

# SOUTHAMPTON INSTITUTE FOR ARTS AND HUMANITIES

# PUTTING CULTURE AT THE HEART OF WORLD-CHANGING RESEARCH

“SIAH advocates for the critical and creative methods of the Arts and Humanities,” said Nicky Marsh, Professor of English and Director of the Southampton Institute for Arts and Humanities (SIAH).

“We celebrate these disciplines and explore what they bring to an understanding of contemporary challenges. We are interested in how culture changes our approach to the environment, to wellbeing, to data and AI.”

SIAH Co-Director and Professor of English, Stephanie Jones, agreed: “We work across subjects to support socially engaged, interdisciplinary work. We place culture at the heart of Southampton’s world-changing research.”

“The Arts and Humanities disciplines have intrinsic value, but I think it is also important to recognise that they do have tangible benefits for society,” said Joanna Sofaer, SIAH Co-Director and Professor of Archaeology.

## **Social good**

What unites SIAH’s diverse research projects is an emphasis on “social good”: how culture contributes to economic prosperity, health, and societal benefit, explained Joanna.

Through actively engaging with policymakers and policy, such as the levelling up agenda, SIAH seeks to use the critical and creative resources of the Arts and Humanities to bring about change.

Nicky Marsh’s ‘And Towns’ series of place-based projects (see page 24) is exploring the role of culture in regeneration, and how to capture qualitative data, such as civic pride, as a metric of value and deploy it

in decision-making. Through partnerships with local councils the projects’ findings are informing policymaking.

With data as one of its research themes, SIAH is very interested in establishing “alternative metrics of value that are more subtle and complex, and in valuing qualitative data,” said Nicky.

Joanna’s work on the UKRI-funded ‘Pathways to Health’ project (see pages 30–31) collaborated with health, civic and cultural partners, and young people in Southampton to understand how and where young people experience culture, and how this can be used to shape provision that supports their health and wellbeing.

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“SIAH has placed culture, and the critical and creative methods it brings, right in the centre of what the University of Southampton can do.”

**Professor Nicky Marsh**  
SIAH Director

Photo: RCM Agency/GO! Southampton

### Tools for reliable research

Arts and Humanities research methodologies offer “a wide range of tools” that researchers outside the Faculty of Arts and Humanities can employ to make their research reliable to the public, argued Joanna. This is particularly useful in knowledge exchange which is fundamentally a two-way conversation.

“There is nothing that will develop a relationship better than an understanding of the world, and Arts and Humanities research is all about understanding of the world, about finding meaning,” she explained.

These research methods can provide the means to capture and engage with qualitative data and complexity. Both the And Towns project and Pathways to Health, used emoji-mapping to understand the subjective experience of place, while another SIAH project, ‘[Creative Writing Against Coastal Waste](#)’, used poetry to try to influence behaviour change and inform policy.

### Supporting collaboration

SIAH also enables researchers to establish proof-of-concept and assemble multi-disciplinary teams ready to respond to “the big thematic multi-funder calls coming from UKRI (UK Research & Innovation) that increasingly prioritise multi-disciplinarity and external partners,” explained Stephanie.

Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) allocations allow SIAH to seed-fund

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**Professor Joanna Sofaer**

interdisciplinary research and work with the arts, heritage, and cultural sectors to share knowledge. The seed-funding provides opportunities to build relationships between disciplines across the Faculty of Arts and Humanities’ nine departments and multiple campuses. It also enables collaboration with researchers across the University in what Joanna calls “blue skies research”.

In addition, SIAH funding supports international collaborations such as Dr Ranka Primorac’s project, ‘[Non-alignment and race in world history, literature and art](#)’. Professor of African Literature Ranka is collaborating with colleagues from English and History at Southampton, and the University of Zagreb and Rijeka City Museum in Croatia. The project takes a fresh look at the cold-war Non-Aligned Movement

(a forum of 120-countries that are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc), and how it may be related to global discourses around race.

### Making connections

Researchers from across the University can access SIAH’s “ready-made network”, which has emerged from partnerships with cultural and creative organisations ranging from galleries, libraries, archives and museums to local government and national bodies such as English Heritage and the National Trust.

A range of seminars and events support SIAH members with knowledge exchange and establishing interdisciplinary relationships. Meanwhile the Public Life series (see opposite) is positioning SIAH at the heart of international conversations about the meaning of Arts and Humanities.

“SIAH has allowed us to support and showcase the value and relevance of Arts and Humanities research,” said Nicky. “It has placed culture, and the critical and creative methods it brings, right in the centre of what the University of Southampton can do.”

