

Institution: University of St Andrews



Unit of Assessment: 29 - English Language and Literature

Title of case study:

Scotland's Bard: Developing the Cultural and Economic Impact of Robert Burns

### 1. Summary of the impact

Research carried out primarily by Robert Crawford helped raise the profile of Burns's poetry in the media, serving to generate greater interest in, and engagement with, his cultural legacy. *The Bard, Robert Burns, A Biography* (2009) was featured in Scottish Government-sponsored public events to mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Burns's birth, a major focus of Scotland's 2009 'Homecoming' event, generating significant additional tourist revenue for the Scottish economy. Subsequently Crawford's research was central to a £20M+ refurbishment of the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum in Alloway, responsible for a significant increase in visitor numbers and bringing much-needed tourist revenue to the area. Finally, Crawford's research inspired Norman McBeath to new ways of thinking that resulted in the creation of a new art project. This case study therefore involves several types of impact: (1) promoting public interest in Burns and interpreting literary heritage to a broad audience; (2) assisting government initiatives to stimulate tourism and create economic prosperity at both national and regional levels; (3) inspiring new forms of artistic expression. The users of this research are the Scottish Government; the National Trust for Scotland; a freelance photographer; the tourist sector of Scotland and the reading and museum-going public.



*Homecoming Scotland 2009 launches in Glasgow with 'Burns Illuminated', a lightshow projected onto Glasgow City Chambers.*

### 2. Underpinning research

Robert Crawford, a researcher in post at St Andrews since 1995, and a member of both the School's Eighteenth-century, Romantic and Victorian Research Group and its Creative Writing Research Group, carried out extensive research into the work and life of Robert Burns during the years 2006 and 2007. This research included work on previously unpublished archival documents and the rediscovery of several 'new' poems by Burns.

Some of the early fruit of this research was published in *Scotland's Books*, in the section on Burns and the eighteenth century. [R3] However, the bulk of Crawford's investigation into Burns and his historical context would be published in 2009 in *The Bard, Robert Burns, A Biography*: the key text in this case study. [R1] Drawing on the research of 2006-07, this biography reshapes our understanding of Burns's childhood and makes new claims about its importance to the poetry of the adult Burns. Provocatively, *The Bard* also establishes a clear relationship between Burns's poetry and his politics. Presenting Burns as 'the master poet of democracy', Crawford figures him as a writer of increasingly republican sympathies, and is the first biographer to make use of a 1796 account of a conversation with Burns in which the poet and a friend are described as 'staunch republicans'. The 'new' poems that Crawford rediscovered during his archival research were also published here for the first time. The biography, then, breaks new ground on a number of different fronts.

On editing Burns's poems Crawford had collaborated with his colleague in the School's Eighteenth-century, Romantic and Victorian Research Group, Christopher MacLachlan, a Scottish literature researcher in post throughout the assessment period until his retirement in September 2013. This

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collaborative, textual research resulted in a selected edition of Burns's poems and letters brought out to coincide with *The Bard* in 2009: *The Best Laid Schemes: Selected Poetry and Prose of Robert Burns*, ed. Crawford and MacLachlan. [R2] Simultaneously Oxford University Press published an American edition of *Scotland's Books*. [R3]

To complement these forms of scholarly inquiry (a critical biography; a textual edition; a national literary history), Crawford collaborated with colleagues in the School's Creative Writing Research Group to commission new poems inspired by the title *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (the title of Burns's first book) Over forty new poems resulted from twelve writers, including St Andrews colleagues John Burnside, Douglas Dunn, Don Paterson and (at the time) Kathleen Jamie, as well as Jackie Kay, Alasdair Gray, Tom Leonard and others from outwith St Andrews. The resulting body of practice-led research, complementary to Crawford and MacLachlan's scholarly research, was collected and published as *New Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. [R4]

Taken together then, this package of work by Crawford and his St Andrews colleagues constitutes a significant contribution to scholarship on Burns and on poetry in Scots.

### 3. References to the research

R1) Robert Crawford, *The Bard, Robert Burns, A Biography* (Jonathan Cape; Princeton University Press, 2009). c. 500pp scholarly biography. Winner of Saltire Society Scottish Book of the Year Award 2009. Output is listed in REF 2.

R2) Robert Crawford and Christopher MacLachlan, eds, *The Best Laid Schemes: Selected Poetry and Prose of Robert Burns* (Polygon; Princeton University Press, 2009).

R3) Robert Crawford, *Scotland's Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (Penguin, 2007). c. 831pp authored book. Published in U.S.A. as *Scotland's Books: A History of Scottish Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2009). Output for REF2008.

