

Institution: The Open University		
Unit of Assessment: D31 Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: Increasing the Present-Day Impact of Religious History and Archives		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008-2017		
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 John Maiden	Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies	2009 to present
Dr Gavin Moorhead	Research Associate in Religious Studies	2012 to 2015
Prof John Wolffe	Professor of Religious History	1990 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>The impacts relate firstly, to creativity culture and society. Collaboration with religious archive custodians and professionals has contributed to significant specific advances in archival infrastructure. These have attracted substantial financial resource and enhanced the preservation and interpretation of religious heritage, especially through major archive developments at the East London Mosque and Lambeth Palace Library. Secondly, through collaboration with religious and community leaders in London and beyond there have been associated impacts on public understanding, learning and participation. Wider interest in religious heritage has been stimulated to make a significant contribution to present-day religious literacy and understanding.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The research falls into two categories. First, archival research has addressed problems in religious history. Second, engaged research, conducted in a planned and funded collaboration with stakeholders, has led to publications exploring ways in which academic insights and the historic experience of stakeholder groups can be mediated to enhance their understanding of their present-day situation. They are thereby equipped to contextualise their present situation and critically to learn from the past. The two strands of research were conducted in parallel between 2008 and 2017. There was considerable cross-fertilisation, with the engaged research informing archival research agendas, and insights from the archival research immediately shared with stakeholder groups. Prof Burns, the KCL Co-I in the original [G2] project, also contributed to the archival research, notably through a case-study of early Victorian church-building in Bethnal Green, and participated in the engaged research led by The Open University team.</p> <p>The principal findings from the archival research conducted by The Open University were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A case-study of the north London suburb of Finchley [O2] highlighted the local and contingent factors that shaped patterns of growth and decline in church congregations. These included the location of the church building in relation to the population, the effectiveness of the clergy, and the nature of competing religious options. • An analysis of Christian responses to the longstanding non-Christian religious minorities in London [O5] concluded that the capital's historic religious diversity has been a significant stimulus to the continuing relative vitality of its churches. • An analysis of London since the 1960s [O6] concluded that the overall level of religious activity was quite similar at the beginning of the 21st century to what it had been at the beginning of the 20th century. Its nature, however, had changed substantially, with the decline of most historic Christian churches and the advance of other world religions as well as of newer forms of Christianity, especially Pentecostalism. 		

Between 2009 and 2014 these insights were shared and developed in extensive conversations with present-day religious groups, initially focused on the Church of England Diocese of London, and subsequently extended to Baptists, Black Majority Churches, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Jews and Muslims. Two websites were developed to provide a continuing legacy from this work. The materials present insights from the research, highlighting the importance of historical understanding for present-day religious groups, and providing resources for further study:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/building-on-history-project/>
<http://www.open.ac.uk/arts/research/religion-in-london/>

The main findings from this aspect of the research [O1, O3, O4, G1, G2] were:

- That it is important for religious organizations to be aware of the long-term contexts (e.g. location, social composition) and recurrent patterns of behaviour (e.g. styles of leadership, attitudes to the surrounding community) that continue to shape their present-day experience.
- That archives accessible to religious practitioners as well as to academic researchers provide an essential basis for developing such understanding and it is therefore important that religious organizations invest in the preservation of such records.
- That historical awareness can make an important contribution to addressing misunderstanding towards and between contemporary religious groups. For example, it raises awareness of commonalities of experience and of past collaboration and acceptance. Moreover, hostilities such as anti-Catholicism and Islamophobia can be better mitigated if their origins are understood.

The research was subsequently extended beyond London to explore the historical dimensions of contemporary religious conflicts, notably in relation to Northern Ireland, and has highlighted the importance of historical research and religious literacy in addressing such situations. A current H2020 grant [G3] is supporting work with a Europe-wide scope, seeking to make historic archival evidence of religious toleration meaningful to present-day young people.

3. References to the research

All the outputs except [O1] were published in refereed academic journals; [O2] was submitted to REF2014; [O5] (reserve) and [O6] are submitted to REF2021.

- O1. Maiden, J.** and Evans, N. (2012) *What Can Churches Learn from their Past? The Parish History Audit*, Cambridge: Grove Books.
- O2. Wolfe, J.** (2013) 'The chicken or the egg? Building Anglican churches and building congregations in a Victorian London suburb', *Material Religion*, 9(1), pp. 36–59.
<https://doi.org/10.2752/175183413X13535214684050>
- O3. Wolfe, J.** (2013) 'What can the Twenty-First Century Church learn from the Victorians?', *Ecclesiology*, 9, pp. 205-222. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455316-00902005>
- O4. Wolfe, J.** (2013) 'The Church of England in the Diocese of London: What does History have to offer to the Present-Day Church', *Studies in Church History*, 49, pp. 248-58.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0424208400002175>
- O5. Wolfe, J.** (2015) 'Plurality in the Capital: The Christian Responses to London's Religious Minorities since 1800', *Studies in Church History*, 51, pp.232-58.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S042420840005021X>
- O6. Wolfe, J.** (2017) Towards the post-secular city? London since the 1960s', *Journal of Religious History*, 41:4, pp. 532-49. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9809.12447>

