

Institution: University of St Andrews

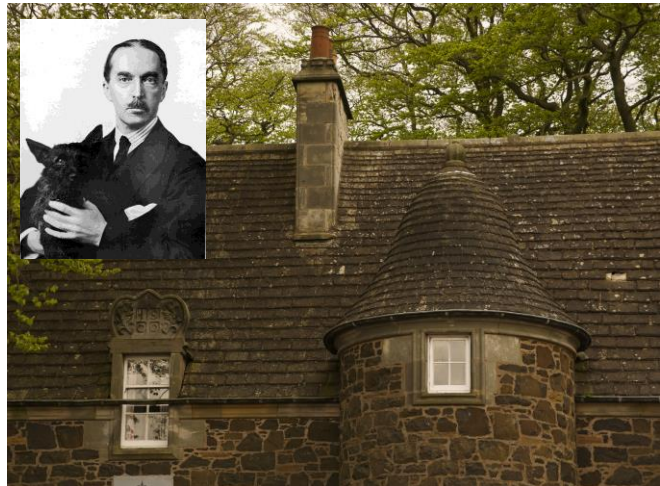


Unit of Assessment: 34 – Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory

Title of case study: Improving public understanding of architecture and the built environment via the online *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*

1. Summary of the impact

In 2006 Professor David Walker and his team at the University of St Andrews launched a fully searchable, free, online database that has transformed the ways in which anyone interested in Scottish architecture from 1840 onwards engages with the subject. The *Dictionary* is widely used by archivists, family historians, house owners, estate agencies, independent conservation campaigners, architects, planners and heritage bodies, schoolchildren and teachers, students and scholars. Its worldwide impact is attested by the organisers of related Canadian and South African websites, as well as by feedback from international users and a current hit rate of more than 3.8 million per year.



Robert Lorimer and his work: the gatehouse at Earls Hall, Fife, 1900

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

A pilot scheme established by Professor Walker in the School of Art History in 2001 initiated a three-year AHRB/AHRC-funded project (2002-5) employing two FTE researchers, Yvonne Hillyard, Leslie Harris (one year only) and Abigail Grater. Their task, under the leadership of Professor Walker (part-time Professor in the School from 1994), was to create a website (R1) as a public portal to information drawn systematically from a wide range of published and important unpublished primary sources, many of which are not readily accessible to the general researcher. These included: Scottish trade directories; RIBA nomination papers and other archives; newspaper and journal reports; details of buildings listed by Historic Scotland and recorded by the RCAHMS; student dissertations and theses; and information from Dean of Guild records, architects' office papers and from architects themselves. Professor Walker's own research files, however, provided the core data for the project, along with his stream of publications on architects, types of building and conservation matters (for a selection see R2-6). He also wrote new essays for the website on the rise of the architectural profession in Scotland, 1840-1940, and on recent developments in Scottish architectural history.

The website is founded on the idea that the ready availability of reliable data will both facilitate traditional research and provide a shortcut to new approaches. Since its launch in 2006 it has provided detailed, verified data on all architects (and some engineers) known to have worked in Scotland in the period 1840-1940; a second phase covers 1940-1980. By July 2013 it included 14,743 biographical and 57,089 building entries.

During the research many lesser-known architects were discovered and the *Dictionary* grew far beyond its original bounds. Its significance was recognised by financial contributions from charitable bodies and businesses (Aberbrothock, Binks, Gordon Fraser, Pilgrim and Russell trusts; Bank of Scotland, Burrell Company, EDI Group, Historic Scotland, Marc Fitch Fund, McTaggart & Mickel and the Royal & Ancient Club), which enabled the researchers to continue part-time after

Impact case study (REF3b)

2005. Since completion of the initial project Professor Walker (now Emeritus in St Andrews) has overseen research into the period 1940-1980 in collaboration with Dr Miles Glendinning of Edinburgh University and Yvonne Hillyard, now employed by Historic Scotland.

