Welcome to arts and humanities research at the University of York

The University of York is a member of the UK’s prestigious Russell Group of elite research institutions. Across our eight arts and humanities departments – Archaeology, English and Related Literature, History, History of Art, Language and Linguistic Science, Music, Philosophy, Theatre, Film and Television – and through the work of our many interdisciplinary centres, researchers at York are uncovering new materials, re-reading existing fields in new ways, informing and reframing ongoing debates, and boldly changing the terms of those debates.

The University’s Humanities Research Centre gives a central belonging and shared collective identity to all researchers in the arts and humanities. Its beautiful new building and superb facilities provide a wonderful space for exploratory and sustained interdisciplinary conversations, symposia, international conferences and public events. Many of the major grants we have won to pursue innovative projects have been made possible through the liberating and expanding ways of working that this welcoming space has inspired.

Researchers in the arts and humanities at York are re-framing understandings of historical, artistic and philosophical figures and concepts, redefining major artistic and intellectual movements and helping to shape the future of our disciplines. But we are also committed to taking the best of our research to communities beyond the academic environment in ambitious and productive ways and we therefore invite our research to engage positively with the contemporary world. Working in partnership with many voluntary and public organisations – including the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, Tate Britain and Tate Modern, the British Library, the Churches Conservation Trust, the National Centre for Early Music, English heritage and the British Film Institute – we are able to share mutually enriching areas of expertise with highly trained professionals from the cultural industries and so find wider audiences for our work.

This brochure provides just a taste of some of the rich and varied research being conducted in the arts and humanities at York. We hope that the cross-section of projects assembled here will enable you to sample the breadth and dynamism of our community and our research.

Professor Mark Ormrod
Arts and Humanities Academic Co-ordinator
Professor Judith Buchanan
Director of the Humanities Research Centre

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THRIVING INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH CENTRES

Our research regularly transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries, pushing us into new and exciting areas of enquiry. To support this, we have created interdisciplinary research centres that bring together academics, research students and external partners in new conversations, innovative collaborative research projects and a range of activities that take our research beyond the academic world.

As well as our more specifically subject-specific centres, we have four, period-based centres which give focus to areas of our arts and humanities research for which we are particularly recognised both nationally and internationally. These are: the Centre for Medieval Studies, the Centre for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies, the Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies and the Centre for Modern Studies.

The Centre for Medieval Studies

Based in the historic King’s Manor in the heart of York, the UK’s largest and most long-established research centre for medieval interdisciplinary scholarship, the Centre’s research spans all periods of the Middle Ages. Among its many achievements are the presentations of the western medieval world in Scandinavia to the Mediterranean. Areas of specific interest include the Vikings, political culture, religion of the Church and laity, language and literature (Latin and vernacular), urban life, family, gender and sexuality, chivalry and aristocracies, buildings and performance, and the court cultures of England, Italy, Holland and France. The Centre currently houses the major AHRC-funded project on Conversion Narratives in Early Modern Europe, offers an annual programme of research seminars, international conferences and public lectures and runs its own interdisciplinary taught MA in Renaissance and Early Modern Studies.

The Centre for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies

Brings together staff and postgraduate students from nine departments across the arts, humanities and social sciences, and is the largest centre of its kind in the UK. The Centre for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies is known worldwide for its leading research on the history of the book, the history and religion of the history of culture and ideas. Other clusters of expertise include Shakespeare, space, landscape and the environment, the senses, science and crime, editing and performance, and the court cultures of England, Italy, Holland and France. The Centre currently houses the major AHRC-funded project on Conversion Narratives in Early Modern Europe, offers an annual programme of research seminars, international conferences and public lectures and runs its own interdisciplinary taught MA in Renaissance and Early Modern Studies.

The Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies

Is widely recognized as the leading centre in the English-speaking world for interdisciplinary research in the period 1700-1850. Its exciting programme of one-day symposia and research seminars regularly attracts the participation of internationally distinguished speakers from around the globe. Major international conferences have also contributed to consolidate its position at the forefront of studies in the field. A thriving student community sustains the lively Postgraduate Research Forum, and students participate in all aspects of the Centre’s activities from the organization of conferences to running the Centre’s social media fora. The Centre has hosted a series of major funded research projects: ‘Nations, Borders and Identities’, ‘Court, Country, City – British Art, 1650–1750’; and a project on the work of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. The Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies offers the interdisciplinary MA in Eighteenth Century Studies: Representations and Concepts, 1750–1830.

