

Institution: Cardiff University
Unit of Assessment: 30
Title of case study: Shaping Public Understanding of the Knights Templar
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The Knights Templar are famous for their involvement in the Medieval crusades but the myths surrounding them and popular representations, as seen in <i>The Da Vinci Code</i>, have created an inaccurate view of the Templars' historical significance. Nicholson's research on (a) the Templars and their estates, (b) her collaborations with museum and heritage organizations, and (c) her advice on Templar properties, has challenged misconceptions about the Templars and informed professional practice in presenting heritage sites, benefiting individuals, authors, archaeologists and museum practitioners. Her research has equipped non-academic audiences with a clearer understanding of the Templars, generating new interpretations and cultural artefacts by diverse groups worldwide.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Sustained by a long tradition of research and investment in research resources on the Crusades at Cardiff University, Helen Nicholson (lecturer 1996-2000; senior lecturer 2000-4; reader 2004-13; professor 2013 to present) has explored (a) the history of the Knights Templar more generally [3.1; 3.2], and (b) examined in detail the Templars in the British Isles [3.3; 3.4].</p> <p>In her work on the appearances of the Knights Templar in Medieval epic and romance literature, Nicholson provided a clearer understanding of their religious roles, such as caring for the sick, their warrior role of fighting Muslims, and the role of 'Templars' in the Grail romances [3.1]. Through her research, Nicholson revealed how these roles developed over time, what function the appearances of these military religious orders performed in the composition of fictional works, and how they presented a positive image of the Templars to provide 'the definitive study of literary representations of the military orders in medieval literature' [<i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i> 33:1 (2002), 206]. In analyzing Medieval epic and romance literature, Nicholson scrutinized the legends of the Grail and associated romances. Her research underscored the close connections between literary <i>topoi</i> and the activities of the Knights Templar and demonstrated how Grail romances need to be read as <i>romans à clef</i> rather than fictionalized histories [3.1]. Equally, in identifying and analyzing a much wider range of written evidence than previously known, her work debunked myths surrounding the Templars; for example, that they had ships to engage in world exploration, were a secret organisation which had little influence on society, or were destroyed because they were corrupt [3.2].</p> <p>In 1999, Nicholson began investigating and translating the proceedings against the Templars in the British Isles (1308–12) as part of her on-going research on the Knights Templar [3.1; 3.2]. Although the trials have been the subject of historical analysis to cast light on the episcopate, on procedural issues, and on how the testimonies were used, scholarship on the Templars in the British Isles and the proceedings against them has traditionally been limited by the fact that the proceedings have not been fully edited or available in full translation. This situation has led to misunderstandings from confusion of individuals and places to a failure to distinguish between third-party rumour and first-hand accounts, which has led to unsupported allegations being reported as fact. In her initial research findings on the trial, Nicholson demonstrated how the stories told by outsiders of abominable Templar rituals, secret meetings, and murders at the dead of night were mere rumour [3.3].</p> <p>Nicholson's more in-depth analysis, transcription and translation of the proceedings was supported by a British Academy Senior Research Fellowship [3.5], which funded twelve months research leave (2003-4) and by university-funded research leave (2009-10). This research resulted in a new transcription and translation of the surviving documents relating to the trial in the British Isles [3.4]. Combined with the accompanying contextualization and analysis her work represents a crucial new source for understanding the history of the Templars in the British Isles, which as the <i>English Historical Review</i> notes 'entirely supersedes Wilkins's abridged and inaccurate edition' (<i>EHR</i> 128 (2013), 396).</p>

Nicholson's translation and editing of the proceedings brought together for the first time the widely scattered editions of the texts to address the weaknesses found in earlier editions [3.4]. Nicholson's edition and the accompanying contextual analysis of the international political and religious context of the trial, has provided historians with a better understanding of the religious beliefs among the lay population of the British Isles, the national and international mobility of lay religious orders, the social function of the Templars in the British Isles, and the organization and operations of the Templars at a local, national and international level. Nicholson's translation and analysis helps Medieval historians and those working on the Templars understand not only the ways in which the case against the Templars was made but also how the text travelled, how it was used in a rushed summary form in Europe, and how it shaped justifications for the suppression of the Order. Furthermore, her research represents the first complete identification of the Templar properties mentioned during the proceedings, of all the Templars in the British Isles at the time of the arrests, and of the handful of Templars who absconded and escaped arrest [3.3; 3.4].

