

Institution: University of Roehampton		
Unit of Assessment: 28 – History		
Title of case study: Women, Words, and Power: Making the Past Personal at the National Trust		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016-19		
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:
Suzannah Lipscomb	Reader in Early Modern History Professor of History	September 2017 - January 2019 February 2019 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Suzannah Lipscomb's research into women's voice, language and agency has shaped public understanding of the past through a series of television, radio, media articles, podcasts, and public talks. In addition to her substantial broadcast media profile, Lipscomb has also curated a high-profile exhibition, 'We are Bess' which has:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> encouraged historical reflection for the modern-day female writers, activists, and pioneers featured in the exhibition and the members of the public who visited, thereby fostering historical debate; and delivered tangible benefits for the National Trust and set new standards for the organisation in how to use research to make the past personal, accessible and meaningful to visitors to heritage sites. 		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>In 2019, Professor Suzannah Lipscomb published <i>The Voices of Nîmes (R1)</i>, which recovers the lives of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century French women. The research interrogated 1,200 cases brought before the consistories of the Protestant church of Languedoc between 1561 and 1615. These rich sources capture women's voices - over a thousand testimonies by and about women, most of whom left no other record to posterity - and allow us to understand early modern women's speech, behaviour, and attitudes.</p> <p>Analysis of these cases produced important new research findings. Lipscomb identified the ways in which women talked and were talked about; the language with which they were derided and disparaged; how they insulted (men and each other in turn), chiefly by turning to sexual invective; and the challenges women experienced in establishing credibility. Lipscomb considered new evidence of women's attitudes to, and experience of, marriage and sex, including adultery, domestic violence, and sexual abuse. Lipscomb found that women's power was not just devious, quiet, and manipulative, but could be much more bold, public, and vocal than hitherto understood. Her research demonstrates how independent, self-determining, and vocal women could be in an age when they had limited legal rights, little official power, and few prospects. Central to this research was the conviction that the women of Languedoc were not exceptional; it is simply that these rare records capture women's concerns and the details of their everyday life. Although the consistory's existence generated female action, its records also give a snapshot of what was already occurring. From snippets of analogous evidence, there is reason to believe that this research gives insight into the lives and behaviour of women across Europe at this time.</p> <p>This was the starting point for the exhibition on Bess of Hardwick, <i>We are Bess</i>. Lipscomb proposed a public exhibition in which her research findings would shape the content: rather than focusing on Bess as an exception, it would explore several aspects of Bess's life that exemplified the lives of other sixteenth-century women that had not been stressed or explored in previous interpretations of Bess's story. The relevant research insights included how sexually charged language was used in the sixteenth century to insult women, which continually constructed and reconstructed ideas of gender. This focused the exhibition on the ways in which Bess was continually slandered, both during and after her lifetime. Evidence about the frequency of infant loss directed attention to two of Bess's eight children who had previously only been mentioned at</p>		

Hardwick in her family tree with an asterisk to the small print, *'two other children died in infancy'*. Bess's marital dispute with her fourth husband was used to explore Lipscomb's research insights into the circumstances and causes of early-modern conjugal disputes, the use of violence against wives, and women's frequent strategic and ingenious reactions to their spouse's infidelity. Lipscomb's research into the way women were doubted by courts, and the challenge of credibility for women shaped a focus on Bess's experience of trying to win the case against her husband. Finally, Lipscomb's research insights about the nature and extent of women's agency and power - not just in secret means of influence, but also in strategies of public and vocal activism (including often through participation in patriarchy) - directed the curatorial focus onto the ways in which women like Bess had power in a patriarchal age.

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

R1 Lipscomb, Suzannah (2019) *The Voices of Nîmes: Women, Sex, and Marriage in Reformation Languedoc*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 97801987661. Listed in REF2.

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

Professor Lipscomb's research (**R1**) provides a revelatory new framework for understanding early modern women – as surprisingly powerful actors operating in a nevertheless relentlessly patriarchal age – that has underpinned her impressive media and public engagement work. Lipscomb is a prominent public historian, and her portfolio of public engagement represents a concerted effort to raise awareness of these untold stories of early modern women—from the most marginalised victims of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century witch-hunts, to England's Tudor queens—with the widest possible audience.

