



# Understanding Place

Opportunities for impact

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## Acknowledgement of Country

UTS acknowledges the Gadigal people, the Boorooberongal people of the Dharug Nation, the Bidjigal people and the Gamaygal people, upon whose ancestral lands our university stands. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the Traditional Custodians for these lands.

Our place-based historical method is a framework guiding communities to understand who they are and where they have come from.

The method enables community, government, university and development partnerships to navigate change and build sustainable futures.

# Our Team

We are a diverse group of historians, social scientists, audio makers and storytellers, exploring how the stories people tell impact their relationships to place and to processes of change.

Our team comprises several faculty members from the Australian Centre of Public History and four professional audio makers from UTS Impact Studios, together with a wide network of affiliate and professional researchers.

We have undertaken a series of place-based projects that leverage academic history, social research and audio storytelling for community and industry engagement.

We aim to deliver processes, tools and outputs for engaging with and capturing the ways communities understand their pasts and their futures.

Our team demonstrates how public history approaches and community partnerships can help foster belonging, preserve lived experience, and inform policy and development initiatives.



The Austin family are four generations living in the one house in Darlinghurst. Pictured are grandmother Irene Parker, mother Dale Austin and daughter Carly Austin.

**100 Faces of Darlinghurst**

Photo Credit: Susan Papazian



# Our Method

Governments are increasingly focused on place-based initiatives and recognise the importance of local involvement in service delivery. In this context, conscious engagement with the stories communities tell about themselves presents both a valuable resource for policy development, and also an opportunity to preserve and strengthen social belonging.

Our place-based historical method is a framework for orienting government, university and development partnerships with communities. It holds that engaging with the ways communities understand who they are and where they have come from is crucial to enabling them to navigate change and build sustainable futures. It offers a set of tools for listening to, documenting, and making accessible individual and community stories as critical evidence to guide place-based approaches to policy and social change.



**Engaging with the ways that communities understand who they are and where they have come from is crucial to enabling them to navigate change and build sustainable futures.**

**Assoc. Prof. Tamson Pietsch**



The ethos that underpins this approach is one of deep listening and close attention to local voices, memories and experiences. Our process is as important as our outputs: it is in being listened to, and heard, that place-based work can enhance belonging, empower active citizenship and connect people to a shared story so that they can imagine and enact a collective future that will ensure their flourishing.

By engaging with community groups, and working with cultural institutions and state archives, we use oral history practices, community storytelling, data and photographic visualisations, and archival research to produce textured and community-driven reflections. As well as the generative process of consultation, outputs might include archival collection, data sets, podcasts, immersive audio stories, walking tours, histories of place, interactive data visualisations, listening parties and community events, as well as books and written reports.

# Team leaders



## **Assoc. Prof. Tamson Pietsch**

DPhil (Oxon), MSt (Oxon), BA Hons (Adel)

**Role: Director, Australian Centre for Public History & Managing Director, Impact Studios**

Tamson Pietsch is Director of the Australian Centre for Public History at UTS and Associate Professor in Social and Political Sciences. She is an expert on the history of ideas and the global politics of knowledge and has a special interest in the history of higher education. Tamson has been awarded over \$3.2 million in competitive funding and managed large and small research and public engagement projects. Tamson has led a range of engagements with the NSW Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector and since 2018 has convened the annual GLAMSLAM industry conference. She has pioneered new forms of public engagement as founder and Managing Director of UTS Impact Studios, whose outputs have received trophies at the New York Festival Radio Awards and been awarded the NSW Premier's History Award. Tamson is currently researching the representation of historical events on Wikipedia.



## **Prof. Anna Clark**

PhD (Melb), BA Hons (Sydney), GradCert (Monash)

**Role: Professor in Public History**

Anna Clark is an award-winning historian, author and public commentator, internationally recognised for her scholarship in Australian history, history education and the role of history in everyday life. Anna's recent book, *Making Australian History*, was longlisted for a Walkley Award and shortlisted for the Ernest Scott History Prize. She has written influential books such as *The History Wars* (with Stuart Macintyre), which won the NSW Premier's Prize and Queensland Premier's Prize for History, a best-selling history of fishing, as well as two history books for children. Anna has attracted over \$3.1 million in research funding. She has appeared extensively in the media, at public events and speaking at writers' festivals about histories of place and community belonging. She has provided expert advice on history teaching and Australian history for state and national curriculum organisations, including ACARA and NESAs.