The Centre for Modern Studies

Is a flourishing locus for research and pedagogical activity in the period after 1830, promoting innovative, interdisciplinary research across the arts, humanities, social sciences and sciences, from a variety of theoretical, methodological and historiographical perspectives. As well as organising seminars, workshops, conferences and visiting speakers, the Centre for Modern Studies provides pump priming for a number of research strands, which serve as focal points for funding bids; and small project grants, which enable graduate students to organise reading groups, film screenings and symposia. Aims to date have focused on narrative theory, creativity, world systems, the cultural politics of twentieth-century popular culture, and transnational and postcolonial studies. The Centre for Modern Studies also runs an interdisciplinary MA in Culture and Thought after 1945.

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Hints Towards a Change of Ministry, c 1797, by the caricaturist George Moutard Woodward

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York has a noteworthy breadth of expertise in research on the representation and interpretation of religion in all its forms. This includes studies on royal burials, work on the Bible in Early Modern England, performances of liturgical drama, the historical mapping and interpretation of pilgrimage, research into Biblical cinema, an examination of Sufism in Western literature, culture and philosophy and a project on narratives of conversion, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

ARCHBISHOPS’ LIBRARIES PROJECT

The city of York, with its rich ecclesiastical history, provides the perfect backdrop for research into sacred texts and spaces. For example, York Minster Library, the largest cathedral library in the UK, is run through a partnership with the University of York.

Brian Cummings, Anniversary Professor of English, and Bill Sherman, Professor of Renaissance Studies, regularly use the library to inform their teaching. They are involved in an international project, bringing together Lambeth Palace in London and York Minster Library, to study the early formation and use of the collections of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. This includes a digitised database of the seventeenth-century catalogues and a digital exhibition combining for the first time the treasures of the two libraries.

Emerging from this work, a national research network based in York is being developed to bring together all of the cathedral libraries in the UK in order to analyse their holdings and make these extraordinary collections more accessible to the wider public. The project aims to enrich religious conversion, the King James Bible and the Qur’an of the Enlightenment period, to make York a leading centre for the study of religion and the book.

The Lambeth Palace Library Exhibition (Royal Devotion: Monarchy and the Book of Common Prayer) ran from May to July 2012. The picture shows HRH The Prince of Wales (centre), Professor Brian Cummings and Dr Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, at the launch of the exhibition on 1 May 2012.

© Picture Partnership/Lambeth Palace

JERUSALEM IN WESTERN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

“The city of Jerusalem plays a vital role in Christianity, Judaism and Islam. It was important in the imagination of Medieval Christians, as the scene of key events in the Old and New Testaments. It foreshadowed the Heavenly Jerusalem. Its sacred topography was translated into a wide range of media, including maps and monuments.

I am working on an in-depth study of Western Medieval maps of Jerusalem and I am part of a five-year research project which documents and examines European monuments reflecting those in Jerusalem. These include famous examples such as the Temple Church in London and the Sacri Monti of Piedmont and Lombardy as well as many lesser known monuments which have until now been studied only at a regional level.”

Dr Hanna Vorholt
Department of History of Art

Jerusalem in Western Art and Architecture
SLAVERY AND ITS LEGACIES

The University of York has a long-standing reputation for ground-breaking research on the history of transatlantic slavery and its implications for the contemporary world.

From a revealing historical study exploring the emancipation of serfs in Russia and Brazil, to an Al Jazeera TV documentary series, *Slavery: a 21st Century Evil*, directed and produced by Emmy and BAFTA award-winning film-maker David Hickman from our Department of Theatre, Film and Television, we approach the study of slavery from many perspectives and using different media.

“It has taken 40 years for the recognition to come that slavery is basic to British history. We tend to think of it as being exotic, but it isn’t; it’s British ships, British finance, British manufacture, British landholding and a British desire for slave-grown produce that drove the whole industry. Slavery is as British as it is American.”

Emeritus Professor of History, James Walvin

Professor Walvin is a world authority on the Atlantic slave trade and the history of slavery in Britain.

