

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU)		
Unit of Assessment: 31 – Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: The radical ideas and writings of Robert Grosseteste (c.1167-1253), scientist, philosopher and theologian		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Jack Cunningham	Reader in Ecclesiastical History and Programme Leader for Theology	2001 to date
Dr Gioacchino Curiello	British Academy Post-Doctoral Research Fellow	2018 to date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 01/01/2014 – 31/12/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Exploration of the thought and significance of Robert Grosseteste achieved various forms of public impact. This was reflected in the domain of 'understanding, learning, and participation' through stimulating public interest and engagement in research, enhancing understanding of issues and phenomena, and shaping awareness and assumptions. Impact was also represented in relation to 'creativity, culture, and society', through contributing to media debates on commemoration and memorialisation. Principal beneficiaries have been public event participants, media audiences and readerships, as well as learned societies and theological and historical groups. Activities have also incorporated engagement with schools and 'impact on teaching'.</p>		
2. Underpinning research – References in section 3 are indicated by number (e.g., R1)		
<p>Underpinning research has explored three interrelated aspects of the life and works of Robert Grosseteste. Cunningham and Curiello have brought new perspectives and readings to critique and understand of the work of Grosseteste which are drawn together by two main approaches. First, Cunningham's work explores cosmology in order to examine the interplay between metaphysics and the beginnings of natural philosophy (science). Specifically, for the first time, a connection is made between Grosseteste and the positive Humanism that emerged particularly in Chartres and Paris in the 12th Century (R1, R2). Second, and linked to this, Curiello's work explores the crucial influence of the neo-Platonic philosopher, Pseudo-Dionysius (c. 5th and 6th Century) on the theology of Grosseteste. This too was characterised by a highly positive perspective, as it insists that the ultimate goal of humanity was deification (R4, R5).</p>		
Grosseteste as radical leader		
<p>Traditionally, Grosseteste has been regarded as a conservative voice within the church in the late 12th and early 13th century. This narrative has been formed on much of the biographical work which focused on Grosseteste as a highly disciplinarian bishop. This interpretation is based on the false modern assumption that strictness in ecclesiastical life is indicative of conservatism. However, the research of Cunningham and Curiello shows that this characterisation is not supported by the evidence. Grosseteste was indeed a demanding bishop but this was based on the important and innovating impulses that came from the</p>		

groundbreaking Lateran Council IV, 1215. Cunningham argues in his work that Grosseteste was motivated by the new impulse to include the laity much more in the Church's mission. As Cunningham and Curiello point out, far from being expressions of conservatism, Grosseteste's activities as a bishop, preaching, inspecting religious houses and insisting on high standards were innovatory (R4, R5, R6).

The Emergence of Humanism

Cunningham has demonstrated that Grosseteste was an important individual in advancing theological and philosophical arguments around what we would call today a positive anthropology. His insights were instrumental in advancing an early form of humanism. Radical ideas in Grosseteste's thought such as the necessity of God becoming man, even without the Fall of Adam, are for the first time linked with the type of 12th century positivity that was advanced by controversial writers such as Peter Abelard and William of Conches (R3).

Advancing science

Grosseteste was one of the first academics to develop systematic approaches to scientific investigation through his work on light and optics. He was one of the first scholars to grasp the importance of the newly discovered natural philosophical writings of Aristotle, and he made early advances in the beginnings of scientific investigation. Together with other medievalists and modern scientists in a unique academic collaboration called the Ordered Human Project, Cunningham has broken new ground in translating, editing and commenting on the scientific works of Grosseteste (R3).