What the *Dictionary* database provides is accurate, detailed, factual material about the careers of architects and some engineers working in Scotland and the buildings they designed, whether constructed or not. It sets these in the context of the development of the architectural profession and the economic and social movements that affected the creation of buildings and the establishment of careers. Bibliographical references are also given to enable users to pursue their own research, and the website benefits from the input of individuals around the world. Information received as a result of an invitation on the site to provide corrections or new data is checked by the team and updated frequently. The website is therefore unusual in its longevity as well as its rigorous standards.

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

Key outputs

R1. D. Walker (with A. Grater, L. Harris & Y. Hillyard, et. al.), 2006, www.scottisharchitects.org.uk Database. This was part of the School's 2008 RAE submission when 75% of our work was judged to be of international significance.

All of the following are substantial publications of 2* or greater quality.

R2. D. M. Walker, 'The Country Houses, larger villas and related hotel designs of Sir John James Burnet', in A. J. Rowan & I. Gow (eds), *Scottish Country Houses 1600-1914*, Edinburgh University Press, 1995, 298-323. ISBN 0 7486 1077 4.

R3. D. M. Walker, 'Designing the Royal College, Glasgow', in D. C. Mays, M. S. Moss & M. K. Oglethorpe (eds), *Visions of Scotland's Past: Looking to the Future*, Tuckwell Press, 1999, 97-121. ISBN 1 86232 072 1.

R4. D. M. Walker, 'Presbyterian variations on themes by Sharpe and Pugin: the Scottish work of the Hays of Liverpool', *Architectural Heritage*, 13, 2002, 99-127. ISSN 1350 7524. DOI: [10.3366/arch.2002.13.1.99](https://doi.org/10.3366/arch.2002.13.1.99)

R5. D. M. Walker, 'Inns, Hotels and Related Building Types' & 'Business and Commercial Premises', in G. Stell, J. Shaw & S. Storrier (eds), *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology: Scotland's Buildings*, Tuckwell Press, 2003, 127-189 & 624-679. ISBN 1 86232 123 X.

R6. D. M. Walker, 'Old Scotch: Victorian and Edwardian High Baronial' & 'Radical Restorations of the Late Twentieth Century: Recollections from the Front Line', in A. Dakin, M. Glendinning & A. Mackechnie (eds), *Scotland's Castle Culture*, John Donald, 2011, 93-142 & 173-186. ISBN 978 1 906566 33 3.

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

Usage has grown from about 1.38 million hits in 2008 to over 3.8 million per year in 2012-13 and by July 2013 was rising by about 16% p.a. [S6]. In addition to the sheer number of hits achieved by the website, and first-hand knowledge of how the *Dictionary* is used in universities, there is plentiful evidence of how the site serves a wide variety of people across the world, and of its importance for their research, whether for work or leisure.

Family historians find it invaluable for investigating individual houses and estates and their architects. Such enquiries may be made purely for personal interest or in connection with proposed alterations or the sale of properties, as reported by professional archivists who deal with public requests of this nature and a researcher for a national firm of estate agents, who says '*I frequently find information that the owners are unaware of*' [S3]. Legal questions about the copyright of

drawings in archives are also easily settled by the reliable biographical data offered by the *Dictionary*.

Architects and planners use the website as a quick way to research project sites and one respondent from a major Edinburgh firm comments that the value of the *Dictionary* becomes especially evident when they work on English commissions: 'I can readily recall projects elsewhere that have taken several hours to get to the same level of understanding that would take less than five minutes for a similar project in Scotland' [S4]. This firm estimates the financial savings to itself and its clients as approximately £5000 per annum and the economic benefits of this across the country – for individuals and the industry – are clear. A particular strength of the *Dictionary* is that it provides an 'amazing depth and range of information by not limiting itself to the better known and therefore better valued and publicised architects and buildings', as noted by Docomomo, an international campaign group that champions the often-unfashionable cause of 20th-century architecture and prepares evidence in relation to listing, alteration or demolition proposals [S5]. The importance of free access out of office hours is noted by this entirely volunteer-run body, which also uses the *Dictionary* to prepare outreach events such as lectures, walking tours and exhibitions.

