

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Leeds</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 36: Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Helping BBC Archives develop a democratic public space through collaboration and public engagement</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Research by <b>Popple</b> has focused on the potential for public collaboration and democratic engagement with digital archives. The main impacts have been to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inform and shape the BBC Archive’s strategy and their approach to public engagement, in its role as a public service organisation.</li> <li>• inform and shape the 2009 BBC coverage of the 25th anniversary of the Miners’ Strike (1984/5), which consequently took account of a range of perspectives, enhancing wider understanding of this time in social history.</li> <li>• develop civic society and public engagement, through enhancing the confidence and ability of the research participants’ to reflect on their experiences of the Miners’ Strike, express them creatively and engage with historical materials.</li> </ul> <p>The research also served to demonstrate to cultural heritage organisations like the BBC the strength of public commitment to, and the benefits of moving towards, more collaborative partnerships with audiences in order to establish open and democratic digital spaces.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Simon <b>Popple’s</b> (Senior Lecturer, 2005 - present, University of Leeds) research has focused on the importance of social records and historical representation, and the potential for digital archives to enhance public engagement and civic participation. Using the BBC archives as a major case study, he examines ownership of cultural heritage resources and how institutions, by opening up digital archives in terms of access and engagement can develop democratic public spaces <b>[1]</b>.</p> <p>The BBC has one of the largest broadcast archives in the world, with over 12 million items including documents, television and radio broadcasts, photographs and online content, and the collection of the BBC’s broadcasting history is in the process of being digitised. <b>Popple’s</b> research focuses on how the BBC can best present its archive as part of its public value remit, which has raised key questions about institutional ownership of the materials and how the BBC can affirm its relationships with the public. At the Edinburgh International Television Festival in 2003, Greg Dyke, as BBC Director General, spoke about the BBC Archive and said that “the people of Britain have paid for it and our role should be to help them use it.” <b>[1]</b>.</p> <p><b>Popple’s</b> research interests have led to joint initiatives with the BBC to explore the potential of the BBC’s archives, and particularly as a democratic public space. The research has developed models through which audiences can access and engage with the archive and begin to use it as a creative resource. Three key projects outline this research:</p> <p>The <i>Open Archive Project</i> (September 2007-August 2008), funded by a grant from the AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Partnership <b>[RG1]</b>, saw <b>Popple</b> investigating how the BBC might use its archive holdings via an ‘Open Archive’. Designed to understand the relationships that audiences might have with the archive, the project examined historical representations and how the BBC could digitally facilitate audiences’ ability to interact with, comment on and contextualise the materials. Significantly, the research focused on how the BBC deals with its regional audience, demonstrating how regional, rather than national news and historical agendas, may be prioritised to provide audiences with material that could be used to construct and make sense of their own histories and memories of important or sensitive events.</p> <p>As part of the research, <b>Popple</b> produced a report, jointly with a BBC link partner, Heather Powell,</p>

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who managed access to BBC staff and resources, aimed at advising future policy of the BBC [2]. Suggesting the best ways of democratising and enriching public use of the archives, it advocated adding the perspectives of citizens to existing broadcast records and the promotion of collaborative activities beyond blog comments and tagging, to open digital storytelling and the development of user generated content (UGC).

The project focused on the major historical event of the Miners' Strike (1984-85); the BBC provided extensive coverage of the strike, which was seen as controversial and attracted great criticism from various sides in the dispute, and so the project enabled **Popple** to bring together groups directly involved or affected by the strike to explore how the event has been represented in the BBC Archive. Participants included former miners, retired police officers, women's groups, local history groups and political activities, who were tasked with responding to the content of the BBC archive, re-examining the coverage and challenging the 'official' version of events. The research also listed BBC holdings relating to the strike as a resource for the BBC [2].

The wish to translate these findings into tangible impact formed the basis of a subsequent project, *Fusion* (February 2009- June 2009), also funded by the AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Partnership [RG2]. It aimed to facilitate a redressing of misrepresentations and the contestation of editorial decisions, allowing for the enrichment of archival content through fuller contextualisation. The research explored how communities might take ownership of cultural and historical materials in which they are represented, and how they could use archival sources to give voice to their own stories and construct their own histories [3]. The research resulted in the joint creation of a series of films, under the title "Strike Stories" that told participants' own stories and offered new perspectives. [4]. **Popple** further explored the findings of the *Open Archive Project* and *Fusion* in [5], examining the BBC's attempt to democratise their archives.

