

Institution: University of Cambridge
Unit of Assessment: UoA29
Title of case study: The John Clare Trust
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Dr Paul Chirico's research has directly shaped the work of the John Clare Trust. Dr Chirico has played a leading role in the work of the Trust, which he founded in 2004 with a view to the purchase of the poet's birthplace in Helpston, near Peterborough. Through the John Clare Cottage and the work of the Trust on which it depends, he has since 2008 achieved direct impact on the conservation, preservation and understanding of culture . He has had an impact on education through the materials he has developed for visitors to the Cottage, both school parties and the general public.
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) The research was undertaken while Chirico was a member of the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge: in 2000 he was awarded a Research Fellowship in open competition based on his research on Clare; he held this Fellowship (2000 and 2004-6) and a Lectureship (2001-4) at Jesus College. He then held a one-year appointment at the University of York (2006-7), and since 2007 has been Lecturer in English at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge. The son of a labourer, the poet John Clare (1793–1864) has in recent decades attracted a great deal of critical and scholarly attention. Chirico's (2007) book <i>John Clare and the Imagination of the Reader</i> [1] makes a major contribution to the understanding of Clare's place in social, cultural, and literary history by investigating Clare's own sustained interest in 'the historical complexity of his own geographical and cultural world'. Chirico argues that 'the terrain which the poet habitually describes is itself a cultural construct. ... the composite product of a deep history of human and "natural" intervention.' Although Clare is 'usually regarded as a poet of place, of precise, localised natural description, his landscapes are in fact repeatedly transformed, their familiarity undermined either by disorientation or by an excess of detail' [1, Introduction]. It is the creative labour that goes into these 'transformations' that is at the centre of Chirico's work. In his important 2006 article 'Bounds of Place and Time' [2]. Chirico set out the aims of the John Clare Trust, which he founded two years before: 'His [Clare's] popularity reflects his unique appeal to three constituencies, as a popular poet (notable for his direct, unaffected, accessible style and his concern to document and celebrate everyday life), a green poet (notable for his passionate local knowledge and his environmental consciousness) and a "poet's poet" (notable for his love of language and the inspirational quality of his writing, which has encouraged the creativity of many private readers and workshop participants of all ages). Reflecting these three concerns, the present project seizes the opportunity presented by the availability of Clare's cottage to bring together innovative and timely work in the three related fields of education, environment and culture.' 'Our aim in the cottage project is to celebrate Clare's rootedness in the context of this profusion of interest – to add substance to the experience of those who have come to his life or work from a distance or through new media, and crucially to use both the reverberant location and a full range of innovative educational methods and materials to bring his life and writings, village and environment, to a much broader public, near and far' [2, pp3-4]. Chirico's 2007 monograph supported these aims with a wealth of detailed biographical and literary scholarship. One of its key chapters is entitled 'Time and Labour'. Here he argues that Clare's 'aesthetic of time and place' entails a complex analysis of his position within a wider commercial literary culture, and his double commitment to 'antiquity' and to 'the muse'. Chirico writes that 'despite his reputation as a poet of the moment, Clare's interest in literary posterity and in alternative cultural history prompts a fascination with the signs of a half-forgotten civilisation concealed in the earth which he worked'. Chirico explores the poet's sense of the vulnerability of material objects over time, including books, and the complex forms in which 'history' is recorded, preserved and transformed, through oral as well as written culture. Clare's own deep concern with his future readers is a major preoccupation of Chirico's analysis.

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

[1] Paul Chirico, *John Clare and the Imagination of the Reader* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[2] Paul Chirico, "Bounds of Place and Time": The Future of Clare's Past', *John Clare Society Journal* 25 (2006), 1–5.

Both outputs are available from the University of Cambridge on request.

Evidence of 2*+ Quality

The reader's report for Palgrave described item [1] as 'an important contribution to Clare studies', and declared 'it will be a touchstone of Clare criticism for the next generation of scholarship'. (Palgrave reader's report; email 11.5.2006 (available on request)). And the 'clearance report' for the publisher concluded: 'Paul Chirico is to be congratulated for producing an important contribution to Clare scholarship, and one of the best books on Romantic poetics in general I've read in some time.' (Palgrave 'clearance report'; email 10.10.2006 (available on request))

Discussing Chirico's work on Clare, a former Poet Laureate commented: 'I admire what he's done - by which I mean the critical writing he's produced, and the practical work he's undertaken for the Clare Trust.... In fact it would be fair to say he's been a key figure in the re-presentation and rehabilitation of this great poet.' (email 5.8.2013 (available on request))

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

Chirico's research has had direct impact on **the conservation and presentation of culture** through the leading role he has taken in the preparation of biographical and thematic texts used in the John Clare Cottage; it has also had indirect effects on education materials for schools through his role in the Trust since 2008. His research has had further impact indirectly through his support of the John Clare Trust, support that was crucial to the Trust's purchase of Clare's Cottage for a museum. This has benefited visitors with an interest in Clare and local history. Chirico has also used his research on John Clare to develop, with local collaborators, cultural, education and social projects around themes of interest to Clare. Such themes include mental health and education. This work is also being used to develop arts programmes to link immigrant communities in an area of high migration.