### Dr. Sarah Gilbert

DCA (WSU), LLB (UNSW), MSc Journalism (Columbia), BA Hons (ANU)

**Role: Executive Producer, Impact Studios**

Sarah Gilbert is a skilled and experienced storyteller, whose work spans documentary film and television, audio production, print and broadcast journalism, and literary non-fiction. She has researched, written, produced and directed many television documentary projects for Australian and international broadcasters, with a focus on Australian history. An oral history practitioner and writer, Sarah recently published *Unconventional Women: The story of the Last Blessed Sacrament Sisters in Australia*. Sarah has been a newspaper reporter in New York, a guidebook writer in Argentina and a journalist at SBS and the ABC. Sarah leads the team at UTS Impact Studios, where she oversees numerous projects and drives the editorial vision for the Studios' impact-generating and award-winning podcasts.



### Olivia Rosenman

MJ (HKU), BA (USYD)

**Role: Audio Producer, Impact Studios**

Olivia Rosenman is an award-winning audio producer and journalist. Her audio work has been commissioned by publishers including Google, ABC, Monocle, Bauer Media, NewsCorp, and The Wheeler Centre. At Impact Studios, she is the Executive Producer of two collaborations between Impact Studios and the Paul Ramsay Foundation: the Welcome to Blacktown community audio project, and the Life's Lottery podcast, which examines how public policy can break the cycle of disadvantage for communities. Prior to working in audio, Olivia was a reporter with Storyful news agency, and the South China Morning Post in Hong Kong. Her freelance writing has appeared in publications including DestinAsian magazine, the Telegraph UK and the China Media Project.



# Why UTS?

UTS has set the university's vision to be a leading public university of technology, recognised for delivering global impact.

This distinctive identity is connected to UTS' history of vocational and technical education, which began in 1833 with the establishment of the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts. Woven through this story is technology: how it is created and how it is used responsibly to better society. UTS continues to prioritise meaningful industry linkages, lifetime learning and a deep connection to professional practice. It is committed to bringing multidisciplinary expertise to the development and management of projects that have practical impact.

The Australian Centre for Public History and UTS Impact Studios are closely aligned with this mission. They share a strong track record of working with government, academic, philanthropic, community and industry partners to develop deep engagements with communities and creative and innovative collaborations that are underpinned by research and production excellence.

**Streets of Darlinghurst**

Photo Credit: Michael Matthews





Jennifer Lam shares her family history - refugees to business owners - in Darlinghurst Oral Histories  
Photo Credit: Sarah Gilbert

## The Australian Centre for Public History

Established in 1998, the Australian Centre for Public History has long been a hub for researchers working at the intersection of academic history, community and industry projects that engage with public audiences. Its members have delivered projects for a variety of funders and created a range of outputs that connect with audiences beyond the university, including data visualisations, podcasts, official reports, curriculum consultations and exhibitions, as well as community-focused events and resources. They have extensive experience working with public cultural and collecting institutions, excellent connections to the wider community of professional historians, and deep individual expertise.

## Impact Studios

UTS Impact Studios is a unique in-house production studio producing quality audio, video, data visualisation and digital storytelling, with a focus on research-rich outputs for social impact. The Studios brings together a team of top-notch audio and media producers who work across projects that include our long-running podcast series, History Lab, as well as collaborations with UTS researchers, researchers from partner universities, and partners in the not-for-profit sector. Its award-winning podcasts are standard bearers in the audio storytelling space in Australia and reach tens of thousands of listeners.

## Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion

The Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion channels the resources of UTS to remove barriers to education, empower communities, increase diversity and inclusion, and advocate for social justice. As part of its work, CSJI has expertise in impact campaigns and impact evaluation, and can assist in developing theories of change and designing and implementing impact and evaluation strategies for place-based projects.





Angelica Ojinnaka-Psillakis, host of the  
Impact Studios podcast Sink or Swim  
Photo Credit: Mridula Amin

# Examples of our work

Our immersive collaborative methods enable histories, community stories, data and archives to come to life as podcasts, walking tours, interactive data, books and more.

