

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 31 Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: Reshaping the Understanding of John Knox		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005–2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Jane Dawson	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Reformation History	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1991–2017
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Jane Dawson's highly acclaimed biography of John Knox and his role in the British and European Reformations has quickly become established as the leading point of reference on Knox. Informing documentary films, novels, theatrical plays, a children's book, TV and radio programmes, her work has dispelled popular myths about Knox and the Protestant Reformation, shifting public understanding of his place in Scottish history and national identity. Furthermore, her collaborative research on the music of the post-1560 church has shaped a more nuanced reception of the attitude of the Reformed church to the arts by pointing to its more positive expressions.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>John Knox, the chief architect of the sixteenth-century Scottish Reformation, was the subject of a major biography by Dawson, published by Yale University Press in 2015 (3.1). Knox remains a culturally significant and controversial figure; he has come to embody a sober and sombre brand of Protestant national identity. The biography challenges deep-seated assumptions, undermining the long-established stereotype of Knox as unyielding, inflexible, and misogynist. Recently discovered Knox material – the first since 1872 – formed the basis of the biography, adding depth to existing knowledge (3.2; 3.3). These sources afforded new insights into both Knox's character and his personal relationships. In exploring his doubts and inner-conflicts, Dawson presented a complex Knox who is both like and yet quite unlike popular caricatures. Through the analysis of his correspondence, she questions the traditionally masculine face of the Scottish Reformation by highlighting the crucial role women played. In his review of the book, Arthur Williamson (California State University) noted in <i>The Scottish Historical Review</i> 95.2 that while recent scholarship reinforces the image of Knox as 'a repressive, misogynist bigot', Dawson uncovers another persona by exploring his 'remarkable solidarity with "godly sisters" who offered him their support and friendship.'</p> <p>By focussing on his correspondence, Dawson was better able to position Knox within a broader international context, thus expanding the horizons of the Scottish Reformation to encompass Europe. Through this focus, the biography untangled the hitherto unclear chronology of Knox's exile in Europe 1554-9 (3.1; 3.2; 3.4), while demonstrating the importance of three products of that exile: the Form of Prayers, the Anglo-Genevan Psalter, and the Geneva Bible. These texts were central to the life and worship of the Scottish Kirk after 1560 (3.5) and influential in the wider English-speaking Reformed tradition. By situating Knox and Scotland's Reformation within</p>		

their European context for the first time, Dawson sheds new light on early-modern religious networks and their international reach.

More broadly, in raising awareness of the sound-world of early Reformed worship and the cultural significance of metrical psalms, Dawson's research challenges the widespread perception that the Scottish Reformation created a cultural desert. Her landmark biography of Knox is part of a broader constellation of inter-related projects that have uncovered the cultural richness of Reformed Scotland and its continuities with the late medieval period. The Wode Psalter Research Project (AHRC-funded, 2009-12, Dawson PI) laid the foundations for the AHRC follow-on project 'Singing the Reformation 2016' (STR), for which she also acted as PI. This explored the sound-world of sixteenth-century Scotland. Producing Scots texts and musical scores for selected metrical psalms, STR tested the results with 80 singers. In April 2016 a reconstruction of late sixteenth-century worship was recorded in St Mary's Church, Haddington, with the aid of 180 participants (3.6). Together STR, the Wode Psalter Project, and the Knox research have challenged popular assumptions that the Scottish Reformation suppressed all forms of artistic work.

3. References to the research

3.1 Jane Dawson, *John Knox* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2015 & 2016) – submitted to REF2. (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.2 Jane Dawson, *Letters from Exile: Documents of the Marian Exile Website including scholarly edition of recently-discovered manuscripts in Denbighshire Record Office* [2013]

<http://www.marianexile.div.ed.ac.uk>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20141101184935/https://www.marianexile.div.ed.ac.uk/>

3.3 Jane Dawson & L.K. Glassey, 'Some unpublished letters from John Knox to Christopher Goodman' *Scottish Historical Review* lxxxiv (2005), 166-201.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25529851>

3.4 Jane Dawson, 'Satan's bludy clawes: how religious persecution, exile and radicalization moulded British Protestant identities' in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 71:3 (2018), 267–286.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930618000327>

3.5 Jane Dawson, 'The Word did everything': Readers, Singers and the Protestant Reformation in Scotland c.1560–c.1638' *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* XLVI (2017) 1-37.

