

<b>Institution:</b> Queen Mary University of London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 History		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Promoting public awareness and understanding of the Crusades and the career of the medieval knight William Marshal		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2000-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Thomas Asbridge	Reader in Medieval History	1999-Present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Dr Asbridge has produced a substantial body of research on the Crusades and the medieval knight William Marshal, which has had wide-ranging public impact. Through providing support for secondary school teachers to improve the teaching and learning of their pupils, an exhibition informed by scholarship and research at the Collection Museum in Lincoln, and the production of high-quality documentaries for the BBC, his research has enhanced public understanding of the cultural and political complexity of the Crusades, and the institution of knighthood and chivalry. Beneficiaries include UK secondary school examination boards, teachers and pupils, archivists, librarians, museum staff, national and international visitors, local businesses in Lincoln, international television audiences, a UK-based independent television production company and the BBC.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Asbridge is an internationally renowned historian of the Crusades and medieval knighthood. Over the past 20 years, his scholarship has evolved from a detailed analysis of the creation of the easternmost Latin principality in the medieval Near East to ambitious, sweeping histories of the Crusades written for wide readerships [3.1–3.3]. More recently, Asbridge's interests have developed beyond the Crusades in his biographical study of the medieval knight William Marshal and his consideration of knighthood, chivalry and Angevin politics in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries [3.4]. He has also written a short reappraisal of Richard the Lionheart [3.5]. His books have been translated into ten languages, including Mandarin, Russian and Turkish.</p> <p>Asbridge's <i>The Crusades: The War for the Holy Land</i> [3.3], published in 2010, is a 784-page single-volume history. It made three major historiographical and historical contributions to a field already well treated by substantial survey histories written by regarded specialists, and received widespread acclaim in major international newspapers (e.g., <i>Die Zeit</i>, <i>The Guardian</i> and the <i>Wall Street Journal</i>). The book's first contribution was to present a history which was concerned with the military aspects of the Crusades as well as the culture, economy, politics and religion of the period. Asbridge's book analyses mass expeditions with rudimentary communications and supplies over extraordinary distances and time, as well as Latin and Muslim military strategies and tactics. It also engages with religious conflict, and its relation to expressions of piety.</p> <p>Concentration on Latin and Muslim perspectives was the second historiographical theme of <i>The Crusades</i>. Latin and Muslim attitudes towards bloodshed feature throughout the book and informed his recent research on the violence perpetrated on Crusades and described by medieval chroniclers [3.6]. <i>The Crusades</i> purposefully called on scholarship written from Arabic and Latin sources, and original material in the latter category, to present a history that decentres the Eurocentric tradition of Crusades history. Thus, Muslim polities and their leaders feature alongside the Franks, as does Asbridge's commentary on their political and religious cultures and objectives in the Crusades era.</p> <p>His final key intervention was informed by the politics of the period in which he carried out his research. Use of the term 'crusade' in discourse after 2001 enhanced the need for an historical</p>		

understanding of the Crusades. So too had loose but potent Western arguments about a 'clash of civilisations' and extremist conceptions of the longevity of 'Western' antagonism towards the Muslim world since the eleventh century. Asbridge's resisted simplistic depiction of the Crusades and complicated his subject by explaining, for example, that the conflicts of the periods of medieval Latin-Muslim interaction in the Near and Middle East were not always binary. Indeed, one of the book's contentions is that in the Latin East, the divisions were better defined by disputes between Franks (that is to say, Latin Christians) and varied non-Franks (namely Christians, Jews and Muslims) than between Crusaders and Muslims. Furthermore, in his analysis of the representations of the Crusades over centuries, Asbridge argued that it was only relatively recently, principally from the nineteenth century, that historical portrayals have had political purpose.