“

The Sink or Swim podcast tells my story, as well as those of the people and communities shaping and transforming where and how they live, using their strengths and innovative ideas, rather than being defined by disadvantages

Angelica Ojinnaka-Psillakis

”



Examples of our work

# Darlinghurst Public History Initiative

[uts.ac/dphi](https://uts.ac/dphi)

**Project Leaders:** Assoc. Prof. Tamson Pietsch and Prof. Anna Clark

Since 2020 the Australian Centre for Public History has been partnering with local residents, historians, and creative practitioners to co-create a suite of public resources for Darlinghurst. The aim of this initiative, supported by the Paul Ramsay Foundation, is to capture stories about the past and perspectives in the present as a way of understanding the lives, possibilities and aspirations of this community. Collaboration is at its heart, with the UTS Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion, and researchers from Murawin Indigenous corporation and Macquarie University undertaking a series of foundational community engagements.

Project outputs include oral histories, books, walking tours, podcasts, and digital experiences that invite audiences – individuals, organisations, governments – to listen to the diverse voices of residents over time and to experience the area’s changing landscapes. Collectively these outputs, deposited with cultural institutional partners, create a rich resource base to enable social change that is aware of and sensitive to context.

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*Tamson Pietsch and Anna Clark* are leaders of the Australian Centre for Public History, a hub for history at UTS. Their network of collaborators unites communities, academics, governments and creative practitioners to advance the meaning and place of history in society - understanding the past to inform the future.

Sunil Badami celebrates the local characters and eccentrics of Darlinghurst in Listen to Darlinghurst, Season 5 of the History Lab podcast, which is part of the Darlinghurst Public History Initiative.

Photo Credit: Michael Matthews



“

Darlinghurst was so crucial not just for the people who lived here or visited here but for our history and our culture and it's by understanding and hearing those stories we can really place ourselves within that greater cultural context.

”

Sunil Badami

Examples of our work

# Welcome to Blacktown

[impactstudios.edu.au/welcometoblacktown](https://impactstudios.edu.au/welcometoblacktown)

**Project Leaders:** Olivia Rosenman and Sarah Gilbert

Supported by the Paul Ramsay Foundation, Welcome to Blacktown is a place-based audio project by UTS Impact Studios. It collected and shared the stories of communities working towards social change in Western Sydney. Built on a deep listening exercise involving more than 100 interviews, the project exemplifies the collaborative methodology of community research and storytelling that is central to UTS place-based work. This exercise identified several themes as important issues for the community and highlighted the limits of statistical methods alone. These lessons were communicated in two distinct but connected outputs:

- **We are Blacktown:** a digital and physical portrait exhibition of Blacktown community leaders and people working for change. The portraits bring together photography and immersive audio, portraying each person both visually and in their own voice.
- **Sink or Swim:** an intimate narrative audio documentary hosted and co-produced by Angelica Ojinnaka Psillakis, a young Blacktown woman. The podcast explores issues of migration and inclusion, drowning and climate change in a part of Sydney that has recorded some of the hottest temperatures on earth.

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*Olivia Rosenman* is an award-winning audio producer and journalist at UTS Impact Studios.

*Sarah Gilbert* is a writer and documentary maker who leads UTS' Impact Studios as its executive producer.

Esky Escandor is a multidisciplinary artist and community worker featured in *We are Blacktown*

Photo Credit: Mridula Amin





“

There were some really iconic figures in the Western Sydney hip hop scene that guided young people like myself ... in getting that energy and putting it into something creative.

”

Esky Escandor

Examples of our work

# Water Stories

[bit.ly/MappingEdges](https://bit.ly/MappingEdges)

[bit.ly/GreenSquareWater](https://bit.ly/GreenSquareWater)

[bit.ly/WaterStoriesGreenSquare](https://bit.ly/WaterStoriesGreenSquare)

**Project Leaders:** Assoc. Prof. Ilaria Vanni Accarigi

Supported by the City of Sydney and UTS, Water Stories is a collaborative research initiative co-led by Ilaria Vanni and Alexandra Crosby (Mapping Edges Research Studio) that explores narratives about water in Green Square, one of Australia's largest urban renewal projects, spanning the Sydney suburbs of Beaconsfield, Rosebery, Zetland, Alexandria and Waterloo. This research fosters a deeper connection between local communities and their environments, uncovering how water shapes the social, cultural and environmental narratives of places. Thanks to Australian Research Council funding for Surfacing Urban Wetlands, the project now extends to renewal sites at the Cooks River catchment.

