

<b>Institution:</b> University of Portsmouth
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 Area Studies
<b>Title of case study:</b> Popular Culture and the City: Exhibiting Inclusive and Challenging Urban Histories (UOP27POPULAR)
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Brad Beaven's research into the changing character and form of popular culture in the English city between 1850 and 1945 underpinned the 'Portsmouth Voices' project, a collaboration with Portsmouth City Museum supported by a £223,500 Heritage Lottery Fund award. Previous exhibitions had presented rather narrow and parochial narratives of Portsmouth's history. Beaven's research significantly structured the project's engagement with class, gender and ethnicity in narrating the city's past, and played a guiding role in the curation of a major exhibition that successfully challenged preconceived ideas on generation, race and sexuality. In presenting both an inclusive and challenging story of Portsmouth's history, the exhibition attracted significant visitor numbers and a new section of the public who engaged with the Museum for the first time.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Brad Beaven is currently Reader in Social and Cultural History, having joined the University of Portsmouth as a Lecturer in 1994. He is recognised as a leading authority on popular culture and the city in Britain between 1850 and 1945. His research approach has been described as successfully demonstrating 'the fruitful intersection of social and cultural history' (Supporting evidence 1, references in parentheses are to items in Section 3).</p> <p>A core feature of his work is the analysis of how working-class communities responded to civic initiatives aimed at influencing their working lives and leisure habits, in peace and war (Output 1). This interest in contextualising the relationship between working-class culture and the city developed into the research monograph <i>Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men, 1850-1945</i> (Output 2). This book explored the issue of social class and identity in the Midlands and southeastern England. These regions experienced very different material conditions to those of northern England – traditionally the focus for studies of popular leisure in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To gain a broader comparative insight into the experience of working-men's leisure, Beaven conducted original research into a wide variety of primary sources, including government records, contemporary newspapers, youth organisation archives, philanthropic pamphlets, personal papers and oral histories.</p> <p>Working at the forefront of an historiographical turn towards plurality and diversity, the findings of this research demonstrated the problems in assuming homogeneity in working-class culture, and illustrated the importance of gender and generation in the fostering of working-class identities. Beaven argued that male workers engaged with the new cultural forms of the twentieth century and negotiated their way into a reconstituted class identity in the midst of mass culture. The book has been recognised as making a notable contribution to the historiographical field. <i>Reviews in History</i>, the leading online journal published by the Institute of Historical Research, praised it as 'a significant and timely contribution to our understanding of popular leisure' (Supporting evidence 2). Likewise, the <i>Economic History Review</i> commented that 'Brad Beaven's compelling new study re-asserts the centrality of social class to our understanding of leisure in modern Britain ... This is a well-written, insightful, and absorbing study. It makes a valuable contribution to the social history of modern Britain' (Supporting evidence 3). In the book, and in other peer-reviewed publications, Beaven explored the internal dynamics of working-class communities through a range of themes not previously explored in conjunction, including teenage cultures, courtship, and the gendered nature of work and leisure patterns (Outputs 3 &amp; 4). These topics were to set the agenda for the projects discussed in Section 4.</p> <p>Beaven is also recognised in his field for defining and analysing the shifting nature of citizenship in</p>

Britain, arguing that the concept had a close but complex connection to the changing nature of urban contexts between 1850 and 1945 (Output 5). Beaven's findings demonstrate how citizenship was identified with 'exemplary' social groups, which in turn created an exclusive rather than an inclusive form of urban identity. The adoption of his model of nineteenth and twentieth century citizenship has extended beyond the historical discipline and has been employed by sociologists and political scientists – Rojek's 2009 work uses Beaven's 'four phases of development in the relationship between leisure forms and citizenship' as a model to build his own analysis upon (Supporting evidence 4). The discussion on how urban identity can be cast in either exclusive or inclusive narratives further significantly informed the activities described in Section 4.

### 3. References to the research

(Output 1) B. Beaven and J. Griffiths, 'The blitz and civilian morale and the city: Mass Observation and working-class culture in Britain, 1940-1', *Urban History*, 1999, 26.1, pp. 71-88. Available on request.

- International peer-reviewed journal

(Output 2) B. Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men, 1850-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), ISBN 0-7190-6027-3. Available on request.

- (Supporting evidence 1) M. Cook, 'Twentieth Century Masculinities', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2008, 43.1, pp. 27-35
- (Supporting evidence 2) J. Thompson, 'Review of *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men*', *Reviews in History*, Institute of Historical Research, May 2006, <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/516>
- (Supporting evidence 3) A. Davies, 'Review of *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men*', *Economic History Review*, 59, May 2006.
- (Supporting evidence 4) C. Rojek, *Labour of Leisure*, (London: SAGE, 2009). See esp. pp. 88-9ff.

(Output 3) B. Beaven and J. Griffiths 'Urban Elites, Socialists and Notions of Citizenship in an Industrial Boom Town: Coventry c. 1870-1914', *Labour History Review*, 2004, 69.1, pp.3-18. Available on request.

- International peer-reviewed journal

(Output 4) B. Beaven, 'Challenges to Civic Governance in Post-War England: The Peace Day Disturbances of 1919', *Urban History*, 2006, 33.3, pp. 369-92. ISSN 0963-9268.