In summarising the aspects of Clare's life and work revealed through his own research (and that of other scholars) Chirico set the agenda for the educational materials at the cottage, with their inter-related themes **[1]**. Visitors have appreciated the extensive presentation of the complex realities of Clare's life and work, undistorted by over-simplification and emerging from first-hand academic research.

The research was disseminated to the beneficiaries through the preparation of material for display in Clare's Cottage, public lectures in and around Helpston (e.g. 5 December 2008, the public lecture: 'John Clare, the man', Helpston Village Hall, and 2 November 2010, Annual Bill Packer Lecture to Friends of Stamford Hospital). Chirico took part in a walk in Clare's footsteps leaving Epping Forest towards Helpston on 9 July 2009, leading up to the formal opening of the Cottage on 13 July. During this period he was interviewed about Clare live on the Today programme (9.7.09), Radio Cambridgeshire (9.7.09) and Look East (13.7.09). Chirico has also collaborated in the development of education materials for visiting school groups, and contributed to many newspaper and magazine articles, for example being interviewed by Adam Foulds for a feature in the Autumn 2009 edition of *Countryside Voice* **[2]**.

Chirico's research has had an impact on visitors to Clare's cottage, the main part of which is a museum relating to the life and work of John Clare. Chirico contributed substantially to the biographical and thematic text and audioguides to the cottage and village in 2009 on the basis of his research ('Thank you for your input into the panels and audio tour - your comments were (are) vital for us!' **[3]**). Chirico wrote and revised substantial biographical, geographical, historical notes, corrected factual errors, and selected and edited the extracts from Clare's poetry and prose which feature heavily in these materials **[4]**. The cottage is open daily for general visitors and has

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received over 11,000 visitors since its opening. The information materials have been well-reviewed, satisfying Clare scholars and meeting the enthusiastic approval of diverse visitors ('superb displays and recordings', 'An interesting and thorough, in-depth look into Clare's life'). Recent comments in the visitors' book include, 'Although I didn't know much about John Clare before we visited here. It has left us feeling very informed of his life – a very interesting time here. Thank-you.' (27/8/12) And the presenter of BBC Countryfile, Bristol (18/4/13) wrote 'Learnt a lot I didn't know about John Clare. Wonderful place. Should make a great film' [5].

The materials at the museum have also impacted on schools, mainly as a result of visits to the cottage (111 such visits since the start of 2011). Again, feedback has been positive. One local primary school teacher wrote to comment on her school's experience: 'It was a really informative and interesting day, we enjoyed the object handwriting and writing with a quill pen as well as the opportunity to go to the field and collect samples of plants and animals' [6]. The teacher's comments reflect the wider role of Clare Cottage, and the research of Chirico, in the preservation and presentation of the social and cultural history as well as poetry.

Through his establishment of the John Clare Trust and work since 2008, Chirico's research on Clare has underpinned a significant expansion of cultural activities in the locality and beyond. For example, based on his experience, as former Chair of the John Clare Society, of hosting a smaller competition aimed at schoolchildren, he helped to establish an Annual John Clare Poetry Competition in 2009 organised by the John Clare Trust [7]. To date the competition has attracted 723 submissions from new and established poets, with winners travelling from as far afield as Rome. Chirico presented prizes for the competition in 2011. Chirico has also helped to establish the annual John Clare Literary Festival, giving an inaugural talk on John Clare and Autumn [7]. From the 40-50 who attended that event on 8 October 2011, the Festival has grown into a major fixture in the cultural calendar in Peterborough.

In 2011 the Trust was awarded £64,680 by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation to carry out a two-year community project, 'Bridging Cultures in Clare Country', linking immigrant communities in the Peterborough area through poetry and the arts. The impetus for this project originated in Chirico's identification of the 'compelling paradox' – central to his research – of the 'urgent and successful appeal of this most rooted of writers to the timeless, placeless reader', and of an opportunity, born from his own familiarity with immigrant communities in Peterborough, to connect Clare's experience of alienation resulting from radical and destabilising changes in land use to the experience of 21st century residents who had left rural homes overseas to travel to the city ('I was a being created in the race / Of men disdaining bounds of place and time'). The intention of the programme has been to break down barriers to engagement and learning within an ethnically diverse area of Peterborough, and activities have included writing, sculpture, vocal battles and graffiti art. Renewed funding for a third year is currently under consideration by the Caterpillar Foundation [8], [9].

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

[1] Paul Chirico, 'Panel corrections' (for cottage display); attachments to emails of 26.5.2009 and 31.5.2009.

[2] Adam Foulds, 'Nature's interpreter', *Countryside Voice*, (Autumn 2009), pp.26-9.

[3] Email from person 1 (Designer, Exhibition Plus) 28.4.2009.

[4] Example images of display boards at Clare Cottage, substantially written by Chirico, displayed since the opening of the cottage in July 2009, photographed in August 2013.

[5] John Clare Cottage Visitors Book; www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01sfmgk; programme broadcast 5.5.2013.

[6] www.clarecottage.org/pages/testimonials Comment posted 20 February 2012.

[7] Confirmation of both claims available from Person 2 (Chairman, The John Clare Trust)

[8] Report to the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, 8.7.2012; updated outcomes document, 'Bridging cultures project', application to the Caterpillar Foundation, 8.5.2013.

[9] Person 3 (CEO, Clare Cottage).

Copies of all sources held on file by the HEI.