In collaboration with other international partners, the University’s Department of Archaeology and Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past have launched an ambitious €4.3 million project, ‘EUROTAST’, which is exploring the history of transatlantic slavery and its legacies. The project brings together leading international scholars and a new generation of archaeologists, historians and scientists from the University of York and across Europe. Researchers are using state-of-the-art technology to reconstruct demographic and genetic links between Africa and the transatlantic diaspora. Through the work of the project, bioarchaeology is helping to increase our understanding of African life cycles and experiences under slavery.

REPRESENTATIONS OF SLAVERY IN MUSEUMS

The Department of History’s Dr Geoffrey Cubitt led a major research project on the representation of slavery in museums and on the commemorative activities of the 2007 Bicentenary of the 1807 abolition of the slave trade in Britain. The findings of this research have not only had a significant impact on participating museums (including the British Museum, the National Maritime Museum and the Museum of London, Docklands) but also continue to attract global interest. Combining analysis of exhibitions with visitor responses, the research has deepened understanding of the challenges faced by museums in handling difficult subjects and has brought together academics, museum professionals and a variety of community representatives.

www.york.ac.uk/1807commemorated

Trench Town High School, Jamaica, 1965 © National Archives

Presenter Rageh Omaar with David Hickman, Director of award-winning Al Jazeera TV series *Slavery: a 21st Century Evil*
The aftermath of the British Empire both in the former colonies and in Britain itself is tackled in new and illuminating ways across the humanities disciplines at the University of York.

What did the end of the empire mean for the British, French, Belgian, Dutch and Portuguese? This is a question that Dr Liz Buettner in the Department of History is tackling. Her latest research project looks at the cultural and social adjustments required in the post-colonial world. Dr Buettner’s research focuses particularly on smaller colonising nations such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Portugal rather than on Britain and France whose narratives have previously tended to dominate and distort colonial and post-colonial studies about Europe.

Post-colonial literature

From leading research on the writings of South African Nobel laureate J.M. Coetzee by Professor David Attwell and Professor Derek Attridge, to Dr Claire Chambers’ analysis of the literature of the Indian subcontinent and representations of Muslims in Britain and South Asia, post-colonial literature is a particular strength in the Department of English and Related Literature.

Writers of Muslim heritage are producing some of the most exciting and politically engaged literary fiction in the UK today. But is there such a thing as ‘Muslim fiction’? If so, is it cultural background or belief that makes writing Muslim? In British Muslim Fictions, Dr Claire Chambers has interviewed 13 anglophone writers who live or work in Britain and have an intimate relationship with Islam, as a means of exploring these questions. Authors interviewed include Hanif Kureishi, Leila Aboulela, Abdulrazak Gurnah and Ahdaf Soueif: a diverse group including religious and cultural Muslims from South Asian, Arab and African backgrounds.

THE POST–COLONIAL WORLD

Bra Tete Mbambisa © Gregory Franz

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THE JAZZ DIASPORA

“Although my research typically takes the form of conference papers and articles, I have also been especially fortunate to work with Bra Tete Mbambisa on his new album Black Heroes which was released in 2012.”

Dr Jonathan Eato
Composer, saxophonist and lecturer in the Department of Music.
Bioarchaeology research at the University of York

From beasts to books to biomolecules

Collaborative work among physicists, archaeologists, historians and archivists is bringing the University’s Borthwick Institute for Archives to life in illuminating ways. In a ground-breaking discovery, researchers have discovered that rubber erasers can be a powerful medium to help ascertain which species of animal was used to make medieval parchments. Working with colleagues in Dublin they have been able to capture one million times more DNA data from manuscripts than was possible three years ago. It may now prove possible to collect forensic evidence that testifies to past human interaction with books. This might include traces of fluids left on the material fabric of our manuscripts as a result of fondling, kissing and blood letting by medieval religious and medical texts.