**Read more about SIAH:**  
[www.southampton.ac.uk/research/institutes-centres/southampton-institute-for-arts-humanities](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/research/institutes-centres/southampton-institute-for-arts-humanities)



## UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN URBAN REGENERATION

Three Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded projects under the name ‘And Towns’ have been developing understandings of culture, towns, recovery, and pride. The research began in 2021 and brings together a multi-disciplinary team led by SIAH Director Professor Nicky Marsh. Researchers are exploring how culture is being used to imagine social regeneration and the roles that alternative models of economic and social growth and measurements can play.

Working with Southampton City Council, Isle of Wight Council and Dorchester Town Council, the latest phase of the project, ‘Neighbouring Data’, aims to offer insights into how local authorities

can use qualitative data to inform their decision-making. This can complement the more dominant econometric approaches informing policy for culture, regeneration and local economies.

The project addresses key research challenges relating to the generation, connection, and visualisation of data about civic pride and place-attachment.

“The civic partners in the project are very keen to see how they can use qualitative data to understand what people think,” commented Nicky.

**Read more about And Towns:**  
[www.andtowns.co.uk](http://www.andtowns.co.uk)

## MAKING THE CASE FOR DATA

“Data is becoming increasingly important to those who are making the case for the significance of culture and cultural activities,” said Daniel Ashton, Professor of Cultural and Creative Industries at Winchester School of Art.

Local and central government are recognising the economic and social contribution of the cultural and creative industries (CCI). However, recent reports from the Local Government Association (‘Creative Places’ 2020) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (‘Better Data’ 2022) highlight the fragmented nature of CCI data and difficulties in accessing it.

Daniel, and research assistant Makanani Bell, addressed this problem in their SIAH-funded

project ‘[Local government data analytics for culture and creativity](#)’, and explored what CCI-related data councils do or could collect. The project recommended coordinating data gathering practices, creating bespoke data generation methods for CCI, and establishing networks to support local government.

Public Policy Southampton funding allowed Daniel to develop the research in a further project which examined how local authorities in England are aligning culture with place, health and the environment through cultural strategies. He is also feeding into the Southampton Data Observatory and the AHRC Neighbouring Data project, and supporting the development of Winchester City Council’s cultural strategy.



Professor Daniel Ashton

## MEN, MOLLIES AND CROSS-DRESSING IN THE 18TH CENTURY

A SIAH grant has enabled Dr Julie Gammon and Professor Maria Hayward (History) to research the lived experience of ‘Mollies’ – men who dressed as women – in the 18th century.

Mollies often frequented ‘Molly houses’, meeting places for homosexual men and gender-nonconforming people, where they could socialise or meet possible romantic or sexual partners. They faced significant and often hostile contemporary commentary.

Julie, a historian of gender, sexuality and crime, and Maria, a historian of dress, are exploring what items of female clothing Mollies wore and where they acquired it. Through archival research and working with an expert seamstress and model they are examining how men wore female clothing, and what

adaptations needed to be made. This allows them to build a picture of how Mollies engaged with female dress to project their identities.

“The SIAH grant was invaluable in establishing proof of concept and developing an application for an AHRC grant,” said Julie. “We plan to expand our time period and look beyond the figure of the Molly to include other men who cross-dressed, to situate the motives for cross-dressing in a wider history of clothing, gender and sexuality in the 18th century.”

**Read more about this project:**  
[www.southampton.ac.uk/research/projects/no-disagreeable-figure-in-petticoats-men-mollies-cross-dressing-in-england-c1690](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/research/projects/no-disagreeable-figure-in-petticoats-men-mollies-cross-dressing-in-england-c1690)



Dr Niki Miles (postdoctoral research assistant) dressing ‘Molly’ model, Michael Cornish, in a calico version of 18th century clothing

## SIAH: PUBLIC LIFE

The SIAH: Public Life series draws a range of leading international and UK intellectuals into conversation about what the ideal of the ‘public life’ can mean to Arts and Humanities researchers and disciplines in the twenty-first century.

Speakers have included: Homi Bhabha, Harvard professor and important figure in contemporary postcolonial studies; Laleh Kalili, expert in the transnational politics of the Arab world; Richard Sennett, Chair of the UN Habitat Urban Initiatives Group, professor and world-leading urban sociologist; and Sharon H. Venne, indigenous activist and lawyer.

“Attracting these international names places Southampton at the heart of the big ongoing international conversations about the meaning of Arts and Humanities,” said SIAH Co-Director Professor Stephanie Jones.

**SIAH: Public Life series is available to watch here**  
[www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLSFgAkubVUL8O37YgJaXdzaDsbQamV9XC](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLSFgAkubVUL8O37YgJaXdzaDsbQamV9XC)



Professor Stephanie Jones