

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Aberdeen</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: UoA 24 Anthropology and Development Studies</p>
<p>Title of case study: Material Histories: Scots and Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian Fur Trade, c.1870-1930.</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact Recent calls from indigenous peoples for information about and access to historic artefacts crucial to their well-being have led to a re-evaluation of both private and museum-held collections. These collections are now being used in innovative ways to revitalise cultural knowledge and to record marginalised historical perspectives. This case study documents one such project. The funding for the <i>Material Histories</i> project (2005-07), which came from AHRC, included specific provision for public outreach work. This comprised a temporary exhibition held at the Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen (4 February to 11 May 2008), an educational website and public talks. Most recently the project has stimulated the development of cultural awareness training in Northern Manitoba, Canada.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research Between 1 October 2005 and 31 December 2007 Ingold (Professor 1999 -), Wachowich (Lecturer 2001 -) and Brown (RCUK Fellow 2005-2010; Lecturer 2010 -) used historic artefacts in Scottish museums and in family homes to explore the social relations between fur traders from Northeast Scotland and Aboriginal people in the Canadian North. The project focused on how artefacts could contribute to fur trade narratives that are otherwise excluded from the written record. Most fur trade research is undertaken in Canada, but this project provided an opportunity to locate under-researched artefacts in Scottish museums and private collections, thus offering new insights into the material flows of artefacts during the historic fur trade era.</p> <p>The research involved oral history interviews with people from northern Manitoba (Canada), Orkney and Northeast Scotland, as well as artefact-based research drawing on private and museum collections, and archival research in the collections of the Hudson’s Bay Company, the National Archives of Scotland, and other sources. The project also included an invited workshop held at Aberdeen University’s Marischal Museum (April 26-27, 2007), which brought together curators, educators, beadwork artists, and students from Canada and Scotland to discuss the linked histories of Scots, First Nations and Métis people who participated in the fur trade, as well as the role of beadwork and other material traces in illuminating these historic, and enduring, relationships. This workshop has helped curators better to interpret such materials in the museums in which they work.</p> <p>Key outcomes of the research included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identification of previously unknown historic artefacts, photographic collections, and archival documents pertaining to the fur trade. A number of these items have since been donated or sold to heritage institutions and are thus now available to other researchers. These include: the Robert Killin collection (1960s Northern Cree clothing plus 200 photographic slides taken in Northern Ontario), sold to the Canadian Museum of Civilization in 2011; the unpublished autobiography of John Payne, describing fur trade life in Labrador in the 1930s, donated to the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives; 1950s Northern Cree beadwork and HBC memorabilia donated to the Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen. 2. New insights into the social networks developed by fur traders while in Canada, and the extent to which these networks were maintained following their retirement. 3. Theoretical insights into how ‘home’ was understood by traders whose communication with their families in Scotland was often limited to one letter per year. These insights contribute to a growing body of literature within anthropology and cultural geography related to migration and diaspora.

3. References to the research

AHRC Standard Research grant awarded to PI **Ingold** and co-PI **Wachowich**. The grant ran from 01 October 2005 to 31 December 2007 and was for £139,063. It was then augmented by an additional dissemination award from AHRC of £10,500.

Brown, Alison K. (ed) 2008. *Material Histories: Proceedings of a workshop held at Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen, 26-27 April 2007*. Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen.

Brown, Alison K. (2009). "Mokisins', 'cloaks' and 'a belt of a peculiar fabrik': Recovering the history of the Thomas Whyte collection of North American clothing, formerly in the Grierson Museum, Thornhill' *Transactions of the Dumfries and Galloway Natural History Society*, LXXXIII: 131-49.