Nicholson's translation and editing of the proceedings has laid the foundation for future research on the Templars in Britain and Ireland, and is 'of inestimable value to scholars working on medieval Latin texts' (*Catholic Historical Review* 98.3 (2012), 550-52)

3. References to the research

PUBLICATIONS

3.1 **Nicholson, H** (2000). *Love, War, and the Grail: Templars, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights in Medieval Epic and Romance, 1150-1500*. Leiden: Brill. ISBN: 978-9004120143

3.2 **Nicholson, H** (2001). *The Knights Templar: A New History*. Stroud: Sutton Publishing. ISBN: 9780750925174

3.3 **Nicholson, H** (2009). *The Knights Templar on Trial: The Trial of the Templars in the British Isles, 1308-1311*. Stroud: The History Press. ISBN: 9780750946810

3.4 **Nicholson, H** (2011). *The Proceedings against the Templars in the British Isles*, 2 vols - vol. 1, *The Latin Edition*: xl + 432pp., vol. 2, *The Translation*: ix + 653pp. Farnham: Ashgate. ISBN: 9781409436508

EXTERNAL GRANTS

3.5 British Academy Senior Research Fellowship (2003-4), £28,028: 'Trial of the Templars in the British Isles'. **Nicholson, H** (PI)

[3.2 submitted to RAE2008; 3.4 submitted to REF. All items available from the HEI]

4. Details of the impact

The impact arising from Nicholson's research on the Templars, the British trials and the identification of Templar sites has three main strands:

- a) challenging popular misconceptions about the Templars through various media, including books, contributions to radio and podcasts to benefit audiences fascinated by the Templars;
- b) providing accurate data about the location and operations of the Templars to benefit individuals, authors, archaeologists, and museum professionals;
- c) enhancing heritage presentation through work with museums and heritage trusts to benefit these organizations;

In doing so Nicholson has influenced a diverse range of beneficiaries from Lincolnshire to Spain and the US.

Challenging popular misconceptions about the Templars

In her books which translate her research to a wider audience (e.g. *A Brief History of the Knights Templar* (Constable & Robinson: 2010), interviews (e.g. with Lisa Grant, Talk Radio Europe, which broadcasts to c.500,000 English speakers in Spain), podcasts (e.g. <http://www.historyextra.com/podcasts?page=15>), public lectures (e.g. Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales in 2009), and in her online 'FAQs on the Crusades', Nicholson has challenged common misconceptions about the Templars. Given the resonance of the Templars in popular culture, her books aimed at a general readership have sold widely (13,122 between 2010 and June

2012), while her *BBC History Magazine* podcast has had c.80,000 downloads. By identifying and analyzing a much wider range of written evidence than previously known, her work challenges and dispels many mistaken beliefs about the Templars. These include supposed connections with the Holy Grail, alleged corruption, and the exclusion of women. Her critical analysis of these myths has informed public understanding, while her research is widely cited on non-academic websites on the Templars (e.g. <http://www.catholic.com/magazine/articles/the-sad-history-of-the-knights-templar>; <http://ordo-saint-maurice.webs.com/ontemplarsoftkit.htm>). Responses to Nicholson's books aimed at a general readership include assessments that her *A Brief History of the Knights Templars* (2010) reveals 'the complete lack of any connection between the real Templars and modern Templar groups nor with bunkum originating from grail myths.' [5.2], while comments on Goodreads.com on *The Knights Templar on Trial* (2009) include 'no-one who is serious about understanding the Templars can afford not to read her books.'

Providing accurate data about the location and operations of the Templars

In addressing the myths surrounding the Templars and in exploring the history of the Templars, Nicholson's research has provided accurate data about the location and operations of the Templars. In doing so, it has informed individuals by equipping them with a better understanding of the nature of the Templars. For example, members of the US medieval re-enactment group (146 members), The Beausant Brotherhood, use Nicholson's research to understand the Templars' equipment. Comments on the Brotherhood's Facebook page include statements such as 'my kit is based on research you've done' and 'I suspect you will want to go to the writings of Dr. Helen Nicholson--she is my premier source for research in the Military Orders.' [5.3]. In providing accurate data on the Templars, Nicholson's research has also contributed to the production of cultural artefacts. For example, her research has allowed authors and local historians to reach a better understanding of the Templars, such as providing Jack Skelton-Wallace with information on Templar personnel at Templecombe, Somerset. Her research has equally benefited a multi-media project, 'the Kiwi Knights', developed by two New Zealand musicians. The project, which had over 870 followers on Facebook [<https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Kiwi-Knights/124696867553118?ref=ts>], charted their efforts to walk the thirteenth-century route to Jerusalem used by medieval pilgrims and engage creatively with musical art forms. Between 2009 and 2010, Nicholson's research insights influenced the Kiwi Knights' decisions about the route they took, and transformed their understanding of the Templar properties which they encountered in France and Germany [5.1].

