

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution: University of Glasgow</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: D29 – English Language and Literature</b>
<b>Title of case study: Centre for Robert Burns Studies: Locating Burns in Scottish and Global Culture</b>
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>

The Centre for Robert Burns Studies at the University of Glasgow has played a major role in raising public awareness and enhancing understanding of the work, global reputation and iconic status of Scotland's national poet, Robert Burns. This has been achieved by (i) forging Scotland-wide links between university, local authority and national collections of Burns-related material, making readily available the full extent of the country's rich holdings in this area for the first time; (ii) increasing and encouraging global awareness of and access to Burns's work through events, online resources and the use of social and traditional media; and (iii) convening an international network of Burns organisations and events. The Centre's exhibitions and performances have attracted upwards of 200,000 visitors and participants in the REF period.

<b>2. Underpinning research</b>
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The University of Glasgow (UoG) has a long-established base of research expertise in the life and work of Robert Burns. The [Centre for Robert Burns Studies](#) (CRBS), based in UoG's School of Critical Studies, is the only research centre in the world devoted exclusively to the study of Scotland's national poet. Researchers at CRBS have been particularly concerned to bring about a reassessment of the various ways in which Burns's life and work have been presented to the public during and after his lifetime. This has been achieved in two ways: first, by investigating the role of his early editors and the transmission of his texts, both in print and in performance, up to the present; and, secondly, by studying the influence of the Burns 'myth' both in the sphere of material culture (domestic ornaments, pictures, etc.) and in the contexts of Scottish history and identity.

Between 2006 and 2008 CRBS researchers created an annotated digital edition of the correspondence (127 letters) of Burns's first editor, James Currie [see [link](#)]. Currie's *Life and Works of Robert Burns* (1800) is the most significant publication in the early stages of the poet's reception, setting in motion many 'myths' as well as giving the basic biographical facts. The CRBS edition of Currie's letters brought to light the subtlety of his negotiations with Burns's acquaintances, showing how carefully he worked to produce a text that would not embarrass the poet's dependents after his early death, and how scrupulously Currie tried to ensure that they received appropriate remuneration from his edition – thus contradicting those commentators who have claimed that he rewrote the poet's life and work purely to satisfy his own predilections.

Between 2007 and 2009 CRBS played a pivotal role in the AHRC-funded *Global Burns Network*, organising a number of events at which new research on Burns was shared and published. During that time CRBS staff demonstrated particular expertise in the areas of song culture, publishing history, postcolonial studies, and the posthumous reputation and iconography of the poet. In the field of song culture, for example, CRBS research into the American composer Serge Hovey's fascination with Burns uncovered new information about Burns's original melodic choices and their sometimes inconsistent treatment in early publications. In addition, CRBS staff discovered the hitherto unknown French source for the song 'The case of conscience', and succeeded in authenticating Burns's note to the 'Highland Lassie', which gives a first-hand account of his famous love affair with Highland Mary, dismissed by some Burns scholars as a myth. In the field of publication history, CRBS research proved that the early Burns editor R H Cromek was reliable, not fraudulent; and, in postcolonial studies, staff demonstrated that Burns engaged in his poems with a specific set of metaphors deployed in the contemporary transatlantic discourse of slavery.

In 2010 Nigel Leask published the monograph *Burns and Pastoral*, which demonstrated that a crucial context for the understanding of Burns's work can be provided by a study of 18th-century agrarian economics and the poet's training as an 'improving' tenant farmer. Leask examined the poet's reputation as a 'heaven-taught ploughman' and showed this to be largely dictated by the generic conventions of pastoral poetry, whose long association with rural dialects also explains the widespread popularity of his writing in Ayrshire Scots at a time of increasing linguistic anglicisation. Leask's book offers fresh readings of all Burns's major poetry in its historical and social contexts,

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the first to do so since Thomas Crawford's study of 1960, and concludes with a new assessment of his importance for British Romanticism.

CRBS research for the AHRC-funded project *Beyond Text: Robert Burns: Inventing Tradition and Securing Memory* (2010-11) discovered more about the relationship between Burns's work and wider material culture in the 19th century. First, the material objects associated with Burns in this period diverged from the biographical record in that they celebrated the poet's connection with masculine conviviality and drinking culture, rather than decrying these things, as was the tendency in the biographies. Secondly, the legend of Burns's relationship with Highland Mary was propagated by the manufacture of statues and objects rather than texts. The CRBS team examined the commemoration of Burns in relics, artefacts and memorabilia, while the University of Dundee was responsible for researching his memorialisation in statues and monuments.

Key researchers during the REF period: Professor Gerry Carruthers, Co-Director CRBS (Professor of Scottish Literature 2011 to the present, Senior Lecturer 2007-2011); Dr Kirsteen McCue Co-Director CRBS (Senior Lecturer in Scottish Literature 2009 to the present, Lecturer 2002-09); Professor Nigel Leask FBA FRSE (Regius Chair English Language & Literature 2004 to the present); Professor Murray Pittock FRSE (Bradley Chair in English Literature 2007 to the present); Dr Rhona Brown (Lecturer in Scottish Literature 2006 to the present); and Dr Pauline Mackay (Lecturer in Robert Burns Studies 2013 to the present, Research Assistant/Associate 2007-13).