Funding

- G1.** (2008-11) 'Modern Religious History and the Contemporary Church,' (AHRC)
 PI: Prof John Wolfe, Col: Prof Arthur Burns (KCL), RA: Dr John Maiden GBP233,546
- G2.** (2012-13) 'Building on History: Religion in London' (AHRC)
 PI Prof John Wolfe, Col: Prof Humayun Ansari (RHUL); Dr John Maiden; RA: Dr Gavin Moorhead GBP95,071

G3. (2018-22) 'Religious Toleration and Peace' (H2020, Lead institution KU Leuven, Belgium)
OU Lead Prof John **Wolffe**, with Dr John **Maiden** and Dr Stefanie Sinclair GBP282,066.77

4. Details of the impact

The research has had impact on religious archives, especially two flagship and influential projects, and also had wider community and policy impact through engagement with religious groups themselves. Their participation has enhanced their understanding of the importance and value of religious archives and of what we can learn from the past.

Impact on East London Mosque archives

In February 2013 as part of the AHRC-funded 'Building on History: Religion in London' project **[G4]** we held an event on Muslim religious history at the East London Mosque. The programme brought together the research of The Open University team on the significance of historical insight for contemporary religious groups **[O1, O3, O4]** with the research of the Co-I, Prof Humayun Ansari (RHUL) on the detailed history of the mosque itself. Our presentations highlighted the importance of documenting the long-term history of Muslims in Britain as a corrective to perceptions of Islam as an alien and hostile presence. The East London Mosque Archives website **[C2]** describes this event as a "*milestone*" in its development. In 2014, the Mosque launched an appeal to install a strong room, with a brochure that included a prominently placed quotation relating to our work **[C2]**. The appeal raised GBP50,000 and the strongroom was opened by the Mayor of London in November 2017, becoming the first professionally organized and purpose-built facility in the UK for storing Muslim historical records **[C2]**.

This achievement has had a wider impact on Muslim communities which is corroborated by the Chair of the ELM Archives Committee, who led the Mosque's fundraising campaign and writes that "*Professor **Wolffe's** contributions [...] were important in increasing awareness within communities of the importance of preserving archives*" **[C1]**. In a briefing to the CEO of the National Archives in 2016 the then Senior Advisor for Religious Archives, reported that "*The East London Mosque is becoming a "standard-bearer" and public exemplar for mosque and other Islamic archives in the UK*", and went on explicitly to relate this achievement to the contribution of The Open University's research **[C3]**.

Impact on investment in Lambeth Palace Library **[LPL]**

Meanwhile, the research [especially **G2**] was a significant factor influencing the Church Commissioners' decision in November 2016 to invest GBP23,500,000 (over 10% of their total 2016 spend of GBP231,000,000) in a new building for LPL, which houses historic books and archives documenting the global influence of the Church of England. Hence, in the context of western Europe, it is regarded as "*the most important religious collection outside the Vatican*" **[C4]**. Previously the library had been prone to see itself as a small specialist academic library, while the Church Commissioners, for their part, had been reluctant to invest in it because they saw the preservation of archives as irrelevant to the present-day mission of the Church. The research **[O3, O4]**, in which LPL was a partner and which it promotes on its website, contributed to an important shift in its self-image. According to the Director of Libraries and Archives for the Church of England "*some [Church Commissioners] board members saw heritage as quite distinct and different from mission, and the Building on History project demonstrated clearly how heritage is mission*" and that "*archives have a great practical value to the wider church and community outside of academic spheres*". This significant change in approach is also evident in LPL's hope that in the future they will secure funding for research on subjects of practical interest to the present-day church **[C5]**.

Construction of the building began in April 2018 and was completed in July 2020. It will open in 2021. By replacing the cramped unsuitable medieval buildings in which the library was previously housed the new facilities will greatly enhance resources for the study of the Church's history, fulfilling the vision of the research by making them much more accessible to church members and to the general public as well as to academics. The hoardings that protected the site from passers-by in Lambeth Palace Road were used for displays that encapsulated this

vision for a publicly-engaged history of the church offering “a sense of continuity and a living heritage” [C6].