R4) Robert Crawford, ed., *New Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (Polygon, 2009). Edited collection of newly commissioned poems.

### 4. Details of the impact

#### 1) Cultural heritage is presented and interpreted for a wide public audience.

Burns is the most influential poet of the Scottish literary canon, and it might be expected that *The Bard* would receive significant coverage in the Scottish national press, especially as its publication was timed to mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Burns's birth. In the event *The Bard* was widely reviewed and praised not only in the broadsheet and tabloid press of Scotland, but throughout the UK and also in the USA. Comments from a few examples include: 'This is a fine biography, and it is difficult to imagine its being surpassed for a very long time.' (Alexander McCall Smith, *The Daily Telegraph*); 'excellent' (*Scotland on Sunday*); 'searching and sensitive' (John Carey, *The New York Review of Books*); 'carefully researched ... unearths material unknown to previous scholars' (*The Times Literary Supplement*); 'a sympathetic portrait ... eerily contemporary' (*The New Yorker*); 'The joy of Robert Crawford's biography of Burns is that it restores much-needed complexity to the image of the Ayrshire balladeer poet.' (*The Independent on Sunday*). [S5]

Citations in reviews outside academic literature are themselves an indication of impact on public discourse about Burns's life and work: that there were more citations than a critical biography of a poet might usually attract, in a variety of different types of publication, and from not only Scotland, but also the rest of the UK and the USA, is indicative of the greater than usual reach and significance of the research underpinning *The Bard*.

Crawford also endeavoured to raise awareness of the value of Burns's work through a diverse range of engagement activities. He has given public lectures on Burns at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Aye Write! (Glasgow), Words on the Water (Cumbria), Wigtown Book Festival, the National Library of Scotland, StAnza (St Andrews) and at other literary festivals. He has also been actively involved in promoting Burns's work in the media. Parts of *The Bard* appeared in the *Sunday Times* and Louise Yeoman produced a 45-minute BBC Radio 3 programme [Creating Robert Burns's Reputation](#), based on Crawford's research (broadcast 25/01/2009). [S6] Professor Crawford was interviewed about Burns's life and

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works on various television and radio programmes, including BBC's *Newsnight Scotland* and *Reporting Scotland*. In *Best Laid Schemes*, Crawford and MacLachlan offered a potential new public an affordable, accessible volume of the poet's best work.

**i2) Advisory contribution is made to a major Scottish Government initiative, and research from the School assists the development of stimuli to the tourist economy to Scotland.**

The Burns anniversary served as one of four major themes of the Scottish Government's tourist promotion 'Homecoming 2009' and as a result of his work published in *The Bard*, Crawford in effect became academic consultant to this theme, as well as delivering a series of public events aimed at supporting 'Homecoming 2009'. Public events which Crawford developed and delivered from his research included a reading and dinner attended by representatives of several governments at the British Embassy in Brussels, and a two-day public celebration at the Library of Congress in Washington ([filmed and digitally archived for posterity](#)), at which Alex Salmond, First Minister of Scotland, also spoke (24-25/02/2009). [S7] The Senior Folklife Specialist at the Library of Congress, responsible for the public programming of that institution, reported that Crawford's research made '*an important contribution*' to their '*mandate of presenting the highest quality scholarship and stimulating informed public discourse*'. [S1] The event was followed by a reception '*co-hosted by the US Congress' Scottish Interest Section and the Office of Scottish Affairs at the British Embassy, that was attended by more than a score of US Senators and House of Representatives members*'. [S1] A report produced by the economic and social development consultancy firm EKOS has estimated that the Burns-themed 'Homecoming' brought net additional visitors of 73,000 to Scotland in 2009, with a further 23,000 visitors citing 'Homecoming' as one of their reasons for visiting the country that year. EKOS estimates that those visitors for whom 'Homecoming' was their main reason for coming to Scotland brought a net additional spend of £53.7M to the Scottish economy. [S8] While it is impossible to calculate the exact proportion of this sum attributable to the contribution made to 'Homecoming' by Crawford's research, it is clear that Crawford's work on Burns played an important part in boosting the Scottish tourism industry, and consequently the Scottish economy during 'Homecoming 2009'. [S9]

**i3) Research from the School informs Lottery-funded redevelopment of a major visitor attraction, improving regional economic prosperity and contributing to the quality of the tourist experience in Ayrshire**

