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Camera turns to capture gay and unpleasant land

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16 June 2011

By [Matthew Reisz](#)

Research on past rural attitudes to homosexuality informs new film project. Matthew Reisz reports

A research project on gay life in the British countryside would not normally be expected to attract mainstream attention, let alone that of a successful film-maker.

But this is the feat achieved by a project at Bournemouth University that forms part of the New Dynamics of Ageing programme, promising to bring its results dramatically to life and to a far wider audience than originally expected.

The programme is supported by all five of the UK's research councils and brings together findings on everything from ageing in fiction to safety on stairs.

The strand on rural ageing, *Grey and Pleasant Land*, consists of seven projects carried out by a consortium of four universities in South- West England and Wales, with *Gay and Pleasant Land?* based at Bournemouth.

"The research involved seven in-depth biographical interviews, panel analyses, theatrical improvisations, on-site visits and focus groups," said Kip Jones, reader in qualitative research at Bournemouth's School of Health and Social Care.

"The main interviewees were all aged about 55 to 80, lived or had lived in rural settings and defined themselves as gay or lesbian.

"They looked back on growing up when male homosexuality was illegal, their experiences of coming out and how they were received in a rural environment. There were stories of suicide among gay men because they were outed, afraid to be outed or rejected by their families. Many still face prejudice."

While the conclusions are to be presented in the usual way in journals and books, Dr Jones also spotted dramatic potential in the material. With this in mind, he contacted Josh Appignanesi, the film-maker behind last year's comedy *The Infidel*, written by David Baddiel and starring Omid Djalili. The result of the exchange is the forthcoming 20-minute film, *Rufus Stone*.

Mr Appignanesi explored the theme of ageing and worked with academics for his 2006 film about dementia, *Ex Memoria*, which drew on University of Bradford research.

He said that *Rufus Stone* was "fictionalisation based on research. The process of winnowing down was begun by Kip and his colleagues and then continued by me, since drama has its own necessities.

"It's a bit like adapting a novel, whereas in the commercial cinema certain kinds of project are never going to get funded and you get different sorts of constraints from the collaborative process of working with script editors."

The film is broadly based on one person's experience, but draws on material from all the interviews conducted by the Bournemouth team. At its heart is the story of what happens when a boy who left the country to become a photographer in London is forced to return today.

"It starts in the 1950s," said Mr Appignanesi, "and explores the two options for gay boys growing up in a village then:

oblivion or exile. But is there a chance for redemption or reckoning now?"

Shooting should begin in mid-July, and Dr Jones hopes that the finished film will be shown at conferences and festivals, and eventually uploaded to the internet. He is also trying to secure funding to enable it to be seen in a mobile cinema that tours the remoter parts of the region.

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Readers' comments

- **Kip Jones** 16 June, 2011

Further information on our project at:
<http://blogs.bournemouth.ac.uk/rufus-stone/>

and the Grey and Pleasant Land? projects:
<http://ehealth.chiirup.org.uk/greyandpleasantland/>

Dr Kip Jones
Bournemouth University

- **John J. Guiney Yallop, PhD** 16 June, 2011

A wonderful article about a wonderful project. This research is a fine example of inter-institutional collaboration, as well as collaboration between academics and artists, and those who live their lives as both. The method of dissemination brings the research into the world, where it belongs. Wonderful. Congratulations to all involved. Much gratitude to the participants.

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