

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Bristol</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 30 History</p>
<p>Title of case study: The Cabot Project: changing how the public and schoolchildren interpret history</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The Cabot Project, led by Dr Evan Jones at the University of Bristol, has raised public awareness of England’s contribution to early maritime exploration, in the process challenging perceptions among both the public and schoolchildren about how history is researched and written. The Project’s research has generated massive international news coverage, including numerous follow-up stories, written as a result of the positive response to earlier coverage, in both the mainstream press and popular history publications. Attention has focused on both the outcomes of the research and on the process of historical research and publication. Since 2013, the Project’s ‘Schools Group’ has used the team’s research findings to contest accepted readings of history in local schools. Research conducted by Dr Jones led to his appointment as a trustee and Education Chair for the <i>Matthew</i> of Bristol Trust, which runs a replica ship that serves as an icon for the city and is an important heritage attraction.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The Cabot Project had its inception in the decision of Dr Evan Jones, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Bristol, to investigate the extraordinary claims of Dr Alwyn Ruddock, a former Reader at the University of London (d. December 2005). From the 1960s Dr Ruddock dominated research into the Bristol discovery voyages led by the Venetian explorer John Cabot, whose 1497 expedition resulted in the European discovery of North America. It was known that Ruddock had found much new material on these famous voyages and had intended to publish a book on the subject. This volume looked set to revolutionise our understanding of the nature of Europe’s engagement with North America in the two decades after 1492. Given the significance of Ruddock’s apparent discoveries, other historians were deterred from pursuing research in this field for many decades. Yet she never published and on her death she ordered that all her research notes and writings be destroyed.</p> <p>Having learned of Dr Ruddock’s decision, Jones began an investigation in 2006 to see if it was possible to rescue any of her research. This led first to the publication of a 2007 article [1], which investigated the claims she made in her 1992 book proposal to Exeter University Press, and her subsequent correspondence with them. In 2009 Jones published a second article [2] that was able to verify more of Ruddock’s assertions – including her claim that a Bristol merchant called William Weston had led a previously unknown expedition to North America in 1499. This was the first English-led voyage to the continent and probably the first North West Passage expedition. In 2009 Dr Jones started to receive formal funding for his project, which allowed other research collaborators to become involved, such as Margaret Condon (Research Associate 2009 to present, University of Bristol) and Dr Francesco Guidi Bruscoli (University of Florence). Their collective investigations resulted in further finds, such as the discovery that Cabot’s expeditions were financed by an Italian banking house that also funded Christopher Columbus [3]. Other outputs include an entry in the <i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> [4], a chapter in an edited volume on early English settlement in the New World [5], and fourteen annotated document transcriptions, some accompanied by extensive introductions, published through the University of Bristol’s electronic repository [6].</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>[1] Evan T. Jones, ‘Alwyn Ruddock: "John Cabot and the Discovery of America "’, <i>Historical Research</i>, 81 (May, 2008), 224-254. Published online in 2007. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2281.2007.00422.x</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

- [2] Evan T. Jones, 'Henry VII and the Bristol expeditions to North America: the Condon documents', *Historical Research*, 83 (August, 2010). Published online in 2009. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2281.2009.00519.x
- [3] Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, 'John Cabot and his Italian Financiers', *Historical Research*, 85 (August, 2012). DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2281.2012.00597.x
Dr Guidi Bruscoli is a Visiting Research Fellow in the Dept.
- [4] Evan T. Jones and M. M. Condon, 'Weston, William (d. in or before 1505)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, May 2010).
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/101082>
- [5] E. T. Jones, 'Bristol, Cabot and the New Found Land, 1496-1500' in P. E. Pope and S. Lewis-Simpson (eds.), *Exploring Atlantic Transitions: Archaeologies of Transience and Permanence in New Found Lands* (Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology, special publications. Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2013). Available upon request.
- [6] A full list of the transcriptions (totalling 36,300 words) can be found on the Cabot Project website: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/history/research/cabot.html#transcriptions>. This gives links to the items published via PURE, the University of Bristol's E-Repository. PURE is a fully-supported electronic repository that is designed to ensure the permanent accessibility of the items. Many of these have been cited in the print publications [1-5] mentioned above.