The Centre for Medieval Literature is a high profile collaboration between the University of York and the University of Southern Denmark. It is establishing a cross-disciplinary, theoretical framework for the study of medieval literature on an European scale.

www.sdu.dk/en/Om_SDU/Institutter_centre/C_cml

AN EIGHTH-CENTURY DETECTIVE STORY: ALCUIN OF YORK

Eight-century York owed its reputation as one of the most intellectually influential cities in Europe to the library and school headed by its great scholar Alcuin. But while rich and vivid evidence exists about the school’s contents, they have largely disappeared, many destroyed by the devastating Viking attacks of the ninth century. Dr Mary Garrison from the University’s Department of History has been seeking the traces of the great talk library and the chief evidence for the investigation is found in Alcuin’s own writings. Until now no book has ever been securely assigned to eighth-century York. But by sifting the evidence, Dr Garrison has been able to identify, for the first time, a book most likely to have been made at the school of York in Alcuin’s time: a gigantic and now incomplete copy of Pliny’s Natural History, now held in Leiden, the Netherlands.

Chaucer’s Scribes

Geoffrey Chaucer is referred to as the ‘Father of English Literature’, not because he was the first author to write in English (he wasn’t) but because his works were among those of his generation that were produced in sufficient numbers to reach a wider audience. Chaucer wrote before the age of print, so the production of his writings in such numbers depended on scribes manually copying works like The Canterbury Tales in manuscripts. My research identifies for the first time who were the scribes responsible for the copying of the earliest manuscripts by Chaucer and his contemporaries. My research also reveals that these revolutionary clerks were holding down day jobs in bureaucratic offices at the London Guildhall while copying medieval English literature as a sideline.

Linna Mooney
Professor of Medieval English Palaeography and Director of the Centre for Medieval Studies

www.sdu.dk/en/Om_SDU/Institutter_centre/C_cml
Heritage: our past and who we are

“Heritage is everywhere. It is a bend in the road, a building valued by its occupants, objects kept on a mantelpiece, and the lumps and bumps in a field. This broad definition may surprise some people but heritage, we firmly believe, is ordinary and everyday just as much as it is special and iconic.”

Dr John Schofield
Director of Cultural Heritage Management and Head of the Department of Archaeology

Uncovering Britain’s oldest house

Yorkshire contains some of the world’s most significant archaeological sites and the University’s Department of Archaeology is involved in a large number of digs. The discovery of the oldest house in Britain by a team from our Department of Archaeology has reshaped our understanding of the post-Ice Age hunter gatherers who lived on the site over 11,000 years ago. Studies of the ancient structures uncovered on the site at Star Carr, in Yorkshire, have helped rewrite standard textbook descriptions of the nomadic groups who recolonised Britain at the end of the last Ice Age. A community previously viewed as rootless drifters, engaged in a never-ending search for prey, has been revealed by the team of researchers from York to be a more sophisticated, settled community with strong societal and generational ties.

The discovery of Britain’s oldest house by Professor Nicky Milner (pictured) from York’s Department of Archaeology and a team from the University of Manchester has shifted historical perceptions of some of our early ancestors. A dynamic study in progress...

Digital Heritage

The University of York’s Centre for Digital Heritage is an interdisciplinary research centre that brings together York’s world-leading expertise in digital heritage, including data management, analysis and visualisation.

Current research projects include the development of touch-screens and mobile phone applications which provide information for visitors on the beautiful medieval churches of York, and on cathedrals elsewhere. These screens and phone apps – produced by the University’s Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture – include 3D visualisations of the churches as they evolve through time.

Heritage and conservation

Archaeologists at York have a long history of researching crucial areas of heritage and conservation practice, asking questions such as why a particular building or place matters. Current research explores the very nature of heritage, and who has a stake in its definition and management. The recognition, for instance, that homeless people and others at the margins of mainstream society have an investment and interest in the shape of the built environment.

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As a place in which to study and conduct research, the city of York is hard to beat, with its rich heritage literally on the doorstep. The University’s strong links with museums, visitor attractions and important archaeological resources are of immense benefit to the research community and to both our undergraduate and our postgraduate students. Researchers from the Departments of Archaeology and History of Art are actively engaged in work to conserve the fabric of our beautiful city. For example, in her role as Director of the York Glaziers Trust and also Course Director of the MA in Stained Glass Conservation and Heritage Management, Sarah Brown of the Department of History of Art is overseeing the restoration of the famous Great East Window of York Minster, the largest gothic cathedral in northern Europe.

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Theatrical performance in the Theresienstadt ghetto

“The World War II ghetto at Theresienstadt near Prague was a place of great suffering and deprivation. It was also a site of enormous artistic energy which included the visual arts, orchestral and choral concerts and theatrical performances.

