masterly revisioning of [Victorian crime] narratives' (63 (261) 2012: 699-701). In the public press, Matthew Taunton commented in the *Times Literary Supplement* that 'there is much to relish in a work that is both theoretically informed and rigorously grounded in primary research.... [theorising dirt] is a provocative way of thinking about detective fiction, and Pittard makes it pay' (13 April 2012, 32). REF output: 29-CP-001

2) ----, 'From Sensation to the *Strand*', *The Blackwell Companion to Crime Fiction*. Ed. Lee Horsley and Charles Rzepka. Oxford: Blackwell, 2010: 105-116. (ISBN: 978-1405167659) (Peer reviewed). Cited in Joseph Bristow, 'Recent Studies in the Nineteenth Century,' *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 51.4 (2011): 905-78; this survey of recent important publications in nineteenth-century criticism noted Pittard's chapter as being of especial significance. *Available on request*.

3) ----, 'The English Detective Story', *The Reinvention of the British and Irish Novel 1880-1940 (The Oxford History of the Novel in English (Volume 4))*. Eds. Patrick Parrinder and Andrzej Gasiorek (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010). 213-26. (ISBN: 978-0199559336) (Peer reviewed). Cited in Tiffany Bergin, 'Identity and Nostalgia in a Globalised World: Investigating the International Popularity of *Midsomer Murders*.' *Crime, Media, Culture* 9.2 (2013): 83-99. Ref2 output: 29-CP-003

4. Details of the impact

The impact of Dr Pittard's research is threefold:

(1) It has influenced the development of Portsmouth City Council's (PCC) policies relating to culture and literacy: Dr Pittard's research into Crime Writing had a strong impact on PCC's outlined Cultural Services and Tourism strategy, strengthening the city's reputation as a literary city. During 2010-11, PCC consulted Pittard in order to develop its literature strategy (sources 1, 4, 5) and its 2013 project *The Home of Great Writing*, which aims to boost tourism and improve literacy rates in the city (sources 1, 2, 3, 5). Pittard's expertise in local heritage figures such as Charles Dickens and Arthur Conan Doyle was vital for the development of PCC's policy on cultural heritage and its literature strategy, and to the organisation of several public events (described below) to promote the cultural profile of the city. More widely, Pittard's engagement with PCC's key cultural services was crucial in developing the Cultural Blueprint outlined as part of their Cultural Services

Business Plan (2010-2013), demonstrating PCC's commitment to cultural heritage (source 3).

(2) It has contributed to the enrichment of Portsmouth's cultural capital and the creative practice of its residents through local tourism and public events that have enhanced the city's cultural life:

Pittard's research has developed stimuli to tourism and contributed to the quality of the tourist experience in Portsmouth. Pittard's work was central to the series of events (including public panel discussions and film screenings) that took place over 21-25 February 2011 organised to relaunch the Doyle collection; one of these events was Pittard's participation in *Decoding Sherlock* (23 February 2011), a public panel event involving debate with Hampshire Police about Doyle's legacy and the relevance of his writing to modern policing and social policy. Pittard's work on crime narratives was thus employed in mediating modern understandings of crime, addressing problems identified in PCC policy (PCC identifies the reduction of the fear of crime as a key corporate priority (Source 3)). Pittard has also been involved in *BookFest*, a central strand of the *Home of Great Writing* programme and a major tourist event; his research informed this event on 22 October 2011 when he interviewed Claire Tomalin on Dickens' influence on the emergence of popular genres including detective fiction (source 8); this event drew an audience of 120 people. The success of *Bookfest* (with 2,444 attendants in 2011, generating a surplus of £431) and further consultation with the Centre for Studies in Literature led the council to launch another major festival, *Portsmouth Thought*, in 2013, as part of which Pittard held a public discussion on 23 January 2013 with the psychologist Maria Konnikova on the psychological methods of Doyle's fiction

(<http://teamlocals.co.uk/maria-konnikova-interview-author-of-mastermind-how-to-think-like-sherlock-holmes>) (25 tickets sold). Pittard organised and participated in a public discussion with the historian Judith Flanders on 31 May 2013, an event which raised public awareness of PCC's Conan Doyle collection (source 7) and promoted new creative practice. Audience feedback for this event (via questionnaire) was overwhelmingly positive, with several commenting on the impact of the event on their understanding of Victorian culture and creative practice ('I feel very inspired', 'It will make me read Dickens again', 'It has given me lots of ideas for my own novel'). The sustainability of this impact is evident in further collaborations with PCC, such as an AHRC-funded Collaborative Doctoral Award, a three-year project, beginning in September 2013, to develop public awareness of the holdings of the Arthur Conan Doyle collection through a new website, public access events, and a public lecture on Doyle's legacy. Dr Pittard's expertise in this field and the work of the PhD student will be crucial in developing the case for MLA accreditation of the collection, an aim identified in the Portsmouth Local Economy Assessment (January 2012) (source 2).

(3) It has created internationally disseminated educational resources: Pittard was an on-screen contributor (alongside John Sutherland and Kate Flint) for an Open University film, *Reading and Studying Literature*, filmed in November 2010 and released in September 2012 (as part of Open University course A320). Pittard's contribution related to Conan Doyle and the *Strand Magazine*. Internationally, Pittard has also given public talks on Victorian culture at the Dickens Universe, University of California, Santa Cruz (source 6), an event with a substantial public audience (attended annually by 300 members of the public); the reach and significance of this event is reflected in media coverage (*Guardian* (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2010/aug/06/charles-dickens-universe-annual-conference>); *New Yorker* (http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/08/29/110829fa_fact_lepore)).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Letter from Portsmouth City Council, confirming Dr Pittard's impact on policy making and promoting the cultural profile of the city.
2. Portsmouth City Council Local Economic Assessment (2012); pp.19-21 outline PCC's priorities for cultural heritage and the development of the Arthur Conan Doyle collection.
<http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/media/API_STR_JSNA_SEC_EMP_ECON_AREA_AX2012.pdf>
3. Portsmouth City Council Cultural Services Business Plan (2010-2013; 2011-2014; 2012-2015); pp. 7, 9, 13, 14, 43 and 60 emphasise the importance of cultural development through resources such as the Arthur Conan Doyle collection; pp. 16-17 comment on PCC's priority in working with external partners; p. 34 identifies tackling public perceptions of crime as a key corporate priority. <
http://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/media/API_Strategy_-_Cultural_Services_Business_Plan_2010-2013.pdf>
4. Discussion item from Portsmouth City Council executive meeting on 30 September 2011 (agenda item 9), proposing PCC Literature Strategy and citing consultation with the Centre for Studies in Literature in drafting the policy
5. Portsmouth City Council Literature Development Strategy <
www.portsmouth.gov.uk/media/cls20110930r9appxa.pdf>
6. Letter from the director of the Dickens Project, UC Santa Cruz, detailing the involvement of Dr Pittard (and other members of the Centre for Studies in Literature) with the Project's annual Dickens Universe event, attended by 300 members of the public, including high school teachers, with the aim of encouraging new cultural, creative and educational practices through reading Dickens' work.
7. Feedback forms for *The Invention of Murder* event with the historian Judith Flanders, 31 May 2013.
8. Claire Tomalin interview (22 October 2011) as part of Portsmouth *BookFest*, considering Dickens as crime writer. Event held in Menuhin theatre, Portsmouth City Library: attended by 120 people. Reported by *Portsmouth News* at
<http://www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/business/local-business/crowds-hear-all-about-what-made-dickens-laugh-1-3178516>