In his next project, Asbridge developed his scholarship on the Middle Ages beyond the Crusades through the biographical study of perhaps the most historically significant English medieval knight, William Marshal (c.1146-1219). *The Greatest Knight: The Remarkable Life of William Marshal, the Power Behind Five English Thrones* [3.4], published in 2015, took as its principal source the thirteenth-century biography of Marshal – the first known of any knight – written in Norman-French verse in a manuscript at the Morgan Library, New York. Asbridge used this text critically to write Marshal's life anew, from obscurity to knight, counsellor to kings, and ultimately regent of England. The resulting biography articulated the evolution of the institution of knighthood and of chivalry, the dominant elite culture of the time, and has contributed to the history of chivalry and of the creation of the martial class that would, in Magna Carta, constrain the power of the throne. Asbridge's attention to the rituals of knighthood, Marshal's career as a knight on the battlefield, and his political position in the court of Angevin kings distinguished his book from existing biographies. Asbridge concentrated on Marshal's service to King John, the role he took among English barons at the conception of Magna Carta in 1215, and the central part he played in the Battle of Lincoln in 1217. Asbridge's research thus depicts Marshal's life as contributing to the origins of the English aristocracy and gentry and of Magna Carta and the checks and balances both would attempt to place on the crown thereafter. His book was widely and positively reviewed and remains very highly ranked among sales of historical biographies.

*The Greatest Knight*, like *The Crusades* before it, drew on Asbridge's specialist historical and historiographical knowledge, original research and commitment to the transfer of academic research to scholarly and popular audiences. His research has enhanced understanding of the Crusades, of medieval knighthood and of aspects of the cultural, political and religious histories of the Middle Ages.

### 3. References to the research

- [3.1] Asbridge, T. (2002). *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch, 1098–1130*. Boydell Press.
- [3.2] Asbridge, T. (2004). *The First Crusade: A New History*. Free Press, Simon & Schuster. Also published in a US Edition and in translations into Dutch, Polish and Spanish.
- [3.3] Asbridge, T. (2020). *The Crusades: The War for the Holy Land*. Simon & Schuster. A second edition of this book was reprinted with a new forward in the UK in 2012. Also published in a US Edition and in translations into Dutch, German, Romanian, Danish, Russian, Turkish, Polish, Mandarin, Portuguese and Spanish.
- [3.4] Asbridge, T. (2015). *The Greatest Knight: The Remarkable Life of William Marshal, the Power Behind Five English Thrones*. Simon & Schuster. Also published in a US Edition and in translations into German, Mandarin and Russian.
- [3.5] Asbridge, T. (2018). *Richard I: The Crusader King*. Allen Lane.
- [3.6] Asbridge, T. (2020). An Experiment in Extremity: The Portrayal of Violence in Robert the Monk's Narrative of the First Crusade. *History*, 105(368), 719-750. [doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.13095](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.13095)

### Evidence of the quality of the research

[EQR.3.3] was highlighted by The Sunday Times as one of the best non-fiction works of 2010 and was widely reviewed and critically praised in the mainstream national and international press. That was also true of

[EQR.3.4] which was commended by Diarmaid MacCulloch in the London Review of Books and by Nigel Saul in the Times Literary Supplement (TLS) who argued that the book should 'be welcomed for bringing Marshal's remarkable career alive to a modern audience'.

[EQR.3.5] was also positively reviewed in the TLS as 'an absorbing new biography' which was both 'objective and learned.'

### 4. Details of the impact

Asbridge's research expertise and the broad appeal of his work has enabled him to promote public understanding of medieval history and has had long-term impact on public understanding, learning and participation in relation to these topics. His research has had significant impact in three areas:

- providing resources for secondary education through books and television documentaries, which have become part of the history syllabi of UK secondary school teaching and assessment
- facilitating a successful exhibition at the Collection Museum in Lincoln, through his position as a historical adviser in 2017
- increasing public understanding through BBC commissions and collaborations with an independent television production company.

#### Enhancing teaching, learning and assessment in schools

Asbridge has enhanced the teaching, learning and assessment of UK GCSE and A-Level history students. The Crusades has long featured as a subject on school history curricula and does so now in the syllabi of the main exam boards, namely AQA, Edexcel, OCR and Cambridge Pre-U. His books and television documentaries have been employed by UK exam boards as sources for examination, and as learning resources for teachers and pupils. [3.2] and [3.3] feature widely in the resource lists, schemes of work, assessment outlines, mark schemes and examination papers for options on the Crusades.