“My research has involved conducting extensive interviews with ghetto survivors during which several previously unknown theatrical scripts have come to light. In these we have found satirical comments on life in the ghetto, wild anticipations of the post-war world and optimistic views of post-war life. I am working closely with survivors to decipher the many hidden references and inside jokes in the scripts and I am addressing the practical and ethical issues around how these scripts can best be performed for audiences today.”

Dr Lisa Peschel
Department of Theatre, Film and Television

A Theresienstadt cabaret performance, sketched by ghetto prisoner Ferdinand Bloch

Pre-genetic intervention and identity

If you can diagnose a genetic condition in an embryo and are able to intervene to change its genetic structure, have you changed the identity of the child? This controversial question lies at the heart of research carried out by Dr Stephen Holland in the Department of Philosophy. One of the Department’s particular research strengths lies in ethics and bioethics, and advances in the science of genetics present a raft of important bioethical problems around issues such as pre-genetic intervention and identity, genetic determinism and eugenics.

Heritage is as much about people as it is about things, and as much about the future as it is about the past. Researchers from across the humanities at York are engaged in research that explores cultural heritage and how it shapes and identifies who we are.

England’s immigrants, 1330–1350 is a major new project led by Mark Ormrod, Professor of Medieval History, and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The project is conducting a fascinating and revealing analysis of the many thousands of immigrants who made their homes in England in the era of the Hundred Years War, the Black Death and the Wars of the Roses. This uses the vast records held in The National Archives in London of census data collected for resident foreigners for tax purposes. The detailed data collected about migration and settling in England in the period gives historical depth to questions that have a clear contemporary resonance, such as how existing residents interact with immigrants, internal ideas of ethnicity and nationality.

Building a huge database of this material and of contextual evidence, the project is making a major contribution to the longer-term history of immigration by providing a deep historical context for contemporary debates about the movement of peoples and the construction of national identity.

www.englandsimmigrants.com
The creativity and intellectual rigour of the humanities subjects combined with that of medical sciences can yield deep and sometimes surprising insights into human health, past and present. Spanning humanities subjects as diverse as Bioarchaeology, Philosophy and English Literature, medical humanities research is extensive and diverse at the University of York.

From an investigation into the works of 17th-century physician Sir Thomas Browne, whose complicated amalgams of science, religion and literature come from an era when medicine and the humanities appeared inextricably linked, to electrical therapy in the 18th century, research into health histories delves into often unexplored areas.

At the centre of medical humanities research at the University sits the Centre for Global Health Histories, directed by Professor Sanjoy Bhattacharya, which works with partners around the world to conduct and promote research of broad medical, scientific, environmental and public health significance.

With current projects including a major initiative examining the history and contemporary workings of primary health care in South Asia, the Centre for Global Health Histories enjoys a strong link with the World Health Organisation and is deeply involved in the Organisation’s Global Health Histories seminar series.

The initiative aims to show how medical history and medical humanities help the global public health community to optimise responses to the public health challenges of today.

The Centre for Global Health Histories houses the editorial offices of Medical History, published by Cambridge University Press, widely regarded as the world’s leading journal in the history of medicine.

The last case of smallpox on the Asian sub-continent
Dr Tarantola © World Health Organisation

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PERFORMANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Visit our vibrant campus on any day of the week and you can sample performance of one kind or another; whether through one of our many music ensembles playing in the impressive Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall, or a more experimental work playing in a ‘found space’, or through a rehearsal for a theatre or film production in one of the dynamic studios within the University’s new £30 million, state-of-the-art facilities for Theatre, Film and Television.

We study, create and perform music, theatre and film. And our practice-led academics and students can be found leading and taking part in quality performances, not only on campus but also in the culturally rich city of York, across the UK and beyond.

The research project, ‘Playing the small screen’, led by Dr Tom Cantrell in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television, is the first exploration of the particular demands of television acting and how these challenges impact on actor training. The project combines new interview material from television actors and directors with the analysis of the broadcast performance, to investigate the innovative and largely overlooked techniques of small screen performance.