Grants received:

Evan Jones, 'The Cabot Project', Gretchen Bauta, a private Canadian benefactor donated £90,000 to the Cabot Project in May 2011. This was supplemented by £30,000 from the UK Government's 'Gift Match' scheme to Universities and £22,500 in Gift Aid. The funding covers the period July 2011 - June 2015. Mrs Bauta has also provided CAN\$90,000 to Prof Peter Pope (Memorial University Newfoundland) for his related project on Carbonear. This is conducting archaeological investigations at the site Dr Ruddock believed to be the location for the first church and Christian community in North America. Evan Jones, 'The Cabot Project', British Academy, small grants scheme, £6,317 (June 2010 – December 2011)
Evan Jones, 'The Cabot Project', Burning Gold Productions and the Faculty of Arts Research Director's fund, £2,000 (July 2009 – July 2010)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)**International media coverage**

The impact of the project on the wider public is most evident from the media coverage it has received. Since 2007 there have been hundreds of newspaper articles, as well as television and radio interviews, about the ongoing research. Jones' 2007 article [1] attracted considerable media interest, particularly in Canada, with attention focusing on the nature of the historical investigation, as well as on Ruddock's actions and claims. For instance, the Canadian *National Post* published a series of articles about the project on: 26 August 2009, 27 August 2009, 6 September 2009, 20 October 2010, 28 April 2012 and 8 July 2012, as the story captured the public's imagination. The second article published in August 2010 [2] resulted in heavy additional media coverage, with the BBC News website, for instance, ranking the story in its 'ten most read' items for several hours [a].

The discovery that an Italian banking house funded Cabot's voyages [3] also attracted much interest. As before, the press stories, such as those in the *New York Times* (June 2012) [b] and the Italian economic magazine, *Il* (October 2012), focused as much on the investigation as on the findings. The *New York Times* article [b] for instance, characterises the research as 'detective work', describes how the research evolved and discusses how it challenges the accepted version of history. Such stories help to change public perceptions that academic history is dry and involves merely the retelling and reinterpretation of a corpus of known facts. The widespread interest in the Cabot Project's research and its ability to attract a large audience, is perhaps most apparent from the download statistics of the three academic articles mentioned above. These were all published in the international refereed journal, *Historical Research*. The journal agreed, from the outset, to make the articles freely available online because it was anticipated that there would be

considerable public interest in the research. All three articles rapidly became, and have since remained, the journal's most read articles, being its most downloaded articles in 2012 [c]. In 2012, Jones' first article [1] received 2,195 downloads, Guidi-Bruscoli's article [3] received 1,379 downloads and Jones' second article [2] received 844 downloads. The fourth most read article received 588 downloads [c]. Although there is no way of determining who all these readers were, it seems likely that most were members of the public – the download figures being so far in excess of what is typical for academic journal articles.

Popular history

Interest in the project's research is evident in the coverage it has received in popular history books and magazines. These include *BBC History Magazine* (Sept 2009, circ. 70,000), *Current Archaeology* (Nov 2009, circ. 18,000) and *Canada's History* (April, 2010, circ. 50,000) [d]. The last of these articles, by Douglas Hunter, focuses almost entirely on Ruddock's claims and Jones' subsequent investigation. These matters also feature prominently in Hunter's subsequent book: *The Race to the New World: Christopher Columbus, John Cabot and a Lost History of Discovery* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), which received excellent reviews by both the press and academics [e]. Interest in John Cabot is further evident in the c.40,000 page views per month received by the 'John Cabot' Wikipedia page, which Jones largely re-wrote in 2009 [f]. A desire to learn more about the Cabot Project's research is also apparent from the c.200 page views his Project webpage receives each month.

Schools Group

In 2011 Dr Jones set up a 'Schools Group' as part of the Cabot Project, with the aim of using the project's research both to challenge children's perceptions about what history is about and to encourage them to carry out their own historical investigations. The most ambitious of these initiatives to date involved 15 Bristol History undergraduates acting as research supervisors to c.50 Year 7/8 children from local secondary schools. The children conducted group research projects on Bristol's maritime history of the 15th-16th centuries, before giving presentations on their research at a conference at the University. The teachers involved felt the pupils benefited enormously from this exercise, which was particularly effective at challenging high-performing pupils. Chris Skidmore MP, a member of the Education Select Committee and Vice Chair of the All Parliamentary Party Group on History and Archives has endorsed the approach taken by the Cabot Project: 'The Department of Education is looking to raise the participation in history in secondary schools, with the subject having been placed in the EBacc. The Cabot Project helps schools to instil a passion for history amongst their pupils at an early age. Projects that ensure university engagement with local schools are also vital for raising aspirations of school pupils, particularly high-performing pupils whose need for additional challenge in their progress has recently been highlighted by Ofsted. The Cabot Project's establishment of a schools group is a pioneering approach to raising aspirations amongst pupils to achieve, and promoting greater integrated working between universities and schools. It is a model that should be looked at by other universities as the benefit it provides is both self-evident and extremely welcome.' [g]