DOI: [10.1017/S0963926806004032](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926806004032)

- International peer-reviewed journal

(Output 5) B. Beaven and J. Griffiths, 'Creating the Exemplary Citizen: Changing notions of citizenship in Britain 1870-1939', *Contemporary British History*, 2008, 22.2, pp. 202-25. ISSN 1361-9462. DOI: [10.1080/13619460701189559](https://doi.org/10.1080/13619460701189559)

- International peer-reviewed journal

### 4. Details of the impact

The significance of the Portsmouth Voices project was that it presented a challenging narrative of Portsmouth's history, successfully engaging people in the region beyond an established core constituency of museum-goers. Moreover, Beaven's research and leading role in the formation of the project pushed its boundaries beyond traditional museum content and encouraged the Portsmouth City Museum (PCM) to re-evaluate its approach to future exhibitions (CS3 – references to Section 5).

Beaven played a key role, in collaboration with the Museum, in formulating the concept, design and thematic content of the project proposal for Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) support. On its successful outcome, Beaven, with project partners PCM and Portsmouth Historic Dockyard Trust, was

charged with managing a budget of £223,500 for a series of activities leading up to a key exhibition in 2009-10. The project engaged the Portsmouth and Hampshire public through displays, publications and educational packs on the history of Portsmouth's popular culture from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Part of the source-material for the exhibitions and publications was formed from a major collection of over three hundred new oral histories generated by the project (CS1).

Beaven's research framed the core themes that directed the oral history interviews and the topics covered in exhibitions and publications. PCM remarked that Beaven's 'research and consultation was vital as it pulled the project in a more fruitful and challenging direction and beyond the parochial', adding that he took the Museum out of the 'Local Authority silo' (CS2). The issues of class, gender, ethnicity and generation ran through the major concluding exhibition entitled 'The Game of Life: Exploring Family Life in Portsmouth'. The perspectives generated through Beaven's research on citizenship and the city underpinned the exhibition's approach to its core ambition: to present an inclusive history of Portsmouth in the twentieth century, ranging from the socially disadvantaged to the privileged, and across a sweep of social and ethnic groups not previously represented in the Museum. The project thus included consultation and interviews with Polish, Russian and Kurdish migrants, and engagement with Portsmouth's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community.

The exhibition proved popular with the public, attracting over 31,000 visitors between July 2009 and January 2010 (CS2). Taking its intellectual lead from Beaven's work, 'The Game of Life' explored how the moral assumptions that underpinned key life stages (infancy, childhood, adolescence, courtship, marriage, parenthood, old age and death) changed between the 1920s and the present day. Moreover, the exhibition's engagement with difficult and challenging issues such as racism and sexuality stimulated public debate and inspired Dr Jane Mee, Manager of Portsmouth Museums and Galleries, to write an article for a key international practitioners' publication, the *Museums Journal*. She noted that despite early concerns about the exhibition's engagement with sensitive issues she was pleased that 'the project team had the confidence to run with the material' and that the real lesson that the Museum had learned for the future was to 'trust the public and be less afraid of taking risks' (CS3).

Equally challenging issues were explored in an oral history campaign on 'Food', which invited the public to reflect upon differing food traditions and cultures, the industrial production of food, and eating disorders. This extended its reach beyond the Museum through the development of educational packs and oral history training. Thus, as PCM have noted, teachers at Mayfield Secondary School in Portsmouth employed the project's core themes as the basis for pupil discussion on eating disorders. Pupils also learned oral history techniques and created textile based art on the theme of food that was included in the exhibition (CS2).

An important aim of the project was to involve the local community in the generation of oral histories. In designing the content of this activity, Beaven used his research as a basis to frame the interview questions on subjects such as teenage experiences, courtship, masculinity and inter-generational conflict. Beaven and PCM established community events to recruit and train local people in the techniques of oral history. This work resulted in 433 person-days of input by Portsmouth volunteers (CS1), reflecting the enthusiasm generated around the project, which eventually collected 314 individual histories. In addition, a 'Video Van' visited community events and fairs in Portsmouth where members of the public were filmed answering questions about their life. A selection of the oral history interviews and video material was employed in the exhibition.

These interviews are an important legacy of the project, as another of its achievements was to have them digitised, transcribed and catalogued, making them permanently available to the public in the Portsmouth History Research Centre. This project overall has helped to transform the Portsmouth oral history archive from a relatively little-used local resource to one with markedly greater public use and regular access from international researchers (CS2 and CS4).

In summarising the impact of Beaven's research on the project, PCM noted that his 'input helped to

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us to forge the key aim of involving people who were not natural museum-goers and engage with different viewpoints that captured a range of gendered, class, ethnic and generational perspectives.’ (CS2) This success has led on to an extended engagement between Beaven’s work and the City Museum, most recently in a successful HLF bid for him to curate an exhibition on the First World War in 2014 (CS2).

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

Items 1-3 are available for inspection on request.

CS1 Portsmouth Voices Final Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Report 23 July 2010.

Provides evidence for:

- Range and scope of project activities, number of volunteer hours recorded and oral histories conducted.

CS2 Letter from the Portsmouth Voices Project Leader, dated 17 October 2013.

Provides evidence for:

- Beaven’s research shaping the project in a challenging and inclusive fashion.
- Visitor numbers for the exhibition
- Engagement with Mayfield School, Portsmouth.
- Increase in use of oral history archive.

CS3 J. Mee, ‘Why are we so cautious when we could be bold and challenging?’, *Museums Journal*, November 2009, p. 17.

Provides evidence for:

- The City Museum re-evaluation of its approach to future exhibitions.

CS4 Portsmouth City Museum on-line Collections site

<http://www.portsmouthmuseums.co.uk/collections/index.html>

Provides evidence for

- International access of the Portsmouth oral history archive.