MAD WORLDS AND COURTESANS: PERFORMING COMEDY

“I am currently directing our own, highly acclaimed university theatre company, Out of the Blue (comprising a student cast and production team), in John Marston’s The Dutch Courtesan (1605), a deliberately chosen sequel to Thomas Middleton’s brilliantly witty A Mad World, My Masters (1605), performed in our exceptional new facilities in 2011.

A dialectic between the two productions will be explored in a specially created website, which will document the development of The Dutch Courtesan, from early text preparation and research, via workshops and design process, through rehearsals, to public performance. The website will also host films of both productions and a discussion about the two plays between a team of international scholars.”

Professor Michael Cordner
Department of Theatre, Film and Television

RENAISSANCE MUSIC’S ‘MISSING LINK’, THE FIRST SURROUND SOUND, c. 1566

The recent re-discovery of a Renaissance mass for an astounding 40 individual parts, composed by Medici employee Alessandro Striggio in 1566, led to its first recording by the Department of Music’s Dr Robert Hollingworth and his top UK vocal ensemble, I Fagiolini. The recording won two international awards for best CD of the year in 2011 and has toured the UK, Belgium and Italy.

Dr Hollingworth led a workshop on the mass at the University of York, followed by a performance in the spectacular surroundings of York Minster. In this, student singers sang alongside the UK’s leading performers – and, most innovatively, the audience was encouraged to enter the performing circle made by the 40 parts, gaining a unique perspective on 16th century surround-sound. The experience was described by some of those there as overwhelmingly moving in its effects.

Eminent theatre critic Michael Billington with playwright Sir Alan Ayckbourn at a masterclass in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television

The complete archive of Sir Alan Ayckbourn, one of the most celebrated and prolifically performed living playwrights, is now part of the Sir Samuel Storey Writing and Performance Collection in the University’s Borthwick Institute.

The set of A Mad World, My Masters, 2011

Driscoll Abbey street, Penelope Wilton, leads a student masterclass in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television

Downton Abbey actress, Penelope Wilton, leads a student masterclass in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television

I am currently directing our own, highly acclaimed theatre company, Out of the Blue (comprising a student cast and production team), in John Marston’s The Dutch Courtesan (1605), a deliberately chosen sequel to Thomas Middleton’s brilliantly witty A Mad World, My Masters (1605), performed in our exceptional new facilities in 2011.

A dialectic between the two productions will be explored in a specially created website, which will document the development of The Dutch Courtesan, from early text preparation and research, via workshops and design process, through rehearsals, to public performance. The website will also host films of both productions and a discussion about the two plays between a team of international scholars.”

Professor Michael Cantrell
Department of Theatre, Film and Television

The research project, ‘Playing the small screen’, led by Dr Tom Cantrell in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television, is the first exploration of the particular demands of television acting and how these challenges impact on actor training. The project combines new interview material from television actors and directors with the analysis of the broadcast performance, to investigate the innovative and largely overlooked techniques of small screen performance.
Turn-taking in speech and music

In a collaborative project between the Department of Language and Linguistic Science at York and the Centre for Music and Science at the University of Cambridge, researchers are using video recordings of pairs of friends in conversation, looking at how they co-ordinate speech and physical movements as a way to negotiate their conversation. They are given tasks to do together, eliciting instances of ‘joining in’, such as playing an unusual musical instrument. As Dr Richard Ogden explains, the study is enriching our understanding of the codes and conventions of sociability and human engagements.

Accent and identity on the Scottish-English Borders

If you live in England, even close to the border, do you automatically sound ‘English’, and, if you live in Scotland do you automatically sound ‘Scottish’? These are just some of the questions framed by the Department of Language and Linguistic Science’s ‘Accent and Identity on the Scottish-English Border’ project and exhibition, which explored the relationship between regional accents and identities in four border towns. Their findings have implications for border communities more generally, and in particular for ones with a significant history of cross-border traffic and cross-border conflict.

www.york.ac.uk/res/aiseb/

Speech and sound

From re-creating the original acoustics of the York Mystery Plays, to an in-depth analysis of accent and identity on the Scottish-English border, the study of speech and sound richly informs many areas of humanities research at the University of York.

In particular, our Departments of Music, of Language and Linguistic Science, and of Theatre, Film and Television are tackling the nature of sound and speech in very different ways but with some interesting areas of connection.