Lipscomb has given public talks both nationally and internationally (USA, France, Sweden, India, Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia) at leading cultural institutions, literary festivals, schools and universities, reaching an audience of approximately 15,000 since 2017 (**IMP1**). The research's finding on the agency and language used by and about early modern women (**R1**) has further underpinned the 40 hours of history documentaries about sixteenth-century women she has written and presented for the BBC, ITV, Channel Five, PBS, National Geographic and UKTV channels including: *Witch-Hunt: A Century of Murder* (2x60', 2015, 985,000 viewers), *Henry VIII and His Six Wives* (4x60', 2016, 1.2 million viewers) and *Elizabeth I* (3x60', 2017, 2.2 million viewers). She has additionally discussed early modern women and history on *BBC Breakfast* and *Newsnight*; Channel 4's *Countdown* and *Time Team*; BBC Radio 4's *Today*, *Woman's Hour* and *Front Row*; BBC Radio 3's *Free Thinking*; and many other programmes and podcasts, reaching an estimated total audience of 50,200,000 for all broadcast media outreach (**IMP1**). She has written books aimed at the general public which inform public understanding of women's voices and agency in history, including a short illustrated Ladybird Expert history of *Witchcraft* (**IMP2**). Her research interests in the experiences, representation and legacies of early modern women have also underpinned a regular column for *History Today* since 2014 (currently at 40 articles) which has a circulation of 66,600 per publication, and a YouTube channel which has 5,400 subscribers and a combined 91,900 views. Further communication of her research reaches huge audiences on social media via Twitter (117.8k followers), Facebook (52k followers), and Instagram (26.3k). More specifically, Lipscomb drew on her research on early modern women (**R1**) as the academic lead for a MOOC on the Tudors for FutureLearn, which has enhanced the understanding of 43,944 learners to date, as FutureLearn's second most popular MOOC in 2019 (**IMP1**).

As part of her public engagement, and in order to engage directly with public institutions and audiences in a physical space, Lipscomb curated an exhibition, *We are Bess*, for the National Trust which was rooted in her research on early modern women (**R1**). This told the story of Bess of Hardwick through a video installation alongside photographs of 20 diverse and influential modern women and their responses to her story. Lipscomb's research distilled Bess's experience into three themes, which spoke more generally to the lives of women at this time: how women were spoken about and whether they were believed when they spoke; the bodily-lived experiences of women; and how women operated with power in a patriarchal world. These themes guided curatorial decisions including the narrative of the video, which modern women should feature in exhibition portraits and the choice to hang the modern and Tudor portraits together in ways that

allowed parallels to be drawn between the subjects, and to foreground the issues of diversity and identity which form contemporary contexts of discrimination for women. The photograph of the Bishop of Gloucester, who commented on her experiences as a woman operating in a man's world, was, for example, displayed next to portraits of Tudor clerics Cranmer and Pole to cast light on the comparative novelty of female power in the church, and sixteenth-century attitudes towards women and faith. The exhibition reached 144,070 visitors, and ran between October and November 2018 and from February to November 2019, having been extended from its original end date in June 2019 due to its popularity (IMP3). Through this research-led public intervention, Lipscomb's research on the lives and experiences of early modern women (R1) has had a range of impacts on the National Trust, and its heritage practitioners, the women featured in the exhibition and the members of the public who visited it.

i. Encouraging historical reflection for the modern-day female writers, activists, and pioneers featured in the exhibition and the members of the public who visited, thereby fostering historical debate

In the exhibition, Lipscomb's research on the language used by and against early modern women and their lives and experiences in a patriarchal society (R1) was offered as a parallel to the experiences of modern women, encouraging historical reflection and thereby fostering public debate. The women photographed for the exhibition have described how much they learnt from the research (R1), which led them to reflect on its parallels with modern day experiences of womanhood and how historical research (R1) can contribute to debates about current social issues: for example, the first female main presenter of Channel 4 News said that she had been *'fascinated to learn more about Bess and slightly disturbed to hear how many of her battles have echoes in today's inequalities'*, while another woman photographed for the exhibition, who had not known anything about Bess of Hardwick before, now felt that *'her story resonates on so many levels'*. One writer and broadcaster drew parallels between *'the slurs made against women in the ancient world just as much as the misogyny faced by women today'* and added *'I finally got what the whole thing had become - not just Bess, not just us, but all of us... I realised this story travels around the world - through place as well as time'* (IMP3).