Impact on professional archives community

The wider impact of the research on the professional archives community has been mediated particularly through the Religious Archives Group [RAG] which brings together representatives of specifically religious archives (e.g. Methodist Archives, Westminster Archdiocesan Archives) with those from other major collections with substantial holdings relating to religion (e.g. National Archives, London Metropolitan Archives). In an internal National Archives report in 2015 the then Senior Advisor for Religious Archives for the National Archives described the collaboration with Prof **Wolffe** and his team as “*particularly fruitful*”. Prof **Wolffe** spoke about the research at their conference in May 2015 and he was elected as their President in 2017. Dr **Maiden** is also a member of the committee. The former National Archives Senior Advisor for Religious Archives pays tribute to the “*experience, knowledge and awareness*” that they have brought to the Group’s work through their research [C3]. Their insights have informed activities to evidence the relevance of religious archives for present-day religious groups and inter-faith understanding. They have also widened interest in the collection and deposit of archives to religious groups beyond the historic British churches, including black majority churches as well as Muslims. For example, the New Testament Church of God [NTCG] has established a heritage centre at its Northampton headquarters, initially opened in 2014 and further developed in subsequent years [C7]. It aims to “*learn from our past to create a better future*”. The former NTCG National Education Director reports that the research conducted by **Wolffe** and **Maiden** provided a “*reference point, an opportunity to look downwards at our work and root it and connect it with the work of others*” [C7]. As a further example, the research prompted Finchley Reform Synagogue in 2018 to donate their records to Barnet Archives [C8]. Most recently, in autumn 2020, Prof **Wolffe** contributed to RAG’s development of the Religious Archives Support Plan 2021 to 2025 recommending initiatives to further raise the profile of religious archives and to safeguard the future of vulnerable collections that had been highlighted by the research [C8].

Impact on religious and community leaders

Within the Christian churches, a particular channel for impact has been a pamphlet on the parish history audit [O1]. This was a key output from the engaged research and was co-written by a member of the OU research team (Dr John **Maiden**) and one of the partner representatives on the project steering group, now Director of Ministry for the Diocese of London. They continue to promote the concept of the parish history audit to churches and he sees “*light bulbs go on in their heads. It makes complete sense to them, making connections with the past*” [C9]. The approach has also been endorsed elsewhere in the Church of England, for example by the Diocese of Derby in their *Mission Action Plan Leader’s Guide* (2018) [C9].

The research has had further impact by informing the use of history to promote a sense of belonging and mutual respect among diverse communities, drawing particularly on Prof **Wolffe**’s ongoing (and subsequently published) research on historic religious diversity in London [O5, O6]. For example, recalling an event led by the researchers in Balham 2013 involving a variety of different religious groups in his locality, the Director of the Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network, writes that “*it brought together many of our groups and partners to recognise and understand, and appreciate their own history in the place we all live. As we do a great deal of our work with Black and other minority communities, this is important*” [C8]. A representative of Finchley Reform Synagogue testified to the role of a similar event in Finchley, also in 2013, in facilitating bringing different faith communities together, understanding difference and breaking down phobias [C8]. There have also been significant impacts on young people through activities in schools. For example, two workshops led by the researchers with students and teachers in 2012 at Urswick School in Hackney, helped to stimulate the development of a school museum opened in December 2015, to celebrate a sense of shared institutional history [C10].

Beyond London the research has had further reach in advancing an historical dimension to discussion and promotion of religious literacy, increasingly important both in counteracting the

ignorance and prejudice that can fuel community divisions and encouraging appreciation of the shared and complementary identities that can advance social cohesion. The Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire, in an unsolicited letter found the research conclusions, as summarised in the Summer 2017 edition of *Society Now*, “*timely and helpful*” in his role in an area “*where there have been tensions between communities in recent years*” [C11]. Professor **Wolffe** has twice (April 2016 and January 2017) been an invited speaker to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education. He was cited several times in its report *Improving Religious Literacy: A Contribution to the Debate* (July 2016), and warmly thanked by its Chair, Fiona Bruce MP for his “*much valued*” contribution to its deliberations [C12]. His input is reflected in a number of the APPG’s recommendations, including that “*the Home Office should make religious literacy training a mandatory part of the Prevent training given in schools, universities, prisons and other institutions*” ([C12] Recommendation 11, p. 50).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1. Email. 2019. Chair, East London Mosque Archives Steering Group.
- C2. Website pages. 2021. East London Mosque Archive, News items, Funding Appeal.
- C3. National Archive Report October 2012 to March 2015, CEO briefing note 2016 on the ELM and corroborating statement, Senior Advisor on Religious Archives, The National Archives.
- C4. Website article. April 2018. Archbishop breaks first ground as construction begins on new LPL.
- C5. Website. LPL Archive Resource for Church Leaders. Testimonial. July 2019. Director of Libraries and Archives for the Church of England.
- C6. LBL vision and mission. 2019. Annual report. 2017. Church Commissioner’s and LBL public engagement hoarding materials.
- C7. Corroboration statement. 2019. Director of Education, New Testament Church of God.
- C8. Building on History participants testimonials. 2019. Finchley Reform Synagogue, Wandsworth Community Empowerment Network and Religious Archive Group.
- C9. Corroboration statement. 2019. Director of Ministry, Diocese of London. Mission Action Plan Leader’s Guide. 2018. Diocese of Derby.
- C10. Website. Urswick School Museum.
- C11. Letter. September 2017. Police and Crime Commissioner for South Yorkshire
- C12. Letters and Report. February 2017. Fiona Bruce, MP for Congleton (Conservative) APPG Religious Literacy Report.