

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Aberdeen		
Unit of Assessment: 27 (English Language and Literature)		
Title of case study: Unearthing Scott's Creative Process at Abbotsford		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000 - 2004		
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:
Alison Lumsden	Chair in English and General Editor Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels	1991 – 1993 1994 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Walter Scott's home at Abbotsford in the Scottish Borders is one of the most significant writer's houses anywhere in the world, containing both his intact 9,000 book library and his museum collections. Its fabric reflects his artistic understanding of history and material culture, enabling visitors to access an unparalleled insight into the life and work of this author. Professor Lumsden's scholarly work, including the publication of Scott's <i>Reliquiae Trotcosienses</i>, has reshaped understanding of Scott's creative process by drawing new connections between his writing, his home and his collections. <i>Reliquiae Trotcosienses</i> has transformed thinking about Abbotsford, influencing curatorial decisions and visitor information, informing public understanding, contributing to the co-creation of new, open-access learning materials, and supporting economic and social impact in the local area.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p><i>Reliquiae Trotcosienses</i> was one of the last works by Walter Scott. It captures how he tried to recover the past by sewing a thread that connects the building of his house at Abbotsford, his collections, and his writing, ultimately shedding light on his whole creative process. Written when his motor skills were deteriorating, his already difficult handwriting was made even worse, and <i>Reliquiae</i> was left unpublished by his nineteenth-century publishers and deemed unreadable by modern scholars, remaining only in a handful of published excerpts and in manuscript form.</p> <p>The manuscript was rediscovered at Abbotsford in 2000. Professor Lumsden was invited to transcribe and co-edit the text, working alongside fellow Scott expert, Gerard Carruthers. Lumsden's unparalleled expertise in reading Walter Scott's handwriting, which she had developed during her role as research fellow for the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels (a world class scholarly edition of Scott's work completed at Aberdeen between 1982 and 2012), put her in the unique position of being able to decipher and transcribe the manuscript. The process involved a series of steps. Lumsden created an initial transcript of the text, which was reviewed by Carruthers. The pair were able to secure unprecedented access to Scott's house at Abbotsford, then still a family home, and used this to add another level of detail to the transcription. During their visits, they were able to verify and deepen their understanding of Scott's process, taking measurements and identifying objects that were mentioned in <i>Reliquiae</i>, which they then used to provide detailed annotations to the text.</p> <p>The result of this work was a publication that gives us an unparalleled insight into Scott's thinking as he built Abbotsford – what is sometimes called his 'Waverley Novels in stone' – and the relationship between the house, Scott's collections, and his creative processes. Not only had the</p>		

beginning of the *Reliquiae*, setting the scene as a spoof antiquarian novel about the collecting process, never been published, but Lumsden's research also unearthed evidence that, for Scott, his museum collections were always springboards for storytelling and revealed the organising principles of his collections at Abbotsford. In *Reliquiae* Scott also describes some of his favourite books, thus also providing an insight into the print artefacts that informed his creativity. *Reliquiae* therefore significantly changed how we think about Scott, his creative practice and the relationship between his creativity and his collecting activities [1].

At the same time as working on *Reliquiae*, Lumsden also edited Scott's 1818 novel *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* [2]. Written at the time when Scott was completing the second phase of building at Abbotsford, the novel is illustrative of the relationship between material culture and story-telling that Scott describes in *Reliquiae*, a connection that Lumsden was able to highlight in this edition. As the novel was being written the old town of Edinburgh was being remodelled and Scott acquired the door, lock and keys to the tolbooth prison ('the Heart of Mid-Lothian'). As Scott suggests in *Reliquiae*, these artefacts thus became prompts for storytelling and they are, in turn, housed at Abbotsford, with the tolbooth door built into the fabric of Scott's home. Lumsden's edition shows how *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* demonstrates Scott's creative process within his writing.

These two complementary projects undertaken by Lumsden helped to illuminate the synergies between material culture and story that underpin Scott's fiction and his home, transforming understandings of Scott's relationship to the objects and stories of Abbotsford.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[1] Walter Scott's *Reliquiae Trotcosienses*, edited by Gerard Carruthers and **Alison Lumsden** (Edinburgh: Faculty of Advocates and Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

[2] Walter Scott's *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels 6, edited by David Hewitt and **Alison Lumsden** (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Lumsden's research [1,2] offers a unique insight into the relationship between the home of Scotland's most significant novelist, his collections of books and artefacts, and his creative process. Her contribution to the first publication of the *Reliquiae Trotcosienses* and her editions of Scott's novels, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* in particular, have created a new understanding of Scott's work, provided new materials that were used to inform the reinterpretation of the Scott museum at Abbotsford, and continue to be used by the curators as a unique reference point at a site of global cultural significance. In turn, this has enabled the museum to deliver benefits to the local area, through both economic and social impact. Lumsden's research has also informed broader public understanding of Scott's creative process, not least through the co-creation of a new online course.