One of the state school teachers noted that, 'this project was a fantastic opportunity for these students to engage in some real historical enquiry to the depth that we can never recreate in the classroom. I would wholeheartedly recommend the project to others and look forward to running it again next year!' and another that, 'I hoped that the students would engage with an aspect of Bristol's history; gain experience of what it was like to work as a 'proper' historian, using primary evidence to approach enquiry questions...my expectations were met.' [h]. The full responses to the questionnaires issued to the school teachers were subsequently posted on the project webpage in the hope of encouraging participation by other schools [i]. That the project did stretch pupils in the way intended was very apparent at the Schools' Conference (20 March 2013), where presentations were graded using the criteria applied in the Department of History to first-year undergraduate 'Group Project' presentations. On this basis the best groups received higher 2.2 marks. A schoolteacher and one of the doctoral students involved (Harriett Webster) have recently had an article about the exercise accepted for the pedagogic journal *Teaching History*. The three state

schools that participated (Redland Green School, Cotham High School and St Mary Redcliffe) intend to repeat the exercise this year, with others planning to join them [i].

Heritage Industry

Cabot and his voyages have long played an important part in the historical identity of Bristol, which included the construction of a working 'replica' of Cabot's ship, the *Matthew* of Bristol, for the 1997 celebration of his voyage. This vessel plays an important part in the city's heritage industry, receiving c. 80,000 visitors per year. It has also often been selected to represent the city. The *Matthew* features prominently, for instance, on the city's 'Visit Bristol' posters and the vessel was invited to represent Bristol at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee 'Thames Pageant' (June, 2012). In 2011 Dr Jones was invited to be a trustee of the newly-created 'Matthew of Bristol Trust' and was appointed as chair of the Education Committee, with aim of using his expertise to shape the way information about the voyages is communicated to the visiting public. In the words of the Chairman of the Trust: 'Dr Jones has helped generate excitement in Bristol and beyond about Cabot's voyages. At the same time he has played a key role in informing our volunteers, and through them the general public, about these famous expeditions.' [j]

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

- [a] 'King's letter reveals epic voyage', BBC news online (27 August 2009) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8224206.stm>. Corroborates BBC media coverage.
- [b] 'Discovery of a £16 Advance Sheds Light on John Cabot's Adventures', *New York Times* (19 June 2012) <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/19/science/john-cabot-italian-bankers-and-the-new-world.html>. Corroborates how media coverage focused on the process of historical investigation thereby raising public awareness of how historical research is conducted.
- [c] Deputy Editor, *Historical Research*. Corroborates number of downloads of articles.
- [d] Douglas Hunter, 'Rewriting History: Alwyn Ruddock and John Cabot', *Canada's History* (April, 2010) http://www.douglashunter.ca/douglashunter.ca/readings/Entries/2010/7/11_Rewriting_History_Alwyn_Ruddock_and_John_Cabot.html. Corroborates claims about interest in the project by those writing for 'popular history' publications and the focus these had on the 'detective' elements of the project and the way the research was being conducted.
- [e] Editorial Reviews of: Douglas Hunter, *Race to the New World* (2010). <http://www.amazon.com/Race-New-World-Christopher-Discovery/dp/0230341659>. Corroborates the positive critical reception of this book.
- [f] Viewing statistics of the 'John Cabot' webpage on Wikipedia http://stats.grok.se/en/latest/John_Cabot. Corroborates claims made about the high public interest in John Cabot. Note that viewing figures for this page vary markedly over the course of the year, from c.65,000 per month in the autumn to c.15,000 per month in the summer.
- [g] Chris Skidmore, MP. Corroborates the value in raising aspirations.
- [h] Teachers from Redland Green and Cotham Schools. Corroborates value for pupils and teachers.
- [i] Cabot Project Schools Group: questionnaire responses of secondary school teachers, April 2013' <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/history/research/history/research/cabotschools2013q.xlsx>. Corroborates the positive reaction of all four participant schools and the extent to which the schools group achieved its aims.
- [j] Chairman of the *Matthew* of Bristol Trust. Corroborates the value that the Trust attaches to Dr Jones' work.