

<b>Institution:</b> University of Dundee		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 28 History		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Scotland's National Tale within the Union		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2006-18		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>  Christopher A. Whatley, OBE Graeme Morton	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>  Professor of Scottish History Professor of Modern History	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>  1992 - present 2013 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 1 August 2013 - ongoing		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		

## 1. Summary of the impact

A collective body of research by the History unit on seminal figures and events in Scottish history generated a range of impacts on cultural institutions and public understanding. The research charted the afterlives of William Wallace, Robert Burns, and the Union of 1707. It has benefited curatorial interpretation in national museums, and it has been widely used by heritage groups and media to inform diverse local, national and international audiences. The impacts were achieved through partnerships with cultural organisations, public engagement, and the high media profile of the research. The impacts are significant in bringing contested academic histories of Scotland to bear on wider understanding.

## 2. Underpinning research

The research by Morton and Whatley addressed Wallace, Burns, and the Union in the context of Scotland's modern historical identity. Their work on Wallace and Burns demonstrated that iterative portrayals of these two iconic figures of Scotland's 'national tale' had added layers of interpretation upon pre-existing unionist and nationalist narratives. Whatley's research used fresh evidence to explain how the Union had framed political nationalism over three hundred years. All of this research, presented mainly in three major monographs, challenged conventional wisdom about the 'national tale'.

A key conclusion from the underpinning research was that the Union agreement was not reached through bribery. In *The Scots and the Union* (2006, 2007), Whatley revised the view that financial self-interest and bribery lay behind the Articles of Union being settled. Rooted in a collective biography of Scots politicians and others of influence, Whatley established that many of those political actors had held long-standing and principled support for political union, some since the Revolution of 1688/9. By undermining the popular refrain from Burns that the Scots had been 'bought and sold for English gold' the research dismissed the grounds upon which contemporary commentators have maintained the Union was misbegotten and therefore illegitimate. This challenge to conventional wisdom was recognised by the award of the Saltire Society's History Book of the Year in 2007 and led one reviewer to conclude it 'sets the agenda for discussions of the Union then, and the Union now' (*Scottish Historical Review*, 87 (2008): 345). In 2014, the research was extended to examine how the Union settlement informs contemporary national identity [R1]. It was demonstrated that the modern nationalist movement in Scotland has made infrequent use of the nation's history—in comparison with examples from Europe—because key carriers of national identity remained compatible with Union. Whatley further established that Jacobitism could not adequately replace the trope of bribery in nationalist history. Instead,

the research concluded that for a 'usable nationalist history' to inform the Referendum vote in 2014, it should be one framed by the Union, not formed solely in opposition to the Union.

The conclusions reached in **R1** added to research that reassessed two central but equivocal historical figures: the national patriot William Wallace (d.1305) and national bard Robert Burns (1759-96). Both figures have encapsulated national identity through the commemoration and memorialisation of their lives: more monuments were built to honour Wallace in nineteenth-century Scotland than any other figure, and more monuments were built to honour Burns around the world than for any other poet. A survey run in 1999 by *Who's Who* voted Burns and Wallace the two 'greatest Scots' in history (*Scotsman*, 18/12/99). The research was conceptualised through the 'national tale', a term taken out of its literary moorings to examine how personal biography has been reformed as the nation's biography over long periods of time **[R4]**. Morton found that modern Scots traced the origins of their civil and national liberties to Wallace, Bruce and the medieval wars of independence. He analysed every statue and monument built to honour Wallace as points where social memory is privileged and shared within the community. He correlated these sites with a survey of natural formations located across lowland Scotland named after Wallace. By then charting the changing literary and visual media that transmitted the national tale, he discovered how Jane Porter's best-selling *Scottish Chiefs* (1810) placed Wallace as Scotland's contribution to contemporary British national identity. This analysis reconceptualised the national tale within British constitutionalism rather than Jacobite romance **[R5]**. Morton challenged conventional wisdom that Wallace was solely a separatist hero. His evidence proved that Wallace underpinned both unionist and nationalist histories in contemporary Scotland, including throughout the political response to *Braveheart* (1995) and *Brave* (2012). The research explained how the transfiguration of historical heroes into national symbols allowed for national identity in Scotland to encompass complex and at times contradictory interpretations of the Union to coexist **[R6]**.

Linking this research into profoundly equivocal heroes was an investigation into a previously unstudied aspect of memory fixing (*lieu de memoire*), which revealed major shifts over time in how and why Burns was remembered and commemorated **[R2]**. Whatley demonstrated that Burns' legacy in Scottish society in the long period after his death was widespread and deeply entrenched. The research was supported by an AHRC project 'Robert Burns: Inventing Tradition and Securing Memory' (PI. Murray Pittock, Glasgow) from which Whatley created a database of all the known memorials produced on Burns. The major conclusion was that the commemoration of Burns was much wider and more pervasive than had been hitherto understood. Beyond the theatre of the Burns supper, the wider social memory of Burns was sustained by his national tale being invoked at all kinds of community-based gatherings in Scotland and across the Scottish diaspora **[R2, R3]**. The proletarian allegory that was built on the afterlife of Burns served to support a particular Scottish ethos, one claiming roots in a collective spirit and a greater (than in England) sense of community. Yet evidence was also uncovered, in poetry and song, where Burns was reinterpreted as an inspiration to British unity in the first half of the twentieth century and to universal values in the contemporary period.