Enhancements to heritage presentation and practice

Nicholson has influenced heritage presentation and practice by making a significant contribution to the interpretation of the cultural heritage of the Templars in Britain. This has benefited professional practice by directing the work of county archaeologists across the UK and increasing their understanding of the Templar sites currently under excavation [5.6]. Her research has equally enhanced how museums present the Templars. For example, Nicholson's work on the Templars' estates was used by the Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales to develop an interactive exhibition on the Crusades in early medieval Wales as part of the museum's Origins gallery. There were 62,863 visitors to the gallery during the exhibition (Sept 2009 – April 2010), and surveys reported that after attending the exhibition museum visitors wanted to learn more about the Crusades [5.7]. Nicholson's research has also transformed the work of individual museum managers by influencing their understanding of the nature of Templar properties in their locality. In East Anglia, for example, Basil Abbot, Manager of the Diss Museum, attests that Nicholson's research 'opened my eyes to a wealth of material and insights on the Templars. The research has influenced my practice at the Diss Museum, including the content and presentation of exhibitions, such as an exhibition on Freemasonry in 2012, and the associated out-reach material, such as media articles, plus talks, tours and presentations.' [5.5]

The impact on cultural heritage is visibly demonstrated in how Nicholson's work has informed Heritage Lincolnshire's virtual website (http://lincsheritage.org/education/temple_bruer/index.php) on Temple Bruer, a scheduled monument and one of the best-known Knights Templar sites remaining in England. As only limited information remains for Templar sites in Lincolnshire, Nicholson's research was essential for interpreting the layout and contents of Temple Bruer and

determining the interpretation put forward by Heritage Lincolnshire in their creation of a computer-generated reconstruction and animated fly-through of the preceptory [5.8; 5.4]. Where previously little had been known about the interior of the building, Nicholson's research on comparable properties allowed the designers to bring to life the medieval preceptor and contents of the chapel, and identify the buildings within the Templars' site, allowing viewers to see what the preceptory may have looked like in the fourteenth century. Since June 2011, the Temple Bruer website has had over 2,000 unique page views, and the animated fly-through model has been adopted for another heritage site. Images from the reconstruction have been the focus of work with all Lincolnshire schools as part of Heritage Lincolnshire's Schools Improvement Service and have also featured in a series of county and local events (which reached an estimated audience of over 2,000 in 2012 alone) and local media, including featured articles on Radio Lincolnshire [5.4].

Heritage Lincolnshire attests that, 'The information that she [Nicholson] was able to share with us regarding the property of the Knights Templar at the Yorkshire site [Temple Newsam] assisted greatly in the reconstructions and provided justification for the inclusion of detail at a level that would otherwise have relied almost entirely on conjecture. The community benefit of the project has been considerable' [5.4]. Nicholson's research has hence directly contributed to the quality of the tourist experience in Lincolnshire and influenced Heritage Lincolnshire's education and heritage programme.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 BBC News report 'Cardiff "Troubadours" on "Templar Trail" to Jerusalem' (15/08/13), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-10808224> corroborates the impact of Nicholson's research on the production of cultural artefacts and creation of the multi-media project, 'the Kiwi Knights'.

5.2 Amazon.co.uk reviews (2012): http://www.amazon.co.uk/product-reviews/1849011001/ref=cm_cr_dp_hist_five?ie=UTF8&filterBy=addFiveStar&showViewpoints=0 corroborates the impact of Nicholson's research on public understanding of the Knights Templar and challenging of popular misconceptions.

5.3 PDF of discussion on Beausant Brotherhood Facebook page (2012) corroborates Brotherhood's use of Nicholson's research to improve their understanding of the Templars and their equipment. (29/06/12).

5.4 Testimonial from the former Director, Heritage Lincolnshire on the impact of Nicholson's research on the enhancement of heritage, local communities and schools through the creation of a computer-generated reconstruction and animated fly-through of Temple Bruer for Heritage Lincolnshire.

5.5 Testimonial from the Director, Diss Museum, Norfolk, on the impact of Nicholson's research on practice at Diss Museum, including the content and presentation of exhibitions related to the Templars. (25/07/13).

5.6 Contact Details. Archaeologist, Monmouth Archaeology, who can corroborate impact of Nicholson's research on professional practice and understanding of the Templar sites being excavated in Herefordshire.

5.7 Contact Details. Acting Keeper of Archaeology & Numismatics, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales, who can corroborate how Nicholson's research has enhanced how the museum has presented the Templars and the Crusades to visitors.

5.8 Contact Details. Temple Bruer website project officer, who can corroborate the impact of Nicholson's research on the enhancement of heritage presentation through the creation of a computer-generated reconstruction and animated fly-through of Temple Bruer for Heritage Lincolnshire for Heritage Lincolnshire.

[All documents, feedback, and testimonies are available as PDFs from the HEI on request]