Mariana Lopez, PhD student, Department of Theatre, Film and Television

“The York Mystery Plays are a magnificent example of medieval drama. Using the coloured language of medieval Yorkshire, they present the ‘history of the world’ from the mystery of God’s Creation, through the birth, death and resurrection of Christ, to the Last Judgement. The plays were performed on wagons through the streets of York, from the 15th to the 17th centuries. They were revived in 1951 and have been performed many times since in a variety of locations in central York.

Research into the plays has been extensive but it has rarely touched on the importance of acoustics and how early outdoor performance spaces would have affected the presentation of the plays and how the audience experienced them. My project uses computer models that allow us to determine which performance configuration would have been more beneficial acoustically.”

Noah’s Flood scene, with umbrellas as props, York Mystery Plays 2012, performed in the ruins of St Mary’s Abbey in Museum Gardens, central York

Kippa Matthews

22 23

Masters student, Tom, rehearses in the Department of Music

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HUMANITIES AND POLICY

Research from sections of the arts and humanities departments at York is having a wider impact in helping to shape policy at both national and international levels, in areas such as conservation, film, schools curriculum reform and health.

Applied philosophy ‘sounds like a contradiction in terms’, but for many years Professor Tom Baldwin of the Department of Philosophy has contributed to public debates in bioethics including the use of human embryonic stem cells and the grounds for granting patents on genes in his work on public health, he has contributed to the public debates on the legitimacy of paternalist interventions in personal life to deal with ill-health linked to personal habits, such as obesity-linked problems.

In the 2005 report that Professor Baldwin co-authored, he argued that the state has a responsibility to provide an environment in which people are helped, but not coerced, to lead healthy lives. The intuitive policy guide ‘the intervention ladder’, developed for and advocated in the report to help assess policy options, has since been used to help frame government policy. Professor Baldwin’s current research in bioethics has switched to new developments in neurosurgery which offer the prospect of treatments for previously untreatable neurological disorders.

ARAB AWAKENING ART IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

The findings of a major British Council-commissioned research project involving the University’s Post-War Reconstruction and Development Unit and Dr Chad Elias from the Department of History of Art, has culminated in a set of recommendations that will have a direct impact on the British Council’s cultural policy in the Arab World.

‘Out in the Open: Artistic Practices and Social Change in Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia’ set out to collaborate with artists and cultural institutions to highlight new ways of looking at, and thinking about, art in a period marked by profound social change and political upheaval.

The extensive research asked two fundamental questions: What social and artistic freedoms has the revolution opened up for artists and institutions in Egypt? Conversely, how has art instigated new found possibilities of social and political expression on the street and in the public sphere more broadly defined?
Based in the award-winning Berrick Saul Building, the Humanities Research Centre provides a place of shared belonging and an intellectual home for academics from across the University’s eight arts and humanities departments and many interdisciplinary centres. It is an energetic and inclusive community of research excellence, interdisciplinary collaboration and academic outreach for scholars from the UK and around the world.

In its outstanding facilities, the Humanities Research Centre houses major interdisciplinary funded research projects and many reading groups and research networks. It is the venue for international conferences, distinguished academic lectures, public talks by well-known broadcasters, authors and politicians, and events for local schools and other sections of the community.

As well as providing beautiful workspace specifically for arts and humanities postgraduates, the Humanities Research Centre actively supports their career development through interdisciplinary workshops, training programmes, project grants, fellowship awards, work in public engagement and a lively, shared community life. It is a stimulating place for research conversations that jostle received ideas, broaden our understanding of ourselves and our world and challenge us about how others might now benefit from this.

LIFE IN THE HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTRE

If you would like to know more about arts and humanities research at the University of York and opportunities for partnering with it, do get in touch with the Humanities Research Centre.

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“The Humanities Research Centre is a perfect place to conduct personal, individual study but at the same time, it forms a brilliant community.”

Dr Li Na
Visiting academic to the Department of Language and Linguistic Science and the Humanities Research Centre in 2012

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With thanks to Ian Martindale, John Houlihan, Vicky Matthers, Gregory Franz, Guzelian, Kippa Matthews, the National Archives, the World Health Organisation, the Wellcome Library, Picture Partnership/Lambeth Palace and the PRDU for photographs and images used in this brochure.