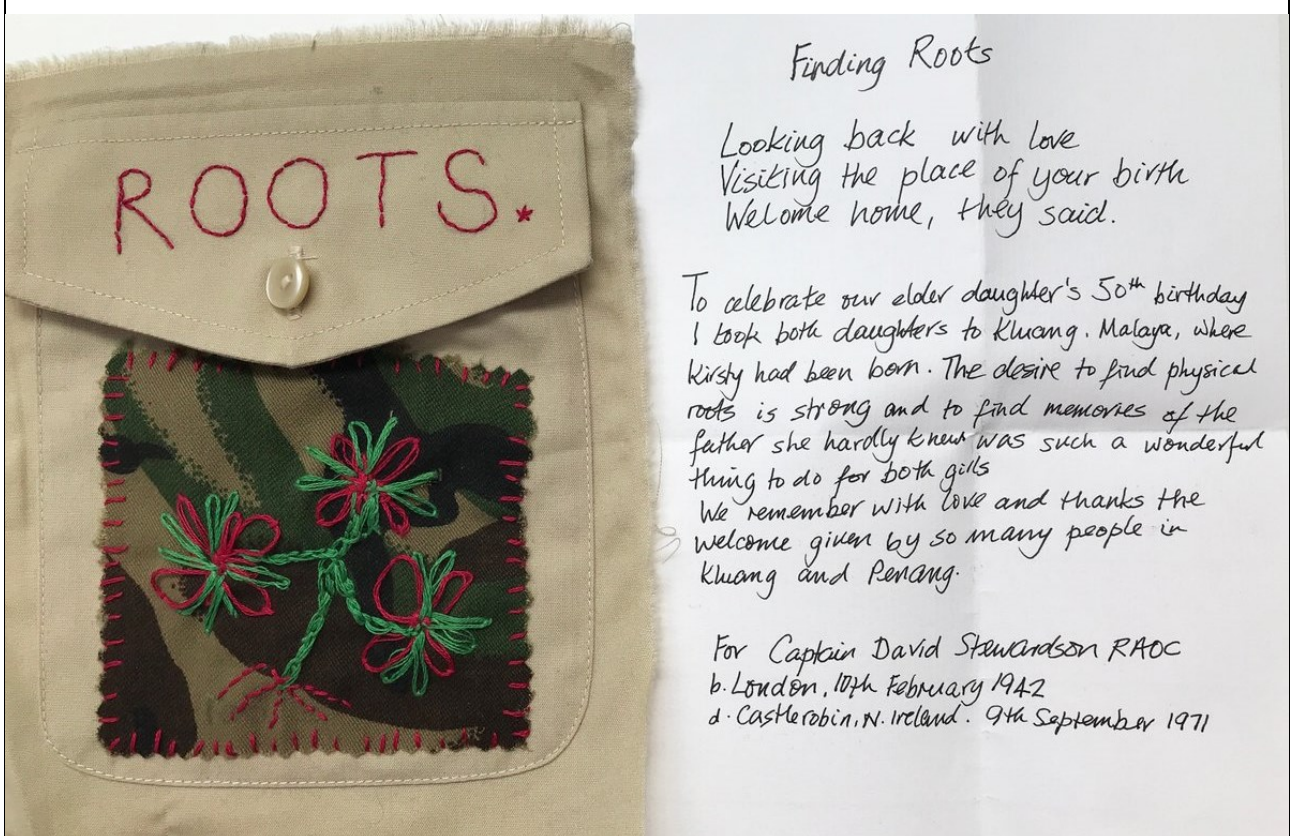
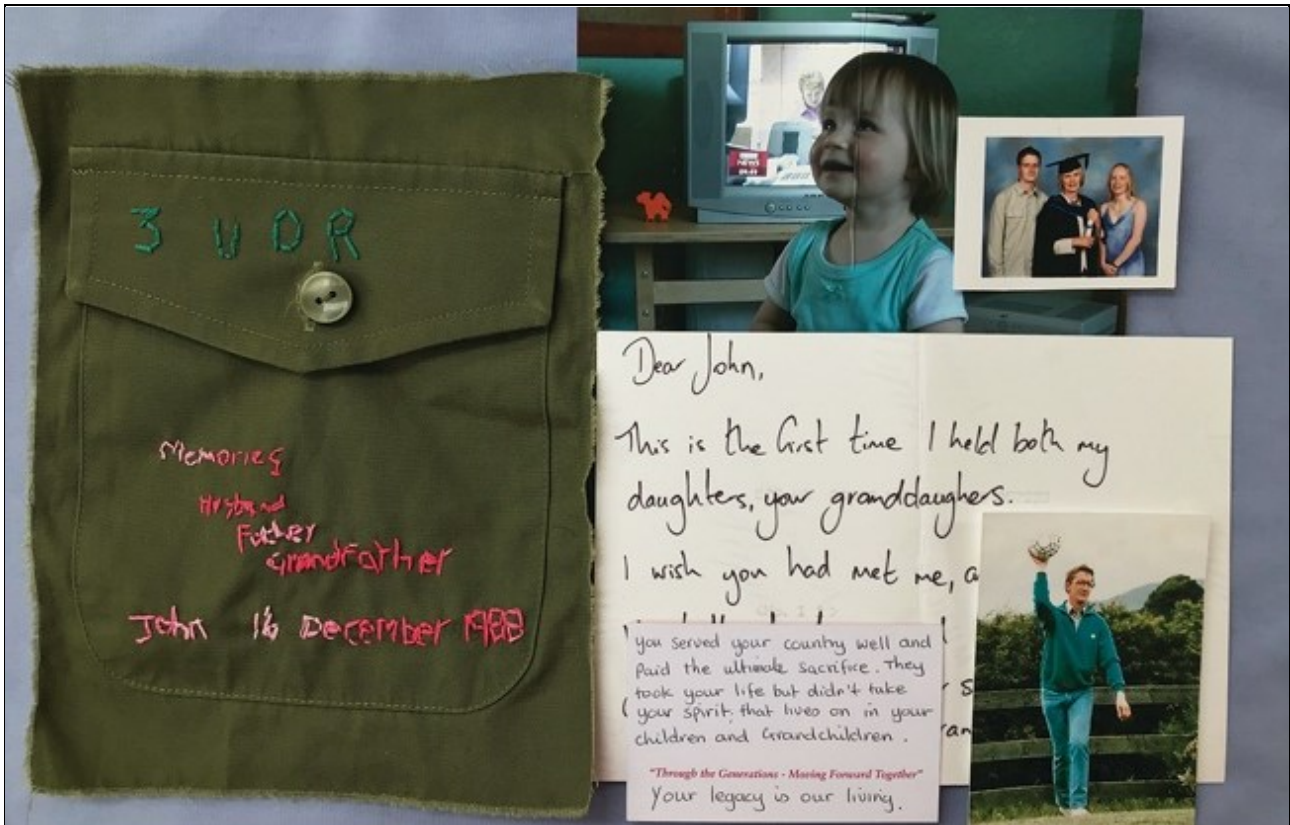


