

Institution: University of Gloucestershire
Unit of Assessment: History
Title of case study: Heritage From Below: concept and method
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The origins of this category and critical concept lie in Dr Robertson's interest in the way local communities have sought to put the past to use in the present. A strong interest in public histories in the Scottish Highlands, both individual and communal, has brought significant opportunities for collaboration with, and dissemination to, local history organisations and other community groups. Further impact includes: the curating of an art exhibition; engaging with practitioners to explore the ways in which memories of flooding can be utilised in future resilience; contributions to debates on land and identity in the Scottish Highlands.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The underpinning research in this field (which continues) originated in work which led to the publication of the monograph <i>Landscapes of Protest in the Scottish Highlands after 1914: the later Highland Land Wars</i> (Ashgate, 2013). It became apparent, however, that there was also an opportunity to make a contribution to the interdisciplinary field of critical heritage studies through the exploration of a contemporary movement to memorialise these protest events. Interweaving oral histories and documentary evidence, Robertson was able to show that there was an important politics underlying memorialisation efforts which speaks of and to local identity formulations. Drawing on this and other contexts, Robertson went on to develop a method, category and concept which critiqued both dominant paradigms and the spatial scale at which the deployment of the past in the present has been analysed. Hence, 'Heritage from Below' is taken to mean the uses of the past in the present that set out to challenge hegemonic interpretations. This is understood differently from 'local' history, which has a specific spatial register of identity.</p> <p>Robertson's work has subsequently focussed on the development, deepening and expansion of these interests. The importance of land and local identity in memory work was addressed in essays in edited collections and a keynote lecture at the Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscape in Berlin in 2006. The concept was first outlined in <i>The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity</i> in 2008 and later that year Robertson took up a Visiting Research Fellowship in the Faculty of Humanities at Curtin University (Western Australia), where he was able to further his research and develop his thinking in collaboration with others. The culmination of all this activity was the coming together of a group of international researchers interested in developing work around the concept of 'heritage from below'. A collection of essays entitled <i>Heritage From Below</i> was published by Ashgate in 2012 under Robertson's editorship.</p> <p>Robertson has extended the reach of 'heritage from below' through a number of funded research projects, including an AHRC network and an ESRC standard grant. In both instances the principle aim was the investigation of the ways in which memories of past flood events can be deployed to aid resilience in future events. Here, Robertson acted as oral history advisor and developed a strong working relationship with members of the local arts community. Collaborative activities with colleagues at Curtin University continue, and Professor Roy Jones has been appointed to a Visiting Professorship at the University of Gloucestershire in order to explore new, but related, research strands. Most recently, Robertson has been awarded a University of Gloucestershire</p>

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Research Grant to lead on a project investigating senses of heritage associated with the family croft and surrounding land and identity in the Scottish Highlands. This also addresses themes of memory and loss, the focus of a panel that Robertson and Jones will co-chair at the 2nd International Conference of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies in Brisbane in December 2014.

All of these projects have involved community partnerships and impact beyond a purely academic audience. Robertson is, for instance, currently working with the Gloucestershire-based arts collective, Walking the Land, to explore ways in which the arts can be deployed to help build community resilience in the face of future flood events.

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

The main outputs of this research are:

'Walking the Wateryscape' (with R. Keating and K. Portman), *Journal of Arts and Communities*, nos. 1 and 2, vol. 4, 2013, pp. 10-31.

'Memory, Heritage and the Micropolitics of Memorialisation', in E. Cameron (ed.), *Recovering from the Clearances*, Kershader, Isle of Lewis, 2013, pp. 147-62.

Heritage From Below, London: Ashgate, 2012, 244 pp.

'Heritage From Below', in B. Graham and P. Howard (eds), *Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, London: Ashgate, 2008, pp. 143-58.

'Land, People and Identity: Popular Protest in the Highlands of Scotland after 1914', in L. Kennedy and R. J. Morris (eds), *Order and Dis-order: Ireland and Scotland, 1600-2001*, Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006, pp. 189-202.

'Memory, Identity and the Memorialisation of Conflict in the Scottish Highlands', (with T. Hall), in N. Moore and Y. Whelan (eds), *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Space: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape*, London: Ashgate, 2006, pp. 19-36.

with P. Richards, (eds), *Studying Cultural Landscapes*, London: Arnold, 2003, 216 pp.