3. References to the research

1. **Cunningham, J.P.** (2020) "'That we might be made God": Pseudo-Dionysius and Robert Grosseteste's episcopal career,' in Coss, P., Dennis, C., Julian-Jones, M. and Silvestri, A. (eds) (2020) *Episcopal Power and Personality in Medieval Europe, 900-1480* – Medieval Church Studies vol. 12 (Turnhout: Brepols), 141-158.
2. **Cunningham, J.P.** (2014) 'Lumen de lumine: light, God and creation in the philosophy of Grosseteste,' in Temple, N., Hendrix, J.S. and Frost, C. (eds) *Robert Grosseteste and Lincoln Cathedral: Tracing the Relationship between Medieval Concepts of Order and Built Form* (Farnham: Ashgate), 81-98.
Indicative book review in independent peer-reviewed journal: [Hortulus](#).
3. **Cunningham, J.P.** and Hocknull, M. (eds) (2016) *Robert Grosseteste and the Pursuit of Religious and Scientific Learning in the Middle-Ages* (New York: Springer).
Indicative book review in independent peer-reviewed journal: [Mediterranea](#).
4. **Curiello, G.** (2020) 'Deification as the goal of the ordered human according to Robert Grosseteste', in Cunningham, J.P. and Puttick, S. (eds) *Robert Grosseteste and Theories of Education: the Ordered Human* (London: Routledge), 19-33.
Indicative book review in independent peer-reviewed journal: [History of Education](#).
5. Gasper, G.E.M., Sigbjørn, O., Sønnesyn, N.P, Lewis, N. and **Cunningham, J.P.** (2019) 'The liberal arts: inheritances and conceptual frameworks', in Gasper, G., McLeish, T., Panti, C. and Smithson, H. (eds) *Scientific Works of Robert Grosseteste. Vol. 1. Knowing and Speaking: Robert Grosseteste's De liberalibus artibus 'On the Liberal Arts' and De generatione sonorum 'On the Generation of Sounds'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 36-47.
6. **Curiello, G.** (2016) – *Robert Grosseteste on Transcendentals*, in J. Cunningham and M. Hocknull (eds.), *Robert Grosseteste and the Pursuit of Religious and Scientific Learning in the Middle-Ages* (Dordrecht: Springer), 189-208.

4. Details of the impact – Sources in section 5 are indicated by number (e.g., S1)

The following types of impact have been achieved:

- Stimulating public interest and engagement in research;

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- Enhancing understanding of issues and phenomena;
- Shaping awareness and assumptions;
- Contribution to memorialisation and commemoration;
- On teaching.

Principal beneficiaries have been:

- Public event participants;
- Media audiences and readerships;
- Schools;
- Learned societies and theological groups;
- Students.

Key engagement themes have been:

- Changing our understanding of the significance of Grosseteste;
- Popularising the relevance today of his cultural and scientific ideas;
- Challenging the popular characterisation of his times as a 'Dark Age'.

Media engagement and broadcasting

Cunningham has stimulated public interest and enhanced popular understanding through prominent media-engagement events:

- In 2019, 11 June, BBC Radio 4, *The Secret History of Science and Religion*. This included Cunningham's consideration of Grosseteste as a medieval example of a scholar who harmonized both disciplines. (S1).
- In 2017, 30 March, BBC Radio 4, *In Our Time*, on Roger Bacon. This included consideration of Grosseteste as a fundamental influence on his work. *In Our Time* gains 2 million listeners in its AM slot, 450k in its PM slots, and 900k downloads in the first month after airing (S2).
- In 2017, 5 December, TedX Lincoln. This event focused on explaining the scientific work of Grosseteste (over 2k views on Youtube, 51 likes (S3).

Commemoration and memorialisation

Cunningham has been involved regularly in debates and further media engagements relating to commemoration and memorialisation. This is reflected in discussion of the recognition of Grosseteste and his historical and contemporary cultural heritage significance and representation. This has crystallised in ongoing arguments around an international/national case for his canonisation, and the canvassing more locally for the erection of a statue in Lincoln.

A set of media articles appeared in 2014 on these campaigns, and referred to and cited Cunningham. These included: BBC News (Lincolnshire), *Catholic Herald*, *Catholic Online*, *Church Times*, *Lincolnshire Echo*, and *The Lincolnite* (S4).

Schools and education engagement

The Ordered Human Project (OHP) was established at BGU in 2018, and has included among its main aims developing connections with schools, pupils and the teaching profession, informed and inspired by the writings and ideas of Grosseteste on the role of education.

This is exemplified by the launch of the Robert Grosseteste Essay Prize in 2020. The 2020 theme, reflecting Grosseteste's engagement with the public issues of his day, took inspiration from the Black Lives Matter movement, with six-form students asked the question: 'Is religion a help or a hinderance when it comes to the issue of racial equality?' This open competition attracted over 100 responses from across the UK, with the winner from Salisbury announced in November 2020 (S5).

Public lectures and events

The establishment by Cunningham of the International Robert Grosseteste Study Centre (IRGSC) at BGU created a leading organising body for public events on Grosseteste. The IRGSC hosted its third conference in 2014 at BGU with 80 delegates from 10 countries, the largest conference on Grosseteste to date. A second followed in 2019 at Pembroke College, Oxford. Associated with this, Cunningham and Curiello are the curators and managers of the IRGSC website (**S6**), which has had over 1,000 unique visitors over the past three years.