<https://doi.org/10.3366/sch.2017.0002>

3.6 Martin Ritchie, 'About Singing the Reformation', Scottish Church Service Society, June 2016.

<http://www.churchservicesociety.org/str/about-singing-reformation-2016>

4. Details of the impact

The research achieved impact through three main pathways:

Literary – Sales of the book indicate its reach to a wider public audience. By mid-2019, *John Knox* had sold 3800 copies, and has been made available in paperback. Yale University Press has praised its success, commenting on the extent to which it had been 'widely reviewed as authoritative, definitive, and rendering all previous biographies obsolete' (5.1). Ecclesiastical bodies have likewise referenced the book's fresh insights, pointing in particular to its wider European dimension. An Anglican reviewer applauded it for highlighting Knox's 'important role in the history of England'. In 2015, it was shortlisted for 'History Book of the Year' by the Saltire Society and it was featured in the major Literary Festivals at Berwick (2015) and Wigtown (2016) (5.2). It has already inspired a children's book and a historical novel, considerably expanding the audience exposed to Dawson's research. For example, in her popular account of the Reformer,

the children's author, Simonetta Carr, acknowledged her debt to Dawson (5.3a). Marie Macpherson, the author of a historical fiction trilogy on Knox, called the biography 'my "bible" for all things Knox-related'. By 'smashing the myths', it enabled Macpherson to 'offer a more three-dimensional view' of Knox' (5.3b).

Media – With 2017 marking the Protestant Reformation's 500th anniversary, TV and radio shows drew on Dawson's expertise. They highlighted in particular her portrayal of the complexity of Knox's character with its admixture of dogmatism and self-doubt and also the women who supported his cause. Dawson featured in two documentaries on the Reformation's Gaelic and Scottish dimensions. *Luther and the Gaelic World* and *The Battle for Souls* aired in the anniversary week 2017 (and were repeated in 2018), broadcast on the main Gaelic mediums for the Scottish Highlands and Ireland (5.4a; 5.4b). While directed towards Gaelic-speakers, BBC Alba's audience extends beyond this community, reaching 700,000 viewers weekly (5.4c). Murdo Macleod's 2015 film *Knox*, nominated for a 2016 BAFTA Scotland New Talent Award, wove comments from Dawson throughout (5.5).

Press reviews celebrated the biography for dismantling caricatures of Knox, replacing them with tangible insights into his complex personality. The *Sunday Herald* declared it '[makes] Knox seem human', while the *Scotsman* noted it 'reveals the valour and vulnerability of the original dour Scot' and the extent to which Knox should be understood as a significant figure not only in Scotland but also in England and Europe (5.6a; 5.6b). A *TLS* reviewer wrote of the way in which its subject becomes more 'complicated', 'interesting' and 'vulnerable' (5.6c). The discovery of 'Knox's Bible' in the University of Glasgow Library in 2016 generated further media interest. Dawson played a key role in its identification – her comments on Knox's possible purchase of the Bible prior to 1559 featured on the Special Collections' blog and in reports in the *Scotsman*, *Herald Scotland*, and the BBC (5.7).

Performance – After reading the biography, Linda Maclean, multi-award winning Scottish playwright, approached Dawson and the two collaborated on the play *Glory on Earth* (5.8). Dawson provided historical advice on the two protagonists, Mary, Queen of Scots and Knox, while the director adapted Singing the Reformation music scores. In May 2017 *Glory* was shown at Edinburgh's Lyceum (one of Scotland's major theatres), with Dawson acknowledged in the programme and the play's printed edition (5.9a). Ticket sales numbered 6,607 (5.9b). Audience feedback testifies to *Glory*'s impact; 66.5% felt 'challenged and provoked' (5.9c). Other responses highlighted its educational value. One person noted how *Glory* 'made me think and research further', while another wrote 'Please tour! I would love my Higher pupils in the Dundee area to see this amazing performance' (5.9c).