His books are also referenced in textbooks and in teacher resource blogs approved by the examination boards. For example, Asbridge's *The Crusades* [3.3] is listed as a key text for classroom and individual study in the AQA's AS and A-Level 1A paper, 'The Age of The Crusades'. His publications on Antioch and the First Crusade [3.1 and 3.2] and his BBC series on *The Crusades* are also on the resource list for the OCR's option on the Crusades and the Crusader States. Furthermore, his work on the First Crusade [3.2] is mentioned on the essay mark scheme for the Cambridge Pre-U A-Level special subject paper on the Crusades. Asbridge's books have also been directly referenced in A-Level assessments. Pupils who took Edexcel's 2015 specimen AS and A-Level Paper 1 Option 1A on the Crusades were required to comment on a section from Asbridge's *The Crusades* [3.3] while those who sat the AQA 1A examination in 2017 had to comment upon an extract from *The First Crusade* [3.2] [5.2].

To support secondary school teachers in their teaching of the exam boards' papers on the Crusades, and hence to assist pupils' learning, Asbridge created a 'Teaching the Crusades Network', based in the School of History at Queen Mary. This network included 37 teachers from a range of schools across a number of one-day workshops from 2015 to 2017. Through the network, Asbridge advised teachers in their understanding of issues and historiographical debates in academic research on the Crusades. This was particularly significant, as after the 2016-17 A-Level reforms, examination boards included breadth studies and required pupils to identify and critique historians' interpretations. Testimonies from six senior teachers of history who took part in Asbridge's network explain how Asbridge's publications and guidance at the network workshops informed their own knowledge, teaching preparation and practices on the Crusades [5.3]. They have set his texts for their pupils and bought multiple copies for School libraries.

Additionally, Asbridge's books, television documentaries, podcasts on BBC History Extra, and articles in *BBC History* magazine, have become important learning resources in their delivery of the curricula. For instance, one teacher has used Asbridge's books in lieu of textbooks approved by an exam board for A-Level studies; another has used Asbridge's *A Timewatch Guide: The Crusades* as a research exercise for pupils. *Timewatch* and *The Crusades* have also been employed to ensure that pupils understand and evaluate historians' interpretations. Another teacher has used extracts from Asbridge's publications to create practice extract exercises for A-Level document analysis questions. It is clear from this evidence that the result of Asbridge's research and research-based engagement with teachers has enriched teaching practice, resource provision and pupil experience and learning in the study of the Crusades [5.3].

### **Informing and enhancing museum exhibition curation**

From May to September 2017, a very successful exhibition, *Battles & Dynasties*, was held at the Collection Museum, Lincoln, and at Lincoln Castle, to mark the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Lincoln in 1217. The motivation for this exhibition came from Asbridge's biography of Marshal. The Chairman of the Historic Lincoln Trust and of the exhibition's Steering Group, said that Asbridge's book, and a lecture that he delivered about it at Lincoln in 2015, inspired him to hold the 2017 exhibition [5.4a].

Asbridge's role extended beyond inspiration for the exhibition to pivotal involvement in its arrangement, content, exhibits, and narratives and explanatory notes, all of which were a direct result of his research expertise and the guidance he gave as historical adviser on the exhibition's Steering Group. The Chief Executive Officer and Keeper of The National Archives, who served as the Lincoln exhibition's co-curator noted that Asbridge 'provided much of the original inspiration for the selection of exhibits and therefore much of the narrative focus' [5.5]

The exhibition comprised of 77 items dated from c.1189 to 1536 which were sourced from, among other institutions, the Bodleian Library, the British Library, Cambridge University Library, Lambeth Palace Library, Lincoln Cathedral Dean and Chapter Archives, The National Archives, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Morgan Library, New York. Foremost among them was *Domesday Book*, displayed outside of London for the first time in modern history. The sole surviving copy of the thirteenth-century *History of William Marshal*, on loan from the Morgan Library and returned to the UK for the first time since the 1950s was also featured. Additionally, the exhibition included Matthew Paris's *Chronica Maiora*, the original thirteenth-century 'autograph' manuscript, lent by Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. The procurement of priceless exhibits from national and international institutions was enabled by his academic reputation; this was attested to by the Chief Executive Officer and Keeper of The National Archives, who stated that Asbridge's 'international research reputation as a manuscript's scholar facilitated the inclusion of several key objects', including the *History* from the Morgan Library in New York. His research also had bearing in prioritising TNA records as exhibits over 'more visually appealing' sources [5.4c].