### 3. References to the research

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**[R1]** Whatley, C. A. (2014) *The Scots and the Union: Then and Now*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

**[R2]** Whatley, C. A. (2016) *Immortal Memory: Burns and the Scottish People* Edinburgh: Birlinn

**[R3]** Pittock, M., Whatley, C. A. (2014) 'Poems and festivals, art and artefact and the commemoration of Robert Burns, c.1844-c.1896', *Scottish Historical Review*, 93(1) pp. 56-79 DOI: [10.3366/shr.2014.0199](https://doi.org/10.3366/shr.2014.0199)

[R4] Morton, G. (2014) *William Wallace: A National Tale* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

[R5] Morton, G. (2016) 'Bruce, Wallace and the Diminished Present, 1800-1964' in Plain, G. (ed) *Myth, Memory and the First World War in Scotland: the legacy of Bannockburn* Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press pp. 27-45.

[R6] Morton, G. (2015) 'Applying the diasporic lens to identity and empire in twentieth-century Scotland' in Glass, B. and MacKenzie, J. M. (eds) *Scotland, Empire and Decolonisation in the Twentieth Century* Manchester: Manchester University Press pp.44-64.

#### 4. Details of the impact

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##### Cultural institutions and curatorial interpretation

The underpinning research has influenced curatorial interpretation in three Scottish museums. At the National Museum of Scotland, Morton's research [R4, R5, R6] formed the basis of a display at the exhibition 'Wild and Majestic: Romantic Visions of Scotland' (June-November 2019). The lead curator of the exhibition confirms that Morton's research on the cults of Wallace and Bruce was placed alongside the history of Walter Scott to explain 'romantic nationalism' [E1]. One reviewer on Tripadvisor said: 'I visited this exhibition with a friend and cannot rate it highly enough. Very user friendly with many fascinating facts about the romantic image of the Highlands post Culloden which persists to this day' (September 2019).

Whatley's research was used by the National Trust for Scotland's Robert Burns Birthplace Museum to support its interpretation of the bard's social significance. The conclusions from R2 and R3 were added to the 'Burnsometer' display, which charts the growing fame and influence of Burns over time. The inaugural curator confirms that the research was also used when the Trust reinterpreted the Burns Monument (1823) - adjacent to the museum within the Memorial Gardens - after major refurbishment in 2018-19. Attracting over two million visitors since it opened in 2011, many from overseas, the £21m Birthplace Museum can better interpret Burns' influence on Scottish national identity because of Whatley's research [E2]. The research was also used by the Scottish National Portrait Gallery to interpret its collections, particularly the 'invaluable' national and international database of Burns sculptural monuments [R3]. The gallery's Senior Curator of British Art described R2 as 'revelatory on a national and international scale' [E3].

##### Public understanding

The research on Wallace has influenced public understanding nationally and internationally. Morton was invited by the St Andrew's Society of Toronto to curate a public symposium and Celtic concert to memorialise the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle of Bannockburn, contrasting the afterlives of Wallace and Bruce through to the modern day (21/6/14, c.150 people) [R5]. Meeting the Society's remit to 'celebrate Scottish heritage and support our community', the audience included members of the Society, the general public of Ontario, and affiliated clan and Burns societies. In the Society's *Newsletter*, this collaboration was described as having been 'a wonderful opportunity to learn about the "Scottish Narrative" across the centuries' (No. 3, Sept 2014, p. 5). A member writing on behalf of the Society contacted Morton (25/6/14): 'I was deeply impressed with both the amount of research undertaken and the depth of knowledge you provided, and I remain grateful for all that you did to make this important commemoration so intellectually rewarding'. Feedback sent to the Society confirmed that the event had raised awareness: 'I wanted to congratulate you all on the day. I overheard one young man on the phone ... telling his wife that it was a really good day and that he was learning lots about Bannockburn.' Another wrote: 'I've been thinking about returning to university and taking more courses—this is the impetus I needed!' [E4].

Reflecting on the symposium and a public talk given in collaboration with the Toronto-based Scottish Studies Foundation (SSF) in 2016, members of the Scottish diaspora were informed that ‘... Graeme [Morton]’s work on Wallace has not only been informative in its own right, but has moved many Scots-Canadians to look to their own identity and to explore their Scots heritage’ [E5]. Morton was also invited to address the Scottish-Canadian community in Vancouver on Wallace by delivering the Annual Tartan Day Lecture on behalf of Simon Fraser University and its affiliated diaspora groups (9/4/16); and to inform c.100 of the Scottish-American community in New York on behalf of the Scottish government - on emigration after the Union - during Tartan Week (2/4/19) [E6]. After presenting new research to the membership of the SSF in September 2019 [R6], the Foundation’s President commented: ‘once again your research not only reinforced our members’ understanding of Wallace but how, in new ways, we might view how Scotland’s national identity has evolved since the Union of 1707’ [E7].