Glory received positive national and local reviews, with the *Herald* describing it as 'a story crying to be told ... a call to arms for young women'. Its contemporary relevance was commended; according to *Stage*, the 'roots of Scotland's religious divide open up a debate with universal resonance', while the *Scottish Daily Mail* noted that the show's 'pig-headed politicking should strike a very modern chord' (5.10). Reflecting the popular appeal of *Glory*, Dawson has since joined the Advisory Board for a major British Library exhibition (now delayed until 2021), entitled 'Elizabeth and Mary: Two Queens in One Isle'. She is responsible *inter alia* for writing the commentary on Knox's *History of the Reformation in Scotland*, one of the exhibits on loan from Edinburgh University Library Special Collections.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Emails from Yale University Press, 21 May, 22 May, and 14 June 2019

5.2 Paul Richardson, 'Book review: Analysing the controversial John Knox', 17 November 2015
<http://www.churchnewspaper.com/43030/archives>

Saltire Society Shortlist, 2015

<https://www.saltiresociety.org.uk/awards/literature/literary-awards/2015/shortlist/>

5.3 a) Simonetta Carr, *John Knox* (Reformation Heritage Books: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2014)

b) Marie Macpherson, *First Blast of the Trumpet* (2012 & 2013, ISBN 9781908483225); *Second Blast of the Trumpet* (2015, ISBN 9781910282519). Testimonial letter from Marie Macpherson, 10 April 2019. (Books can be supplied by HEI on request)

5.4 a) *The Battle for Souls/ Ant-Stri Spioradail* BBC ALBA - Tuesday, Oct 31 2017, 9pm

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09cfrck>

b) *Luther and the Gaelic World/Luther agus An Domhan Gaelach* [58 mins] Shown on BBC2 NI - Sunday, Oct 29 2017, 10pm; RTE1 - Thursday, Nov 2 – 10:30pm

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09d5tq8>

c) 'Crunch Time Now for BBC Alba, a Scottish Success Story', *Scotsman*, 20 February 2017 (circulation: 21,204)

<https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/brian-wilson-crunch-time-now-for-bbc-alba-a-scottish-success-story-1-4371151>.

5.5 *Knox: The Life and Legacy of Scotland's Controversial Reformer*, produced by Murdo Macleod (Trinity Digital, 2015)

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4591784/>

Knox Bafta nomination

<http://www.bafta.org/scotland/awards/new-talent/nominees-winners/bafta-scotland-new-talent-awards-winners-in-2016>

5.6 a) 'Making Knox Seem Human', *Sunday Herald*, 26 April 2015 (circulation: 18,307)

<https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-herald-on-sunday-sunday-herald-life/20150426/281505044765162>

b) 'John Knox by Jane Dawson', *Scotsman*, 26 April 2015

<https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/book-review-john-knox-jane-dawson-1506539>

c) Arnold Hunt, 'Sins of the Preacher', *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 December 2015 (circulation: c.26,000)

<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/sins-of-the-preacher/>

5.7 Robert Maclean's blog on discovery (Special Collections, University of Glasgow Library), 21 September 2016

<https://universityofglasgowlibrary.wordpress.com/2016/09/21/john-knoxs-bible-discovered/>

'Glasgow University archivists find John Knox's Bible', *BBC News*, 21 September 2016

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-37431542>

'University finds Knox bible in the library', *Herald Scotland*, 22 September 2016

http://www.heraldscotland.com/News/14758925.University_finds_39_Knox_Bible_39_in_library/;

'John Knox's Bible "Discovered" in Glasgow University Archive', *Scotsman*, 21 September 2016

<https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/john-knoxs-bible-discovered-glasgow-university-archive-1466734>

5.8 Email from Linda Maclean to Dawson, 5 May 2016.

5.9 a) Glory on Earth text Acknowledgements and Theatre Programme.

b) Email from the Lyceum with ticket sales, 11 July 2018.

c) Feedback from audience members.

5.10 'Theatre Review: Glory on Earth at Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh', *Herald Scotland*, 24 May 2017 (circulation: 32,100)

https://www.heraldscotland.com/arts_ents/15306029.theatre-review-glory-on-earth-at-royal-lyceum-theatre-edinburgh/;

'Glory on Earth Review at Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh', *Stage*, 24 May 2017

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170612224336/https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2017/glory-earth-review-royal-lyceum-edinburgh-clever-satisfying/>

'Feisty Queen Mary strikes chord', *Scottish Daily Mail*, 30 May 2017

<https://www.pressreader.com/uk/scottish-daily-mail/20170530/281883003295158>