Others reflected on how empowering it was to see their communities represented in spaces where, traditionally, race and ability have been absent from discourse, and to have their experiences compared with those of Bess and other early modern women (R1): a journalist and *The Guardian* columnist tweeted that *'The National Trust are hosting an exhibition of modern, influential women - and I'm excited to be one of them... I think this officially makes me the first wheelchair user on a Tudor wall.'* The founder of *She Speaks We Hear* – an online platform for women of any background, to be heard on their terms without being hijacked or silenced by sexism, racism or social disadvantage – tweeted how powerful it will be *'for young girls to go to a Tudor house & see someone who looks like them'*. She added, in her reflections, *'I cannot express in words what it meant for a woman of colour who wears hijab to see herself in a portrait alongside Tudor personalities and dignitaries. My greatest hope in taking part in the exhibition was that young girls... would see someone who looked like them and came from a similar background when they visited Hardwick Hall... despite the challenges and barriers they might face... they can still be empowered to achieve their dreams and goals.'* (IMP3).

We Are Bess also encouraged historical reflection in visitors to the exhibition. Visitor feedback was gathered through bespoke questions on surveys (of c. 2,500 visitors), an estimated 4,500 comment cards, and two focus groups. Commonly occurring words to describe the exhibition were: *'thought-provoking', 'inspirational', 'empowering', 'inspiring', 'relevant', 'engaging', 'moving', and 'uplifting'* (IMP5). 89.5% of the 25,000 visitors surveyed said they *'learnt something new about the past or the present'* and 41% agreed or strongly agreed that the exhibition had a *'real emotional impact'* on them (IMP4).

Visitor comments also made specific reference to the exhibition's strategy of framing of the contemporary relevance of the research, identifying the insights and changed understanding which this created, *'it brought the story of Bess into a relevant place for today'; 'you could see Bess as a real woman and not just a figure from history'; and 'it puts a historical figure into a*

relatable context - and that is how we learn'. The focus groups emphasized this too: 'so much of her story is still relevant to us today. So many of us face the challenges that she did. The use of "shrill" and "hysterical" is still so prevalent' (IMP5).

The opportunity to complete comment cards to be displayed at the end of the exhibition generated thousands of responses, demonstrating how the exhibition enriched these visitors' relationship with the past. In response to the question, *'In what way are you Bess?'*, people wrote about having survived broken marriages and widowhood, miscarriage, the loss of infant children, sexual assault, cancer, and prejudice: *'I lost twins miss them every day xx I am Bess'; 'I've survived breast cancer I am Bess'; 'I have survived sexual assault. I am a queer woman. I am Bess'; 'I escaped from an abusive marriage after 30 years. Now I speak my mind & say what I like & to who I like'; and 'I was told I cannot be a woman. I am. #IamBess' (IMP6).* The emotional impact of the exhibition is further demonstrated by the 1,300 positive comments given in the surveys: *'I found it an emotional experience! As a woman, it made me feel empowered'; 'I think making it relevant to ordinary women was very powerful. Also because I haven't seen much like this before. Thank you NT for leading the way!'; 'I was surprised at the impact the exhibition had on my 11 year old daughter and that of my friends [sic] 2 daughters... our girls were very proud of her!!!'; and 'one of the most powerful heritage experiences I have ever had, thank you' (IMP5).*

ii. Delivering tangible benefits for the National Trust and setting new standards for the organisation in how to use research to make the past personal, accessible and meaningful to visitors to heritage sites.