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

- Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral: Poetry and Improvement in Late 18th Century Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Joint winner 2010 Saltire Prize for Best Scottish Research Book. ISBN 9780199572618 (**REF 2** Output)
- Murray Pittock, ed., *Robert Burns in Global Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell, 2011). Includes contributions from Leask, Mackay and Pittock. ISBN: 1611480302 (Available from HEI)
- Gerard Carruthers, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). Includes contributions by Brown, Carruthers, Leask and McCue. ISBN 9780748636488 (Available from HEI)
- Gerard Carruthers, 'Some Recent Discoveries in Robert Burns Studies', *Scottish Literary Review* 2.1 (2010), pp. 143-58, ISSN 1756-5634. (**REF2** Output)
- Murray Pittock and Pauline Mackay, [Taxonomy of Private and Domestic Burns-related Objects](#) – an analytical online taxonomy of the significance of Burns objects and memorabilia.
- Sharon Alker, Leith Davis and Holly Faith Nelson, eds., *Robert Burns and Transatlantic Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012). ISBN 9781409405764. Includes contributions by Brown, Carruthers, Leask, McCue and Pittock. (Available from HEI)

### Grants

- 2007-8, Carnegie Research Grant for *The Correspondence of James Currie* (£30k).
- 2008-9, AHRC award for *Global Burns Network* (£26k).
- 2010-11, AHRC award for *Beyond Text: Robert Burns: Inventing Tradition and Securing Memory, 1796-1909* (£145k).
- 2012-16, AHRC award for *Editing Burns for the 21st Century* (£1.1m).

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

CRBS has generated impact in the following ways:

#### 1. Forging Scotland-wide links between university, local authority and national collections of Burns-related material, thereby enhancing cultural life and engaging civil society.

CRBS is a key member of Burns Scotland, formerly the Distributed National Burns Collections Project, which was created in 2008. [Burns Scotland](#) – a partnership between UoG, the National Library of Scotland, National Galleries Scotland, National Museums Scotland, Glasgow Life, Dumfries and Galloway Museums and East and South Ayrshire Museums – coordinates management of and promotes access to and appreciation of the approximately 36,000 items relating to Burns in Scottish public collections.

In 2008 Carruthers served as academic consultant to the Burns Scotland exhibition *Zig Zag: The Paths of Robert Burns*, which displayed Burns-related items and his writings in order to throw light on his participation in the creation of his own myth. *Zig Zag* attracted 52,991 visitors to venues in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dumfries and Aberdeen. Since 2010 Carruthers has also chaired the Burns Scotland Research Committee. In 2012 Burns Scotland co-hosted the annual CRBS conference, *Robert Burns: Artefact*, which attracted academic and non-academic Burns enthusiasts from around the world, and included the display of Burns-related treasures and performances of Burns-related music. One-day Burns conferences have been held annually by CRBS since 2007, each attracting around 150 specialists and members of the general public from the UK and abroad.

In 2011 CRBS's MacKay co-curated a series of exhibitions entitled *Robert Burns Beyond Text* with the National Trust for Scotland and Glasgow's Mitchell Library, designed to enhance public understanding of Burns's contribution to the Scottish cultural landscape. The project team also developed the Mitchell's Treasure of the Month exhibition for January 2011, February 2011 and January 2013, during which time 120,258 people visited the library. The exhibitions displayed objects held in the Mitchell's Burns collections, with notes pointing visitors to the UoG Beyond Text website ([Robert Burns: Inventing Tradition and Securing Memory, 1796-1909](#)), which offers new perspectives on his writing. As an example, among the objects curated at the Mitchell were a number celebrating the link between Burns and masculinity, with scenes from *Tam o' Shanter* depicted on items associated with a range of 'male' activities, including shaving (razor hones) and smoking (snuffboxes) as well as drinking (whisky jugs). The work of UoG's researchers enhanced public understanding of how different materials have helped to inform the cultural memory of this national figure. Impact was gauged using feedback forms, with almost 100% of respondents finding the exhibition 'interesting' or 'very interesting'.

The *Robert Burns Beyond Text* exhibition was also hosted by the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum in Alloway from March to April 2011, with CRBS researchers working alongside the museum's curatorial and educational staff. UoG's research input, again in the form of notes and website, underscored the exhibition's emphasis on the relationship between literary and material culture, addressing questions such as whether the choice of means of commemoration (through particular kinds of object or images of Burns) had an effect on public perception of certain poems or on approaches to the writer's life. The museum drew 61,000 visitors during the months of the exhibition. CRBS also curated exhibitions for the University of Dundee (March 2011) and for UoG's School of Scottish Literature (May 2011) and Hunterian Art Gallery (November–December 2011).