Brown, Alison K. with C. Massan and A. Grant (2011). 'Christina Massan's Beadwork and the Recovery of a Family History'. In Sarah Carter and Patricia A. MacCormack (eds), *Recollecting: Lives of Aboriginal Women of the Canadian Northwest and the U.S. Borderlands*. Edmonton: Athabasca University Press. [This book has won the following awards to date: 2012 Best Book in Aboriginal History Prize, Canadian Historical Association; 2012 Best Scholarly and Academic Book, Book Publishers Association of Alberta; Finalist, Manitoba Historical Society, Margaret McWilliams Award, 2012; 2012 WILLA Award for Scholarly Nonfiction]

Brown, Alison K. (in press) *Encounters: British Museums and First Nations Communities*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

Website: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/materialhistories/index.php>

Material Histories: Scots and Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian Fur Trade. Exhibition curated by Alison Brown and Nancy Wachowich and held at Marischal Museum, 4 February 2008 to 11 May 2008.

4. Details of the impact

Public talks were held from 2005 onwards in locations as diverse as the Stromness Museum, Orkney (The Orkney Historical Society), the Village Hall, Stuartfield, Aberdeenshire (The Buchan Field Club), and the Elders Centre, Thompson Manitoba (Honekwe Oral History Gathering). Several short articles were published, aimed at a non-academic audience, for example, Alison Brown 2007, 'Christina Massan's Beadwork and Family History', *Fox Tracks, Newsletter of the Fox Lake Negotiations Office, Fox Lake Cree Nation*, vol. 7 (3): 4-5. In addition, a number of outreach activities were developed in connection with this project, detailed below.

(1): *Material Histories: Scots and Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian Fur Trade*. Exhibition curated by Alison Brown and Nancy Wachowich and held at Marischal Museum, 4 February 2008-11 May 2008

This exhibition drew on oral history, archival and artefact-centred research undertaken by **Brown** and **Wachowich** between 1 October 2005 and 31 December 2007 to highlight the experiences of people from the Northeast of Scotland who joined the Hudson's Bay Company during the twentieth century. The curatorial team worked closely with members of the public who had responded to a press release regarding their own family connection with the fur trade to develop text panels that highlighted the experiences of individuals within the broader context of changes in the northern fur trade. The exhibition was aimed at the general public and ran for approximately three months. It was attended by approximately 7000 visitors. The exhibition raised the profile of the *Material Histories* project, drew the attention of visitors to the historic and economic links between Scotland and Canada, and enabled students in the Department of Anthropology to gain experience of research and curation by assisting with the exhibition's development.

(2): *Material Histories: Scots and Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian Fur Trade*. Website www.abdn.ac.uk/materialhistories

This website was developed in order to make the results of the research available to a global

audience and was launched on 17 June 2008. Data for the total number of hits since then are not available, but the most recent available figures show that during May 2011 there were 231 separate visits to the site from 22 different countries. **Brown** continues to receive emails about the project via the website at least once a month, mostly from people requesting help in locating fur trade ancestors. In April 2012, for example, a Canadian emailed to say, "I have just discovered your work posted on ABDN website and I want you to know that I really appreciate it. Thank you...." He then requested assistance in finding archival resources for his own research. In March 2012 a First Nations individual wrote: "Hi. Mrs Alison.... sorry about my english.....i speak more my language..... I'm an Algonquin from canada quebec. i was in contact with you by an anthropologist from montreal she helped me to trace my great-grandfather who was a Scottish. He arrive here in Canada in 1876. i... would love to know if he has family in scotland if he had brothers sisters. I now that he was from Orkney....something like that....is name was David McKenzie.....he arrived in north of Ontario Canada.....in Moosenee exactly....he was 16 years old in 1876. We had a picture of him.....at my grand mom....but someone took it away from our family..... So i dont now if these informations will help you out.....but tanks alote to helping us to find a part of our ancestors.....everyones gonna be happy if we now about our great grand dad :) Mikwetch." The website continues to generate similar queries from an extremely broad audience. We have also received very positive feedback from professional archivists and educators.