The third project builds upon this research by drawing on aspirations expressed by the participants for a stronger partnership based approach to the building of community history and heritage. A pre-project in 2012 (a Creative Technology Lab) initially modelled an online resource called *Pararchive* that allowed the public to use online archives as a means of digital storytelling, to enable community research and develop creative and democratic engagement. **Popple** subsequently secured funding from the AHRC in August 2013 [RG3] to conduct further research into the design and creation of open digital archival resources to examine how communities and cultural heritage organisations can co-create, design and build a genuine open community digital space. The *Pararchive: Open Access Community Storytelling and the Digital Archive* project commenced on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2013.

### 3. References to the research

[1] **Popple** S. 'It's Not Really Our Content': Archiving Media History in the Digital Age. In *The Long History of New Media: Technology, Historiography and Contextualizing Newness*. Editors: Park DW., Jackowski, NW, Jones, S., 2011, pp. 317-332.

[2] **Popple** S and Powell H, *AHRC/BBC Open Archive Project - The Miners' Strike: A Case Study in Regional Content*. [2009] This was an internal report written especially for the BBC, and intended for internal dissemination, with a summary of the first project and recommendations drawn from our findings <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/knowledgeexchange/leeds.pdf> (23/09/2013)

[3] Bailey M. & **Popple** S. The 1984/85 Miners' Strike: Re-claiming Cultural Heritage. In *Heritage, Labour and the Working Classes*. Editors: Smith L, Shackel P, Cambell G. 2011, pp 19-33

[4] *Strike Stories* (produced by **Popple**) premiered at the National Film Theatre screened by the British Film Institute as part of their *King Coal* season, September 2009. The films are now publically available at <http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/research/research-projects/strike-stories/> (23/09/2013)

[5] **Popple** S. The New Golden Age?: Using UGC to develop the Public Digital Space. In *Content Cultures: Transformations of User Generated Content in Public Service Broadcasting*. Editors: **Popple** S, Thornham H. I.B.Tauris, UK 2013 (In Press)

### Research Grants

[RG1] Sept 2007 – August 2008: AHRC and BBC Pilot Knowledge Exchange Programme, *Open Archive: The Miners' Strike: A case study in regional content*, £57,427.984, **Popple** as PI. <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Pages/Open-Archive-The-Miners-Strike-A-case-study-in-regional-content.aspx> (23/09/2013)

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**[RG2]** February 2009-June 2009: £15,600 awarded as follow-on from the AHRC and BBC Pilot Knowledge Exchange Programme. *Fusion Project*.

**[RG3]** October 2013-February 2015: £596,491.49 award from the AHRC's *Digital Transformations in Community Research / Co-production in the Arts and Humanities* scheme. AH/L007800/1

#### 4. Details of the impact

*Impact on BBC's archive strategy and approach to public engagement.*

**Popple's** research has informed the BBC Archive's strategy and its approach towards opening up their archives, both in terms of access and engagement, and particularly in terms of exploring the potential of the archives as a basis for a public democratic space. The Controller of Archives and the Digital Public Space for the BBC confirms this, stating that:

"[T]his research has significantly influenced the development of our strategy in relation to our approach to public engagement – in particular the role of User Contributions to help describe, to augment and responsibly reuse the materials we hold. It has also informed our thinking regarding our aspirations for the democratisation of access to our archives in general." **[A]**

The research has also informed the subsequent approach and activities of the BBC in their attempts to use creatively the archive and further democratise access to its collections. This includes making more content available as an educational resource and also exploring new ways of engaging and delivering the service. For example, the development of the *Research and Education Space (RES)* project (January – December 2013), a partnership programme between the BBC, Jisc and the British Universities Film and Video Council aimed at opening wider archives for UK-based teaching and learning, has been attributed to **Popple's** initial research. The Controller of Archive Development for the BBC, referencing *RES*, stated that, "We could never have achieved this level of ambition without the pioneering work of The Miner's Project...we are all most grateful for your bold and innovative approach" **[A]**.

Furthermore, the research has also helped the BBC address concerns over the need to affirm relationships with its audiences and enhance public engagement. In a speech in the Prix Italia Conference in 2011, the BBC Controller of Archive Development used **Popple's** research as a central case study and noted that the Miners' Strike participants' contributions were "illuminating, especially in terms of how they had felt manipulated by some sections of the media. There was much discussion in our focus groups on the whole question of trust and it was agreed that by making archive materials freely available, and acknowledging the issues attached to them, the BBC had an opportunity to regain the confidence it had lost in some quarters." (Ageh 2011:13) **[B]**. In his supporting testimonial, the Controller added, "I am convinced that the findings of your work is helping us in relation to building public confidence in the organisation by allowing us to engage in a mutually beneficial, two-way dialogue with individuals and communities that will, over time, allow the people of the UK to feel they have a genuine and trusted relationship with the BBC." **[A]**