Public interest in R4 led to invitations for Morton to speak at a number of high-profile events in Scotland. They included the Edinburgh International Book Festival (24/8/15) where Morton addressed an audience of c.300 people. One commentator stated: ‘Of all the lectures I attended at the Edinburgh Book Festival, Morton’s crowd contained the highest percentage of Scots, all of whom were eager to see the facts of their great national hero parsed out from the legends that have overtaken him’ [E8]. Other talks included the Wigtown Book festival (2/10/15) and ‘Previously ... Scotland’s History Festival’ (22/11/15), where Morton gave the closing lecture.

Whatley’s research on the Union of 1707 and its legacies [R1] led to the creation of the Five Million Questions public forum (5MQ) in Dundee. Established in the run-up to the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and led by Whatley, 5MQ enabled the issues surrounding independence to be examined in a public space where the complexity of nationalist and unionist versions of history was recognised, and where political events were discussed in their historical context [E6]. Whatley’s analysis of the Union’s origins and how it had structured national identity since 1707 attracted over 300 people to that 5MQ event (29/5/14). A Scottish Labour MSP with a twitter following of 8500 was inspired to lead a twitter discussion on how sixteenth-century conceptions of political union shaped the Union agreement in 1707. Over 360 people attended the concluding event of 5MQ, a debate led by Whatley on the ‘Referendum of 2014 in Historical perspective’ (27/9/14). Over 7,000 people attended 5MQ events in total, and its YouTube channel passed 16,000 hits [E9]. It established a high public profile across the UK by including Alex Salmond, Nicola Sturgeon and Alastair Darling amongst its speakers.

The unit’s Scottish history research is also actively disseminated to wider audiences through a collaboration between its Centre for Scottish Culture (CSC) and the preeminent public history magazine in Scotland, *History Scotland*. A series of public lectures hosted jointly by the Centre and the magazine were filmed, transcribed, and published. This partnership was launched with Whatley’s debate on Jacobitism and the Union (based on R1), which achieved 24,688 views on YouTube. One attendee at the debate commented that ‘it widened my view and made me consider other interpretations’. Our partners confirm the value of using our research in this way: ‘these links allow us to further our aims of bringing world class research to an engaged and enthusiastic audience’ [E10].

### Informing audiences via the media

The unit’s research on Scottish history also had a high media profile, a key way in which it informed public understanding. Contributions to media coverage and discussions of the historical context of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum were extensive. Whatley’s expertise on the Union of 1707 and its legacies was in high demand from local and national journalists. Whatley was sought out for comment by Associated Press, STV, *Scotsman*, BBC Scotland, BBC Radio 2 (Jeremy Vine), BBC Radio 4, Sky News, *Le Figaro*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, *La Segunda*, *British Politics Review* (Norway), and the American news and

comment website *The Daily Beast* (1m readers per day). One newspaper which used his research to advance political debate, described Whatley as a 'top historian voicing his view on independence' (*Daily Record* 12/11/13; circulation c.106,000). *Publico* translated Whatley's conclusion that the Union of 1707 made sense to eighteenth-century contemporaries and that it had long created a positive environment for Scots (14/9/14). The Europe correspondent for ABC Radio in Australia, Barbara Miller, interviewed Whatley to help her listeners understand why the analogous economic challenges of 1707 were apparently being ignored in the 2014 debate ('Scots divided on eve of historic poll', 17/9/14). A survey of academics who attained impact during the Referendum debate concluded: 'top of the list of honour is Professor Chris Whatley' (Kerevan & Cochrane, *Scottish Independence*, 2014: 134-5). Because of its influence in shaping public debate, 5MQ and Whatley's research were featured in Channel 4's 'Dispatches' (7/7/14) and in *The Times*, following a lecture given in the Scottish Parliament (29/9/14). The objectivity of 5MQ was endorsed by the First Minister (Scottish Parliament, 13/11/13). Brian Taylor, Political Editor for BBC Scotland, portrayed 5MQ as 'thoughtful and valuable' for the insights it gave to his reporting (BBC News, 22/9/15).

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

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[E1] Lead Curator Wild and Majestic Exhibition, NMS

[E2] Inaugural Curator Burns Birthplace Museum

[E3] Senior Curator of British Art, Burns and National Portrait Gallery of Scotland

[E4] St Andrew's Society of Toronto Bannockburn Event

[E5] The Scottish Studies Foundation website

[E6] BBC Radio Scotland Presenter and Producer, New York Tartan Week and 5MQ

[E7] The Scottish Studies Foundation, Testimonial

[E8] Edinburgh International Book Festival, Wallace, National Tale (British Heritage)

[E9] 5MQ Testimonials and Tweets

[E10] Partnership between *History Scotland* and Centre for Scottish Culture