Staff at the Collection Museum described Asbridge as 'the central figure' among figures brought in as advisers and explained that he was the 'most hands on' of the Steering Group in 'determining the interpretation' of the exhibition and 'the look and the feel of the space'. He also contributed to the exhibition catalogue, wrote a booklet, 'The 1217 Battle of Lincoln', both of which sold well, and delivered the Lincoln Cathedral Magna Carta Lecture to a sold-out audience of 500 [5.4d]. The Honorary Curator of the 2017 exhibition, and former Director of the V&A (1995-2001), noted that Asbridge's 'knowledge and scholarship made a vital contribution to the organisation and public success of this exhibition' [5.4b].

The exhibition was deemed 'a great success' as it attracted more visitors than any other previously held at Lincoln [5.4b]. 9,349 visitors attended the exhibition at the Collection Museum and 80,000 at Lincoln Castle. Visitor testimonies were very positive as were press reviews [5.5]. The exhibition also had significant economic impact. It involved the employment of two curators at the Collection Museum and disbursements from a total exhibition budget of GBP250,000 [5.4d]. Furthermore, the exhibition was cited as one of the main reasons for 2017 being the year when Lincoln enjoyed its highest ever visitor numbers and a 7% increase in its visitor economy which for the first time

exceeded GBP2,000,000 [5.5]. These were notable impacts achieved as a result of the inspiration provided by Asbridge's research and due to his role in the selection and procurement of exhibits, their display, description, and the historical integrity and quality of the exhibition. That Lord Cormack judged that the exhibition could not have taken place without Asbridge's contribution underlines the impact he and his research had upon it [5.4a].

### **Increasing public understanding of history through television productions**

Asbridge has enhanced public understanding of two elements of medieval history through major BBC television documentaries. His BBC commissions have also brought benefits in finance and reputation to the independent television company, 360production (now Rare TV), with which he worked. His collaborations began in 2012 with the major three-part BBC Two television series, *The Crusades*, based entirely on Asbridge's 2010 book. Asbridge conceived the content of the programmes, shaped every aspect of filming, and wrote and presented the series which was highly successful in acclaim and viewing figures. Since 2014, the series has been repeated and watched by an additional 1,800,000 people in the UK; it has also been broadcast in Australia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Russia and Spain. Moreover, according to 360production's former owner, the leading factual streaming service in the United States, Curiosity Stream, cites *The Crusades* as 'its most successful ever series' [5.1].

Asbridge's reputation within the BBC led to a further commission in 2014 for a 58-minute BBC Two documentary based on his research on William Marshal, which was created once again by 360production. According to the programme's director, Asbridge 'authored, presented and originated' the programme, overseeing it from conception to post-production. In contrast with other television treatments of Marshal's life, *The Greatest Knight: William the Marshal* presented the thirteenth-century biography of Marshal critically as a literary construction and emphasised historical questions about medieval martial ethos and chivalry; it also concentrated on Marshal's role in Magna Carta and in the protection of the Angevin line. The documentary received very positive critical reviews and had over 1,000,000 viewers which was above average for its channel and time slot [5.1].

The success of *The Greatest Knight*, and that of *The Crusades* before it, led to yet another BBC commission in 2016 for Asbridge and 360production. *A Timewatch Guide: The Crusades* was a 59-minute documentary which explored BBC representations of the Crusades over 60 years. As historical consultant and presenter, Asbridge used his research to inform the selection of archival material and frame the content and arguments of the programme, which was been repeated in 2017, 2018 and 2019 [5.1]. In this programme, as in his others, Asbridge called directly on his scholarship to write and present a television history documentary which enhanced public understanding of aspects of the medieval world. Additionally, they brought financial and reputational benefits to an independent television production company and to the BBC.

## **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

[5.1] [Testimonials] Owner, 360production company; independent television director and producer; and media reviews.

[5.2] [Citations] UK GCSE and A-Level exam board syllabi and materials (AQA, Edexcel, OCR and Cambridge Pre-U); textbook references and Hodder History Expert blog.

[5.3] [Testimonial] UK Secondary School and Sixth-Form College teachers regarding the educational impact of Asbridge's research and 'Teaching the Crusades' network.

[5.4] [Testimonials] Lord McCormack testimonial; Dr Alan Borg letter; TNA statement; Collection Museum statement.

[5.5] [Feedback] Lincoln *Battles & Dynasties* evidence compilation, including exhibition catalogue, *Visit Lincoln* data, exhibition photos and visitor comments.