Through Cunningham, BGU is a partner in the consortium-based Ordered Universe Project (OUP) (**S7**). This project sets out to engage the public with the contemporary significance of Grosseteste's through public lectures and other events, podcasts, and activities for schools. This included a symposium in Lincoln with Cunningham and Curiello as contributors in 2019.

Public lectures and talks have also been presented to local organisations, for example, the Wednesday History Group, Lincoln, and Historical Association, Lincoln (**S8**).

Events organised by the OHP, OUP, IRGSC, and others, were typically open to the public, but also encouraged student participation, bringing impact on teaching. Examples included the BGU annual Robert Grosseteste Lecture, a major showcase event which typically coincides with the University's Matriculation Day and the anniversary of Grosseteste's death (c. 10 October); as well as occasional events, such as a talk for the Lincoln Theological Society in 2017 (**S8**), and the OUP symposium in Lincoln in 2019.

Elsewhere, Cunningham has been invited to give further public lectures to popularise the work on Grosseteste for Cardiff University in 2015, the Centre for the History and Philosophy of Physics, St Cross College, Oxford in 2016 (with 743 YouTube views, **S9**), the Ushaw Public Lecture, Durham University in 2018, McGill University, Montreal in 2018, and Eostvos Lorand University, Budapest in 2019).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Media engagement and broadcasting

1. Media discussion: BBC Radio 4, *The Secret History of Science and Religion*, 11 June 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000614f>.
2. Media discussion: BBC Radio 4, *In Our Time*, 'Roger Bacon', 20 April 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08m8z2w>.
3. Live lecture: TedX Talk, 15 December 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTSFqfsr-A0>.

Commemoration and memorialisation

4. Media articles:
 - BBC News, Lincolnshire, 'Statue call for "Big Bang" Bishop Robert Grosseteste', 24 July 2014, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-28390183>.
 - *Catholic Herald*, 'Call to honour "forgotten" bishop who changed the course of scientific history', 17 July 2014, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/academic-asks-lincoln-to-honour-bishop-with-statue/>.
 - Catholic Online, 'Mysterious bishop: father of British science to be honoured', <https://www.catholic.org/news/international/europe/story.php?id=56226&wf=rsscol>.
 - *Church Times*, 'Rediscovered manuscript adds weight to canonisation cause', 18 July 2014.
 - *Lincolnshire Echo*, 'Campaign to erect statue of Robert Grosseteste launches', 27 July 2014.

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- *The Lincolnite*, 'Will a 300-year-old manuscript change Robert Grosseteste's story?' 13 June 2014, <https://thelincolnite.co.uk/2014/06/will-300-year-old-manuscript-change-story-robert-grosseteste/>.
- *The Lincolnite*, 'Campaign to be launched for a statue of Robert Grosseteste in Lincoln', 15 July 2014, <https://thelincolnite.co.uk/2014/07/campaign-launched-robert-grosseteste-statue-lincoln/>.

Schools and education engagement

5. Public website: event media, 'Robert Grosseteste Essay Prize, 2020', <https://sites.bishopg.ac.uk/ordered-human-project/robert-grosseteste-essay-prize>.

Public lectures and events

6. Public website: International Robert Grosseteste Study Centre, <https://grossetestesociety.org/about/>.
7. Public website: Ordered Universe Project, <https://ordered-universe.com/>. Project-related media:
 - *Público* 'Uma cosmologia medieval reformulada pela matemática', 18 March 2014, <https://www.publico.pt/2014/03/18/ciencia/noticia/uma-cosmologia-medieval-reformulada-pela-matematica-moderna-1628657>.
 - *The Economist* 'Unearthing a thirteenth-century Metaverse.' 30 April 2014, <https://www.economist.com/babbage/2014/04/30/unearthing-a-13th-century-multiverse>.
 - *The Guardian*, 'The Medieval bishop who helped unweave the rainbow.' 27 November 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2014/nov/27/bishop-unweaved-rainbow-times-higher-education-award>.
8. Public talks: testimonials from:
 - Wednesday History Group, Lincoln, 20 November 2019;
 - Lincoln Theological Society, 8 June 2017;
 - Historical Association, Lincoln Branch, Public Lecture. *Robert Grosseteste, Lincoln's Einstein*, 20 June 2016.
9. Public lecture: 'Medieval physics', Oxford, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIR2zgufDHM>.