*Impact on BBC coverage of the anniversary of strike*

**Popple's** research also informed and influenced the BBC's coverage of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the strike in 2009. Through listing the BBC holdings relating to the strike, the report for the BBC notes that the research provided "a definitive list of what content actually exists and can be re-used" **[2]**. The findings, which were always planned to coincide with this significant anniversary, also helped shape the BBC coverage by highlighting a variety of different accounts, which as a result, incorporated a range of perspectives that would otherwise not have been possible. This served to preserve and present cultural heritage in a new light, highlighting previously marginalised viewpoints and more generally, influenced the wider understanding of this time in social history. This was noted by the BBC Controller of Archive Development in 2011:

"The feedback we've been getting throughout this project has resulted in all of us having a more rounded and nuanced understanding of the miners' strike than we had previously. The information and knowledge that was contained in our footage was very important – but it has been enriched

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and given extra context by our engagement with the people directly involved in the strike at the time. Until we engaged with them, it was just a few cans of film on a shelf in a storeroom. Now, it's a living resource." (Ageh 2011:17-18) [B].

BBC Yorkshire also gives testimony to the significance of **Popple's** research in its coverage. BBC South Yorkshire's web resources used stories drawn from the project's participants [C], in addition to using the *Strike Stories* films [4], and the Head of BBC Yorkshire stated:

"Your case study using BBC archives allowed people to tell their stories and to engage with the material which has not been seen for many years. The stories have already been used on television, radio and online and will serve as a reference for future generations. I am convinced we would not have heard the stories without your involvement." [D]

### *Impact on civic society and public engagement*

**Popple's** research also had additional benefit for the participants of the projects. The *Fusion* project brought several people together to articulate their feelings of being misrepresented and allowed them to address their own relationships, encouraging reconciliation with people and groups with very different perspectives on the strike. It increased the participants confidence to contribute to public debate and develop their own interests, for example, one participant now leads the national campaign for a public enquiry into events at the Battle of Orgreave in June 1984 and attributes **Popple's** research to her ability to develop this campaign and engage with the media [E]. Another participant, a striking miner, has also gone on to record his experiences during the strike for a book, *Digging the Seam*, which reflects on the legacy of the dispute and explores cultural representations of the strike and how music, photography and cinema responded and contributed to the strike [F].

The research also clearly demonstrated the potential for collaborative design and the genuine public commitment and desire to engage with, and take ownership of, cultural heritage resources. The Strategic Partnerships Executive for BBC Research & Development stated: "Your project has impacted on the work and approach of BBC Archives in relation to thinking about collaborative engagement with BBC audiences and the recognition of the important role they play" [G]. Finally, the BBC representative noted in the internal report following the *Fusion* project that, "The choice of the miners' strike 1984/5 for this research was an inspired one and came from the University of Leeds... few other events had such an impact on social and political lives. [...] Through this research we can begin to understand what is important to communities about how they are represented in the archives. We can also start to understand the passions and sense of ownership the BBC audience has when engaging with what is essentially their archive." [H]

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[A] Testimonial from BBC Controller of Archives and the Digital Public Space.(11/02/2013)

[B] Transcript of speech given by the BBC Controller of Archives and the Digital Public Space, "The Value of Memory", at A Prix Italia Conference in Torino.(21/10/ 2011).

[C] BBC South Yorkshire produced a range of web resources using stories drawn from participants and covered in their *Strike Stories* films. Two examples include:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/content/articles/2009/03/13/women\\_against\\_pit\\_closures\\_caroline\\_poland\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/content/articles/2009/03/13/women_against_pit_closures_caroline_poland_feature.shtml) and

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/content/articles/2009/03/02/lesley\\_boulton\\_orgreave\\_photo\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/southyorkshire/content/articles/2009/03/02/lesley_boulton_orgreave_photo_feature.shtml) (23/09/2013)

[D] Testimonial from Head of BBC North.(16/5/2013)

[E] Testimonial from Women Against Pit Closures project member. (9/2/2013)

[F] **Popple S** and McDonald, I. (Editors) *Digging the Seam: Popular Cultures of the Miners' Strike*. Cambridge Scholar's Press 2012. Chapter Seventeen *Stories from the Front Line* pp.230-238.

[G] Testimonial from Head Strategic Partnerships Executive, BBC R&D. (11/3/2013)

[H] Forward by BBC's Heather Powell, in **Popple S** and Powell H, *AHRC/BBC Open Archive Project - The Miners' Strike: A Case Study in Regional Content*.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/knowledgeexchange/leeds.pdf> (23/09/2013)