Educational use is also described by a teacher based in a primary school which celebrated its 120th anniversary in 2012. Production of an eBook and blogspot was a small part of the festivities, but the Deputy Head Teacher was delighted to find easily accessible information about the history of the building and to be given permission to incorporate it into the eBook [S1].

In 2007 the day-to-day management of the database and employment of the senior researcher were taken on by Historic Scotland (HS). As the government body responsible for listing buildings and a major user of the information, HS was eager to house the website, proof of its value as a resource for the protection of Scotland's historic architecture. A direct link is given on the HS web pages [S7]. Local interest is shown by the fact that Yvonne Hillyard, one of the original researchers and now Manager of the project based in HS, has published eight magazine articles since 2008 (in addition to a scholarly article, 'George Mathewson: A Far-travelled Dundee Architect', *Architectural Heritage*, XXII, 2012, 53-75) and given five talks to Scottish societies in the same period.

International usage of the *Dictionary* is attested by the Archivist at the British School at Athens [S2], who uses it particularly to research the School's Byzantine Research Fund Archive, and by website statistics and links from specialist information sites and related databases, such as one devoted to the South African built environment [S9-10]. The organiser of this and the Canadian equivalent use the *Dictionary* for fact-checking and appreciate the opportunity to contribute new material to it when found. This is a theme running through the feedback and indicates a strong sense of ownership of the *Dictionary* by its users. Because it is a record of people, more than of buildings, it has a personal following that includes retired architects interested in tracing old colleagues or students and keen to add to the record about projects currently attributed to a firm or local government team. The pleasure users experience from the website is evident in the feedback: 'The only criticism I have of the site is that it is addictive' [S3].

National coverage was given to the website on its launch, including in *The Times* [S8]. The international impact of the *Dictionary* and Professor Walker's work was recognised in 2008 by his appointment as Honorary Patron of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain and in 2009 of a [European Heritage Award Medal of Honour](#) by Europa Nostra for 'Dedicated Service', as recorded in the *2009 Awards Magazine* [S11].

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

S1. Deputy Head Teacher at Sciennes Primary School, Edinburgh, (copy of email and see also <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/book/dozen-decades-at-sciennes/id535981882?mt=11>, viewable on iPad only, but printouts on file) corroborates the use of the site by teachers for school projects.

Impact case study (REF3b)

S2. Archivist, British School at Athens (pdf of letter) corroborates that free access to the information provided by the website enables non-HEI researchers to conduct and contribute to scholarly research.

S3. Self-employed researcher for estate agents (copy of email) corroborates that the website benefits commercial property companies as well as the owners of houses or other buildings.

S4. Associate/Architectural Historian, Simpson & Brown Architects, Edinburgh (copy of email) corroborates the value of the site for cost saving in the architectural profession and for the provision of better information to the clients of architects.

S5. Co-ordinator, Docomomo Scotland (pdf of letter) praises the *Dictionary* for its comprehensive nature, accessibility out of office hours, and usefulness for educational work (Docomomo campaigns for the preservation of modern architecture in the face of proposals for demolition or alteration).

The following report, websites and publication give evidence of the wide recognition of the Dictionary in Britain and across the world.

S6. Usage figures for the year 1 August 2012 – 31 July 2013 reported by the website designer, 7 September 2013 (report on file).

S7. <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/heritage/historicandlistedbuildings.htm>

S8. Article by Marcus Binney, *The Times*, 26 June 2006, p.54 (pdf). This corroborates the date when the website was made public and the national attention it received.

S9 <http://www.designinform.co.uk/artssearch-research-guides/research-guide-no-1/architects.html>

S10. http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/style_det.php?styleid=361

S11. <http://www.europanostra.org/laureates-2009/>