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

Robertson's research on 'heritage from below' and its significance to an understanding of the use of the past in the present more generally has been disseminated through books, articles, radio broadcasts (on the preservation of unpopular public buildings, for instance) and public lectures. This has led to an enhanced public awareness of the cultural role of memory work and memorialisation more generally, and of the possibilities offered by heritage, when expressed from below more specifically.

Robertson's commitment to bringing his work to a wider audience is evidenced through a number of different fora. In 2006, for example, the Countryside Agency took the decision to lodge the archive of the outputs from the funding stream Local Heritage Initiative (LHI) at the University of Gloucestershire, partly in recognition that Robertson's work was the most supportive of the Initiative. Usage figures for this archive compare favourably 'to a couple of other collections that we have that are in a similar situation' (UG archivist). LHI material has also been used in a diverse

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range of exhibitions, including Open Days, public lectures, reunions and for the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council Committee.

In October 2006, Robertson was researching a land disturbances memorialisation project in the Outer Hebrides and was invited to feed back his findings to the organising committee, Cuimhneachain nan Gaisgeach. This marked the beginning of wider dissemination and community engagement in the region. Testimony to the nature of this impact has been provided by John Randall, chair of the Islands Book Trust, a major force for regeneration in the Outer Hebrides. According to Randall, Robertson's efforts have both enhanced 'local pride in and understanding of the valuable heritage of these islands' and 'had a beneficial impact on some of the most rural parts of the UK – through Iain's own visits, those of his students and the higher profile given through his presentations to the memorial cairns which now attract a significant number of visitors. I am aware that the community-run shop, hostel and café at the Ravenspoint centre on South Lochs, Lewis, as well as other local businesses, have benefitted from these visits'.

In 2010/11 Robertson acted as co-organiser of the AHRC-funded Living Flood Histories workshops which drew in arts practitioners, community groups and policy makers. Robertson was co-leader of the multidisciplinary conference that was the culmination of this network. The conference combined academic papers, musical performance, readings and drama in order to draw in the widest possible audience, alongside the art exhibition 'Wateryscapes' that ran immediately before and during the conference. Gloucester Guildhall suggests that 13,503 people visited the venue during the period of the exhibition. The conference was reported by Heart FM and Robertson was interviewed for their mid-morning show. One arts collective involved in all aspects of the network output was Walking the Land. This resulted in important new work and collaboration with Robertson which, according to the principle artists, 'was catalytic and continues to influence the way we make work'. Further, Robertson's 'input during 2012/13 has had an impact on our ongoing work with others, for example in a project called "River" which continues to look at community resilience and challenge ideas of landscape, or "taskscape" to use Iain's term. ... For us and those that we work with, it was a very fruitful collaboration'.

Robertson's current project returns to questions of land, identity and heritage in the Scottish Highlands. Working in informal partnership (confirmed at Board level) with the North Harris Trust and other community organisations, this began with student-led field recordings, which, according to the Trust, had benefits similar to those described by Randall above. Together, Robertson, project partners and a long-standing Highlands resident working as a locally-based Research Assistant, have moved to create a digital archive which will be lodged with various local history groups (also involved with the data collection). According to the North Harris Trust's Development Manager, this project matches well with their 'cultural heritage objectives', with outcomes of significance and value 'to this community'. Indicative of this is the fact that Robertson has given a paper summarising the research to the annual conference of the Islands Book Trust, which is explicitly aimed at both the academic and non-academic communities, and he has published a summary of the paper in the winter 2013 edition of the island's local historical society newsletter. As articulated by the North Harris Trust's Development Manager, 'Every family here has relationships and links with descendants of those who have had to emigrate from the islands for whatever reason and I am certain that the research will be of great interest to them'.

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

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'Learning to live with water' final report: [Learning to live with water](#)

Blog from workshop participant: <http://ruscombegreen.blogspot.com/2010/11/living-flood-histories-great-day.html>

Land and Identity in the Scottish Highlands references:

- Development Manager, North Harris Trust: <http://www.north-harris.org/>
- Chairman, Islands Book Trust: <http://www.theislandsbooktrust.com/>
 - Conference - <http://www.theislandsbooktrust.com/2012/07/recovering-from-the-clearances-conference-wed-5th-to-sat-8th-september/>