Community resources are a key output of these projects. The team has produced story maps, exhibitions, atlases, storytelling walks, bike rides and workshops, which help residents, workers, community groups, developers and schools understand the socioecological histories of the area.

The projects help city residents engage with their local ecologies by combining ethnographic and archival research to analyse the interplay between society, place, and the environment with design methods to foster positive societal change.

Ilaria leads the historical research for this study, which considers place as a living archive holding material, social and environmental histories of water as an agent transforming urban spaces.

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*Ilaria Vanni Accarigi* is a member of the Australian Centre for Public History and works across the social sciences and design, with a focus on how design and material culture shape the cultural, social and political dimensions of urban environments. She has written extensively about place-based methodologies.

The Alexandra Canal project was never completed, and today the canal is both heritage-listed and one of the most polluted waterways in Australia.

Photo Credit: Ilaria Vanni





“

**Water Stories fosters a deeper connection between local communities and their environments, especially in urban renewal areas, uncovering how water shapes the social, cultural and environmental narratives of places.**

**Assoc. Prof. Ilaria Vanni Accarigi**

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# Partnering opportunities

## Tech Central

The transformation of the area around Central Station into the focal point of Sydney's innovation and technology community will reshape Haymarket, Ultimo and Camperdown and impact communities from Surry Hills and Chippendale to Glebe and Pyrmont. These neighbourhoods have multilayered histories and are of great importance to Aboriginal and diverse communities. With investment from the NSW State Government, UTS has committed to being a key driver of innovation in this precinct.

Our team is exploring opportunities to partner with businesses and organisations moving into this area, and to engage with existing communities and connect to new ones, working towards change that can be grounded in context.

## Professional development

Culture and professional practice are crucial planks in organisational success, especially during times of relocation and change. At the same time, building relationships with local communities is crucial for generating social legitimacy during times of rapid commercial development. But achieving workforce engagement with cultural competency, reconciliation action plans, organisational values, literacy and workplace policies on diversity and inclusion is a challenge.

Our team is open to opportunities to produce engaging materials (i.e. audio, walking tours, interactive development experiences) that will orient staff both professionally and in place, whilst communicating organisational values and priorities.


## Waterloo Precinct

Waterloo has long been an important place for Indigenous Australians – a gathering place, a refuge, a place of work and play and struggle. It is on the brink of transformation with the development of the Waterloo metro and the renewal of the public housing towers. This transformation means significant disruption, dislocation and risk for the existing community, many members of which will leave their homes temporarily or permanently. Gathering and preserving the history of this part of Sydney is an undertaking of great social importance, affording opportunities for organisations to make a genuine contribution to the local and national community.

Our team seeks partners to enable residents to make, keep and hear their own stories in new, easily accessible collections.

Dancer Annalouise Paul, whose oral history appears in the book she is holding, *My Darlinghurst* - a part of the Darlinghurst Public History initiative.

Photo Credit: Michael Matthews




## Understand Your Place

Our place based historical method and creative outputs are developed with communities. We listen, learn and celebrate the richness of your community stories to amplify the strengths of your people and place, and to advocate for a flourishing future.

**Australian Centre for Public History**  
[public.history@uts.edu.au](mailto:public.history@uts.edu.au)

**Dr. Sarah Gilbert, Executive**  
Producer, Impact Studios  
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Cover images:

**Streets of Darlinghurst**

Photo Credit: Michael Matthews

**100 Faces of Darlinghurst, a part of the Paul Ramsay Foundation and UTS partnership – Darlinghurst Public History Initiative**

Photo Credit: Susan Papazian



## Further information

Partnerships are critical to our work. Contact us to find out how you can celebrate the stories of your community.

Australian Centre for Public History  
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