Creating a unique reference point to shape the continuing reinterpretation of the Scott museum at Abbotsford

The opportunity to reinterpret the museum at Abbotsford came about in 2004, when the last descendant of the family to live there died and, in 2007, the house came into the custodianship of the Abbotsford Trust. Lumsden's research was used as a key resource for Abbotsford's refurbishment and the development of the Visitor Centre, which took place between 2008 and 2013. Since reopening in late 2013, Abbotsford has relied on *Reliquiae* to influence and inform both the curation of the museum and the information prepared for visitors, putting the objects Scott collected and their relationship to his creative output at the centre of the visitor experience. Lumsden has provided material for the story boards in the Visitor Centre and appears in a video loop on permanent show there explaining Scott's approach to history, story and his home.

Her research on *Reliquiae* was used as a key resource to inform the development of one of the audio tours available to visitors, the 'Voice of Scott' as well as other visitor materials. As Kirsty Archer-Thompson, Abbotsford's Collections and Interpretation Manager has said, '*In our visitor interpretation ... we have tried to capture something of Scott's tone of voice - and indeed his spirited passion for his antiquities and books - across both our audio and guided tours, using Reliquiae as our keystone text ... these experiences continue to delight our audiences*' [S1]. Using extracts from *Reliquiae* the tour encourages visitors to see the relationship between collecting, story and Scott's creative output. Visitors have reported on the 'informative' nature of the tour, providing 'valuable insights' at the same time as being 'great fun' [S2]. The tour has been converted to standard English as an alternative accessible option, and then translated into four international language options. Written versions are available in eleven languages. The tour was made available for public download while the house was shut due to Covid-19 and so that it could be accessed ahead of visits during social distancing (thus eliminating the need for handheld audio tours). It was downloaded 3206 times between 5 August 2020 and 19 October 2020 [S3].

The connection between object and creative process highlighted by Lumsden through her edition of *Reliquiae* has shaped the ethos of the museum, and the research continues to inform both curatorial decisions and research within Abbotsford. Kirsty Archer-Thompson uses *Reliquiae* frequently. She says,

I refer back to Professor Lumsden's edition of Reliquiae perhaps more than any other text published in relation to Sir Walter Scott and his life... I also regularly read excerpts from Reliquiae alongside Scott's letters to knit together the provenance of collection items only mentioned tangentially in the manuscript. The text is, therefore, still enabling curatorial research to this day [S1].

Enhancing the economic and social impact of the museum, through its refurbishment

Since refurbishment, visitor numbers have been strong at Abbotsford, with over 160,000 visitors since it reopened in 2013. Around 40% of these are international. The museum has contributed an estimated GBP45,760,000 to the local economy, supporting 915 jobs in the area and 35 at the museum itself. As well as the original GBP12,000,000 secured through grants and fundraising, the museum has attracted GBP250,000 in funds to restore Scott's woodlands and paths, and a further GBP3,000,000 as an endowment to help safeguard Abbotsford for the future [S4].

Abbotsford also creates social impact, through the role of volunteers and the benefits that this brings to the individuals who take on that role, including confidence, social engagement, skills and learning. There is a thriving community of 115 volunteers supporting the house in various functions. Volunteer training reflects the ethos expressed in *Reliquiae* in relation to collecting and story, and the text underpins the Abbotsford Trust's guide training programme as a core resource.

Enhancing public understanding of Scott's creative process

As well as visitors to the museum, Lumsden's research has also enhanced the understanding of Scott's creative process for other audiences, in particular through a new massive open online learning course co-developed with Abbotsford. 'Walter Scott: The Man Behind the Monument', was launched on the FutureLearn platform in October 2019. Led by Lumsden, with input from the curatorial staff at Abbotsford, the course draws on the relationship between object and creative process outlined in *Reliquiae* to emphasise the synergies between material culture and story, illustrating these principles through Lumsden's work on *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*. Described by Abbotsford as their largest ever learning experience, the first two runs of the course attracted 2,056 learners from 98 countries, including teachers, lawyers and heritage workers, as well as members of the public studying for interest. Feedback from many of the learners expressed the desire to visit Abbotsford in the future and highlighted a new awareness of the synergies between Scott's collections and his writing. The course has remained open for new learners throughout 2020 and has now attracted a total of 5,217 participants from 118 countries, with an active learning rate of over 80% [S5].

Lumsden's expertise continues to be recognised, not least through her appointment as a Trustee at Abbotsford. In this role, she will chair its Heritage and Engagement Committee as it plans cultural celebrations and project activity to mark the 250th anniversary of Scott's birth in 2021.

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

- [S1] Statement from Collections and Interpretation Manager at Abbotsford
- [S2] Summary of visitor feedback on 'Voice of Scott' audio tour.
- [S3] Audio tour download data, 2020.
- [S4] Statement from CEO Abbotsford.
- [S5] Evidence of FutureLearn learner numbers and feedback.