(3): Cultural Awareness

One unanticipated impact of the project is how it is being used by individuals who were interviewed as part of the research. As an educator, Christine Massan, from Fox Lake Cree Nation, Manitoba, has been a keen supporter of the project and co-authored a book chapter with **Brown** about her own family's fur trade connections. She is involved in Cultural Awareness training for employees of companies such as Manitoba Hydro, Ducks Unlimited, Comstock, which have a presence in Northern Manitoba for the construction of dams. She has also used the research as the basis for presentations to school students in her own community, many of whom are struggling to find positive role models. Finally, she is in the early stages of developing a film, with Cree actor and director Michael Lawrenchuk, based on the research.

(4): Film/television

Several media productions in the early stages of development will draw on aspects of the research. Cree actor and director Michael Lawrenchuk, from Fox Lake First Nation, Manitoba, Canada, has proposed developing a film based on the lives of a family with ties to his community whose story was uncovered during the *Material Histories* project. In addition, there have been some preliminary discussions with the BBC to develop a documentary featuring one of the families researched during the project. This follows from the screening of an *Antiques Roadshow* episode (televised on 30.02.2008) in which one of the individuals who worked with **Brown** on the project participated.

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

1. Manager of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg, Canada: She will be able to make reference to the project identifying previously unknown archival material in family archives in Scotland relating to the experiences of HBC employees from NE Scotland. Some of these documents have since been donated to the HBCA, allowing for wider access to researchers. These documents include a memoir written by John Payne, who worked throughout Labrador between 1913-1938, and a letter donated by Angus Pelham Burn regarding recruitment in the northeast of Scotland.
2. Curator at Orkney Museum. She was invited, with a colleague, to the Material Histories workshop held in Aberdeen in 2007. She has since drawn upon that experience to develop public outreach activities at the Stromness Museum and other venues in Orkney that highlight the relationships between Orcadians and Aboriginal peoples. These include, most recently, the JohnRae200 conference in Kirkwall, which includes sessions on material culture and museum collections, and draws on the professional connections made by Park during the Material Histories workshop.

3. Associate Professor in the School of Engineering, AUT University, New Zealand. He is directly descended from one of the fur trading families the Material Histories team researched. Artefacts owned by his family (and some which he had donated to Glasgow Museums) were a central focus of the research. He will be able to address the personal impact of reconnecting with family members in Canada after seventy years of not knowing what happened to his First Nations relatives.
4. Associate Professor in the Department of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba, Canada. She is an interdisciplinary scholar with an active arts and curatorial practice. Her scholarly interests include Indigenous art history and art criticism, First Nations and Métis women's history, museology, revitalizing and decolonizing art practices. She will be able to point to the importance of the project in drawing attention to the stories of the women who made many fur trade artefacts, which are generally absent from written documents and scholarly literature on the fur trade. As a participant in the Material Histories workshop, she will also be able to comment on the project's impact in assisting museum curators responsible for First Nations artefacts in incorporating the perspectives of First Nations people into their curatorial practice, thus challenging preconceived ideas about their histories and contemporary lives.
5. Professor of Art History and Canada Research Chair in Modern Culture at Carlton University, Canada. She will be able to comment on the importance of the research in raising the profile of previously overlooked holdings in UK public and private collections. She should also be able to address the role of the project website in relation to digital access of First Nations collections. The Material Histories research fed into research co-ordinated by the professor through The Great Lakes Research Alliance for the Study of Aboriginal Arts and Cultures (GRASAC), which she co-ordinates. GRASAC is an international collaborative research partnership of Aboriginal community researchers, museum and archival scholars and university researchers, and as the Material Histories team assessed all Scottish museum collections as part of their own research, they were able to draw the professor's attention to collections which her own team was not able to study in person.

References:

Petch, Alison 2009, 'Review of Alison K. Brown (ed) *Material Histories: Proceedings of a workshop held at Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen, 26-27 April 2007.*' *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 22: 188-190.

Brownstone, Arni 2010. 'Review of Alison K. (ed) *Material Histories: Proceedings of a workshop held at Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen, 26-27 April 2007.*' *Museum Anthropology Review* 4 (1) online: <http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/mar/article/view/443/531>