Institution: Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU)		
Unit of Assessment: UOA27		
Title of case study: War Widows' Stories		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 09/2014 – 12/2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Nadine Muller	Senior Lecturer in English Literature & Cultural History	01/08/2012 – Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 09/2016 – 07/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Created in 2016, War Widows' Stories (WWS) has worked with 128 war widows and war widows' family members, and in close partnership with the War Widows' Association of Great Britain (WWA). By making them feel heard, enabling them to tell their stories in their own voices, helping them process their experiences of loss and grief, and recording and publishing their stories, the project has had a profound positive effect on war widows' wellbeing, strengthened the WWA's political advocacy, and raised significant public awareness of war widows' lives at a national level. To do so, WWS has drawn on Muller's research on the social, cultural, and literary histories of widowhood in Britain. Combining it with participatory arts and oral history, and working in close partnership with the War Widows' Association of Great Britain (WWA), WWS has created an intricate and collaborative public history of war widows' lives in modern Britain.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Funded by grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund (2016–18), British Academy (2018–19), AHRC (2018–20), and Arts Council England (2018–20), Muller worked on the underpinning research with Dr Ailbhe McDaid (Research Assistant, LJMU, 01/2017–03/2018) and Dr Melanie Bassett (Research Assistant, LJMU, 09/2018-09/2019), and in collaboration with artists Lois Blackburn (Lead Artist, 2018– present) and Philip Davenport (Lead Writer, 2018– present), and in continuing close partnership with the WWA (2016– present).</p> <p>Muller began her research on widowhood in 2014. Her work documents and analyses the social, cultural, and literary histories of widowhood in Britain from the nineteenth century to the present day. Muller's article "Deceit, Deservingness, and Destitution: Able-Bodied Widows and the New Poor Law" (R1) traces the social attitudes and anxieties that formed the welfare state's gendered attitudes and suspicions toward war widows in post-war and contemporary Britain. "Desperately Funny: The Comical Misfortunes of Husband Hunting" (R2) analyses widows in Victorian comedy and identifies the roots of British society's discomfort with and attempts to police the behaviours, independence, and sexualities of young and middle-aged widows. Muller has also published her research in the form of blog posts for the project website, including pieces on war widows' treatment during the Victorian period, the First World War and the interwar period, the Second World War and the post-war decades (R5), and analyses of literary, cultural, and historical primary sources and artefacts related to war widowhood (R6). This body of research has: a) informed the focus of the project's oral history interviews and its participatory arts practice by identifying the origins and development of contemporary attitudes towards war widows and the common themes that define their experiences of widowhood; b) profoundly affected women's perceptions of their own experiences by rendering them part of a shared, longstanding history; and c) raised public awareness and increased understanding of war widows' lives.</p> <p>From 2016–2019, Muller, McDaid, and Bassett carried out oral history interviews with war widows and war widows' daughters (G1, G3) and produced an open-access archive of 31 transcripts and recordings (R4). These life stories informed the project's participatory arts practices and simultaneously highlighting the diversity and common themes of war widowhood in contemporary Britain, including its financial, psychological, and social challenges. In documenting the issues that war widows face today, the interviews make a key contribution to our understanding of the diversity of war widows' identities and circumstances as well as their experiences.</p>		