## **2. Promoting access to Burns's work through events, online resources and use of social and traditional media, enhancing public engagement and creating cultural capital.**

CRBS researchers have taken an innovative approach to textual editing, combining online data, scholarly editions and a taxonomy of Burns-related objects with song recordings and crowd-sourced information-gathering from the Burns Federation and the wider collecting community. In 2009-10 CRBS worked with the BBC to create a permanent [online audio archive](#) of Burns's works. The publicly accessible archive features recorded performances of 716 works by celebrities including Robert Carlyle, Robbie Coltrane, Brian Cox, Alan Cumming, Liz Lochhead, Phyllis Logan, Ian McDiarmid, Siobhan Redmond, Elaine C Smith, Alex Salmond and the Prince of Wales. The BBC producer describes embarking on the project 'armed with a Scots dictionary, and with Gerry Carruthers, Director of the Robert Burns Centre at Glasgow University at the end of a telephone or email to check any pronunciation or meanings' [see the [BBC Radio Scotland blog](#)].

CRBS also commissioned a new work by Scottish composer James Macmillan in 2009 to mark the 250th anniversary of Burns's birth. Macmillan chose to set one of his 'most beautiful and lesser known poems', and *The Lament of Mary, Queen of Scots* had its premier in UoG's Bute Hall on 16 January 2009 with an audience of 300. The concert included an additional programme of Burns songs with arrangements by Haydn, responding directly to a major new edition of Haydn's folksongs produced by UoG academics Rycroft and Edwards (Music) and McCue (CRBS). Following the international conference *Robert Burns 1759-2009* (2009), CRBS was approached by the World Burns Federation to co-organise what turned out to be a successful world record attempt

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to perform Burns's *Auld Lang Syne* simultaneously in 41 different languages (2009) [see [YouTube video link](#)]. The *Robert Burns 1759–2009* conference also provided a platform to build important links with schools. CRBS collaborated with Scottish publisher Itchy Coo to organise a drawing and writing competition, encouraging children and young people to respond to Burns's work. Hundreds of entries were received from schools throughout Scotland, and about 100 children attended the awards presentation at the conference.

The digital resource from the *Robert Burns: Inventing Tradition and Securing Memory* project went live in March 2011, and in that month alone it received 3,262 hits, prompting correspondence from businesspeople and surveyors as well as academics, and a chatroom on the World Burns Federation website. The digital resources had received a combined total of over 24,700 hits by June 2013 (statistics provided by Webalizer version 2.01). This research generated new interest in Burns's legacy, as evidenced by the response from the press – e.g. *The Herald*, 14 March 2011 ('The myth of Burns's mystery muse is exposed') – and in social media, with significant discussion of the project on UoG's Twitter account.

The recent AHRC grant for *Editing Burns for the 21st Century* resulted in the creation of a global [blogsite](#) and social network for the worldwide community of Burns enthusiasts, which attracted widespread media interest on its launch in July 2012 and had received over 13,000 visitors by July 2013. Performances of Burns songs in various styles have been [downloadable on iTunes](#) from the CRBS website since December 2012, and by October 2013 had been browsed 1,109 times and accessed 811 times.

### 3. Convening an international network of Burns organisations and events that enhance understanding of his global influence.

Supported by CRBS, the [Global Burns Network](#) (2008-09) was developed as an information exchange to enhance understanding of the nature and scale of Burns's international profile and influence. To commemorate the 250th anniversary of his birth, the Network hosted a 'Countdown to 2009' [page](#) disseminating information about a series of international events in the USA, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Czech Republic, Serbia and Russia. One of these events was the *Robert Burns 1759-2009* conference noted above, a three-day event hosted by CRBS. The conference – which was attended by 607 academics and members of the public – had a strong outward-facing element, incorporating public talks and evening performances, and offering a variety of speakers, papers and plenary lectures. It attracted significant media interest, including press (*The Herald*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Sunday Herald*, *The Dundee Courier*), radio (BBC Radio Scotland, Real Radio and Clyde One) and television (BBC Scotland's *Newsnight* and STV *News*).

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

**Corroborating statements – available from HEI** (evidencing benefit to institutions and public):

- Manager, Manuscript and Archive Collections, National Library of Scotland
- Director, Robert Burns Birthplace Museum

**Testimonials – contact details available from HEI:**

- Former Principal Curator, National Museums of Scotland
- Former Curator, Robert Burns Birthplace Museum (on the influence of Beyond Text)
- Editor of 'Robert Burns Lives' (on influence of CRBS projects on Burns community in the US)

**Press and Media:**

- *The Herald*, 14 January 2009: World's academics descend on city for Robert Burns event – see [\[link\]](#); BBC News, 15 January 2009: Three-day Burns festival begins – [\[link\]](#); 'Auld Lang Syne' world record attempt – see [YouTube video](#), 1 December 2009; BBC News, 14 March 2011: Robert Burns Highland Mary muse theory disputed – at [\[link\]](#); STV Website, 25 July 2012: New website created for Robert Burns fans from around the world to connect – at [\[link\]](#); *Daily Record*, 2 October 2012: Digital database with works of Robert Burns to be created – at [\[link\]](#)

**Other – available from HEI:**

- Global Burns Network – Final project report for AHRC.
- Robert Burns: Inventing Tradition and Securing Memory, 1796-1909 – Final report for AHRC.