The reach of the exhibition was extended through its website (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hardwick/features/we-are-bess-exhibition), which housed it in digital format. At its peak, the web exhibition was the 22nd most visited page across the whole of the NT website. The digital exhibition attracted over 9,000 unique visits with an impressive dwell time of 1:49 per page, whilst the introductory video written and directed by Lipscomb was viewed by over 1,000 visitors between September 2018 and October 2019 (IMP3). This digital exhibition format allowed the impacts experienced by face-to-face visitors to extend to an even wider audience. One Twitter user commented that *'I haven't made it to @NThardwick for the #WeAreBess exhibition yet, but that doesn't mean I haven't been immersing myself in it' (IMP7).*

The exhibition has been highly acclaimed within the National Trust and, as a result, it was extended beyond its original end date of June to November 2019. Senior National Trust staff themselves found the exhibition *'personally very moving', 'hugely resonant', and 'amazing, really amazing'*. Moreover, the exhibition provides an example of best practice, particularly in how to make the past personal and to communicate directly with the contemporary experience of those attending, for both Hardwick Hall and the wider heritage sector. The exhibition had a clear emotional impact on visitors: the emotional engagement score for Hardwick Hall increased year-on-year (2017-18) from 19% to 25% (IMP4). The General Manager at Hardwick Hall said, *'it feels like we've done something really different'*. For her, the exhibition has been a *'catalyst for transformational change'* and proved, above all, the value of research: it has *'completely changed my view: now I think we need research before we do anything' (IMP8).* The Director of Culture and Engagement for the National Trust, who described the exhibition online as *'a superb piece of programming'*, added privately that *'We are Bess has been a significant exhibition for the Trust', because it is 'a model for how to intervene successfully in important historical spaces, in how to approach an important but potentially sensitive topic, and in how to engage visitors in their thousands.'* (IMP3).

The fact that the exhibition provides an example of best practice is demonstrated by its reception by the heritage community. The exhibition has won two awards - one, for 'Programming through Story' in the National Trust Experience Awards 2018, which is for *'celebrating inspirational use of creative programming and exhibitions to make our stories relevant for visitors and find new ways into spirit of place'*, and one for 'Great Experiences' in the National Trust Mighty Oak Awards 2019. The immediate legacy of the exhibition is evident in the fact that the exhibition's film will remain as a permanent fixture at Hardwick Hall, and that, after the official closure of the exhibition to the public, it remained open for three months for internal NT audiences to view it as an example of

best practice. Lipscomb was also invited to collaborate with Hardwick on their next exhibition on Bess of Hardwick and the nature of friendship in Tudor society (planned to open in 2022), which, in light of the success of *We Are Bess* and as an indicator of trust, was given an increase in budget of 50% (IMP3).

Underlying this significance is the role of research. The Director of Culture and Engagement is unequivocal: *'critical to this success has been the academic underpinning [R1] of the exhibition'*. The Consultancy Manager at National Trust Midlands notes that, *'part of the power of the exhibition for me is in the research methodology; the way in which the experiences of modern folk have given us new insight into historical figures. That those women and their experiences were chosen as a result of academic partnership and new research [R1]... gives the exhibition depth and integrity.'* In her view, *'there is huge potential to apply this methodology in other places with other key historical figures, and this could be an enduring legacy of this project if we were able to transpose it to other sites/stories'* (IMP3).

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

IMP1 Metrics Report on public engagement activities, 2017-2020.

IMP2 Lipscomb, Suzannah (2018) *Witchcraft: A Ladybird Expert Book*. London: Michael Joseph. Available on request.

IMP3 *We are Bess* Impact Report, 2018-2019 (2020).

IMP4 Quantitative data report of Hardwick Halls Visitor Survey 2018-19 – 'We are Bess Bespoke Questions – Data Tables'.

IMP5 Qualitative data report of Hardwick Halls Visitor Survey 2018-19 – 'We are Bess Bespoke Questions'.

IMP6 Photographs of 'We are Bess' comment cards written by exhibition visitors, 2018-19.

IMP7 Social media using exhibition hashtags #WeareBess and #IamBess and conference hashtag #WomenAndPower, 2018-19.

IMP8 Interview of the General Manager of Hardwick Hall by Professor Lipscomb on 5 November 2019 about the historical underpinning of the exhibition.