The War Widows' Quilt (R3, G1, G2) is an innovative, moving piece of participatory arts research that tells individual stories of widowhood since the Second World War through poetry and stitch and brings them together in a collective whole that is informed and inspired by the longer history of war widowhood. Blackburn, who has extensive experience and expertise in participatory arts practice with those who have experienced war and trauma, designed the quilt in homage to the quilts made by convalescing soldiers during the Crimean War (1853–56) and framed by a collaborative piece of poetry (Davenport). Each square is created by one of the 98 war widows who participated and tells their stories of love, loss, and grief across conflicts and generations, ranging from the Second World War, the Korean War, the Troubles, the Falklands, Iraq, and more. The War Widows' Quilt powerfully communicates the realities and effects of losing a loved one on grounds of their service in the armed forces.





3. References to the research

RESEARCH (R)

1. [Journal Article] Muller, N. "Deceit, Deservingness, & Destitution: Able-Bodied Widows & the New Poor Law", *Journal of Victorian Culture* (2020), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jvcult/vcaa037>

2. [Journal Article] Muller, N. "Desperate Funny: Victorian Widows & the Comical Misfortunes of Husband Hunting", *Journal of Gender Studies* (2020), DOI: 10.1080/09589236.2020.1819777
3. [Exhibition Catalogue] Blackburn, L., N. Muller, P. Davenport, *The War Widows' Quilt* (2019)
4. [Online and print] *War Widows Stories: A Collection of Oral History Interviews* (2017–2020), <http://www.warwidowsstories.org.uk/stories> [30 interview transcripts and recordings; transcripts also available in print]
5. [Online] Muller, N. "History", *War Widows' Stories* (2017), <http://warwidowsstories.org.uk/history> [Short summaries of the history of war widowhood in Britain since the Victorian period: "Who Is a War Widow" (800 words); "The Victorian Period" (700 words); "The World Wars" (600 words); and "The Post-War Period" (350 words)]
6. [Online] Muller, Nadine. "Library", *War Widows' Stories* (2017), <http://warwidowsstories.org.uk/library> [Analyses of historical primary sources on war widows since the Victorian period, such as government broadcasts, newspaper articles, songs, novels, and biographies. Ca. 4,000 words.]

GRANTS (G)

Awarded to Dr Nadine Muller (LJMU) unless otherwise indicated:

1. AHRC Leadership Fellowship (09/2018–09/2020), £242,124
2. arthur+martha, Arts Council England Project Grant (10/2018–02/2020), £14,980
3. British Academy Rising Star Engagement Award (04/2018–03/2019), £14,719.50
4. Heritage Lottery Fund Sharing Heritage Award (09/2016–03/2018), £9,800

4. Details of the impact

Building on her underpinning research on the histories of widowhood, Muller created the War Widows' Stories (WWS) project. Its main focus lies on enabling war widows to tell their life stories through oral history interviews and art and, in doing so, to create an intricate, participatory, accessible history of war widowhood in Britain. This has achieved three key types of impact: a) improving war widows' sense of wellbeing and facilitating their post-traumatic growth; b) raising awareness and increasing understanding of war widows' lives; and c) strengthening the political advocacy of war widows as a group.

a) Improving war widows' wellbeing and facilitating post-traumatic growth

WWS has worked directly with 128 war widows. The project has facilitated the post-traumatic growth of participants and of members of the wider war widows' community by making them feel heard, demonstrating the value of their life stories through publication and exhibition, helping them process and express their loss and grief through storytelling, poetry writing, and embroidery, and enabling them to understand their experiences as a shared history:

"At last I was being listened to. There was relief to be able to talk about what had happened. For years no one wanted to know [...] I now feel a sense of closure, of peace." (Rita Armin, S1)

"Even though you are talking about a deep, deep sadness, it gives you a feeling of freedom. And to see my husband's name and talk about him makes you think, 'There, that's the last thing I can do for you'." (Wendy Hutchinson, S1)

"I revisited some of my own baggage that I have not been able to deal with. I realised that I am still angry. I did not think of it as a social history but as an unfortunate personal event that I had to deal with." (Event Attendee, S1)

"Somehow it helps to say something, to express it out loud. I must have needed to do it. This has helped me a great deal." (Angela Evans, S1)

"Sewing my square gave me a strange sort of peace. I could think about how (my husband) died while I stitched so the sewing was giving me a control. It's hard to explain but it worked for me." (Lauran Hamilton, S1)

b) Improving war widows' political advocacy

WWS has improved war widows' political advocacy by documenting and analysing war widows' experiences and thus contributing evidence and knowledge to the WWA's campaigns. On 15 November 2018, Baroness Janet Fookes, President of the WWA, drew on the project's oral history interviews and the War Widows' Quilt to seek support in the House of Lords for the WWA's campaign for the reinstatement of pensions to those women whose war widows' pensions had been stopped upon remarriage after their husbands' passing (S3). Mary Moreland, WWA Chair, explained that "the quilt and the project help the Association raise awareness of the challenges war widows face every day. Our voices are sadly still absent from most public institutions, including museums. We cannot tell the stories of war without the stories of those left behind" (S2). Group Captain Mark D Heffron, Head of Welfare Policy at the Ministry of Defence, noted that the project's oral history interviews are 'thought provoking and powerful' and that the project showed 'a resolve to support all those who suffer as a loss of loved ones through war. We can all learn from these memories, experiences, and feelings of our war widows; we cannot and will not forget those who gave their lives in war, nor the sacrifice made by their widows' (S4) David Whimpenny, a Trustee for the Royal British Legion, acknowledged that "this work delivers a vitally important and missing element of the nation's archive of remembrance" (S5).

c) Raising awareness and increasing understanding

WWS has raised public awareness and increased understanding of war widows' lives through its outputs, events, and media coverage in the United Kingdom. The project and Muller's research have been featured extensively in the national media, including BBC Radio 3's Free Thinking and The Essay, BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*, BBC Arts Online, BBC Radio Scotland's *Sunday Morning with Ricky Ross*, ITV Wales News at Six, ITV News London, and in the *Daily Express*, reaching a total of 3,345,000 listeners, at least 4,936,200 viewers (ITV News London), and 295,079 readers (*Daily Express*). The project's website has received 8,410 unique visitors since its launch in 2016, while its events were attended by 201 members of the public. The War Widows' Quilt was exhibited at the Queen's House (Royal Museums Greenwich) from 8–11 November 2019, with the exhibition launch event attended by 100 guests, and with the exhibition period seeing 2,000+ visitors to the venue. Audiences attested to the fact that the project has significantly raised awareness and increased understanding of war widows' lives.

"A reminder that bereavement lasts forever." (Event Attendee, S6)

"It's individuals speaking and that's why it touches me [...] It communicates human experience to you." (Charlotte, Exhibition Visitor, S6)

"It's nice to get away from the poppy conversation. It's good not to go down the hero-worshipping route yet again, but to think about the cost of war." (Gemma, Exhibition Visitor, S6)

"It's shocking and yet it's great to see. To understand what is behind these sad stories. Each little square says so much." (Maximo, Exhibition Visitor, S6)

"When I saw this from afar, I was drawn to it because it's a pretty thing. Then, when you get close, it hits you ... the stories." (Anonymous, Exhibition Visitor, S6)

"I like the way the widows are less passive than they're usually portrayed. [...] It really was quite a powerful impact. Almost embarrassing, like you're intruding on someone's grief. The raw feeling." (Beatrix, Exhibition Visitor, S6)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Testimonies by Project Participants
2. Testimony by Mary Moreland, Chair of the War Widows' Association of Great Britain
3. House of Lords Speech by Baroness Janet Fookes (18 November 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trWP6TokJb4>
4. Testimony by Group Captain Mark Heffron, Head of Welfare Policy, Ministry of Defence
5. Testimony by David Whimpenny, Trustee, Royal British Legion
6. Event audience and exhibition visitor feedback
7. Media coverage