As a result of the impact of his research described above at (i1) and (i2), Crawford was invited to be involved in overseeing the National Trust for Scotland's National Lottery-supported redevelopment of the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum (RBBM) in Alloway, Ayrshire. [S2] The redevelopment project had a budget of £21M, which brought much needed spending and employment to a deprived area of Scotland (Ayrshire scores highly on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and has higher unemployment than the national average). The then Curator of the Museum has commented that: '*Professor Crawford's input included advice on the reinterpretation of Burns Cottage, the poet's iconic birthplace, and direction in the display of artefacts of national and international significance in a new 1600m<sup>2</sup> museum facility. Professor Crawford personally edited thousands of words of new museum text, contributed directly to the 'Inspired by Books' section in the museum, and was instrumental in contacting eminent fellow writers to solicit contributions from authors such as Seamus Heaney and Jackie Kay. The sum total of Professor Crawford's work in helping to shape the content and visitor experience in Alloway cannot be overestimated: RBBM is the most visited NTS property and attracts a consistently wide demographic, all of whom are affected in some way by Professor Crawford's expert contributions to the new museum.*' [S2]

The Curator is also of the opinion that the timing of *The Bard* '*was undoubtedly responsible for a resurgence in research interest in the Birthplace Collection*'. [S2] In the year following the re-opening of the Museum in January 2011 visitor numbers increased in the first year by over 50% on each of the two preceding years. [S10] At the end of 2011 the RBBM was the second most frequently visited tourist destination in Ayrshire and Arran, drawing 444, 947 visitors. [S10] Of these, 80% came from within Scotland; 15% from England, Northern Ireland, or Wales; and 7% from overseas. [S3] Scottish visitors to Ayrshire and Arran spent on average £112.14 per trip in 2011; rest of UK visitors spend on average £473.80 per trip and overseas visitors on average £347.83. [S10] When 47% of Scottish visitors to the RBBM are discounted from potential spend



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figures (being local residents rather than tourists from further afield) it can be estimated that visitors to RBBM produced a spend in the local economy of in the region of £62M in 2011. In 2010 this estimated figure was £42M. In other words, RBBM redistributed into the local economy roughly the cost of its redevelopment in the year of its opening. Entrance fee payments (£8 for adults) and associated spending also bring very significant revenue to the local area.

#### **i4) New artistic expression is inspired by research in the School, also providing paid work for freelance photographic artist Norman McBeath**

Inspired by *The Bard's 'sensitivity to Burns as a poet who used Scots but reached an international audience'*, [S4] Norman McBeath, a portrait photographer with work in both the Scottish National Portrait Gallery and the National Portrait Gallery London, sought out Crawford to collaborate with him on a series of paired photographs and Scots verse texts. Remarking that '*as I worked with Robert, my own practice as an artist developed*', the photographer was awarded a Creative Scotland New Work Award of £5,000 to develop the collaborative project that became 'Body Bags / Simonides', and which was exhibited at the [Edinburgh College of Art](#) during the 2011 Edinburgh International Festival. [S4, S11] It was the only visual arts show at the 2011 Festival to receive a five-star review in *The Scotsman* (09/08/2011) [S12] and was the subject of a [BBC Radio 4 programme](#), nominated for a Sony Radio Award (03/12/2011). [S13] The exhibition has toured to galleries in Glasgow, Oxford and at Yale, and has been seen by more than 8,000 people. After the current REF window for impact ended, it went to the Poetry Foundation in Chicago during September 2013. [S4]

[Legacy Resources](#) for this case study will be curated at the School's webpage to provide continuing benefit to our users beyond the end of this REF cycle.

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- S1) Senior Folklife Specialist at the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. Corroborates contribution to Library of Congress' Robert Burns Symposium. [i2]
- S2) Former Curator of Robert Burns Birthplace Museum (RBBM). Contribution to the redevelopment of the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum. [i3]
- S3) Property Manager, RBBM. Data about visitor origin to RBBM. [i3]
- S4) Norman McBeath, self-employed portrait photographer. Corroborates that McBeath was inspired by Crawford's research to produce new artwork. [i4]
- S5) Reviews of *The Bard* in [The Daily Telegraph](#) (24/01/2009); [The New York Review of Books](#) (05/11/2009); [The Times Literary Supplement](#) (14/01/2009); [The New Yorker](#) (09/02/2009); [The Independent on Sunday](#) (11/01/2009). Non-academic citations of *The Bard*. Demonstrating reach of the work's impact in the non-academic press. [i1]
- S6) Website of BBC Radio 3's [Sunday Feature](#). Demonstrates Crawford's key role in the BBC's flagship programme on Burns. [i1]
- S7) Website of the [Library of Congress](#). Evidence of Crawford's participation in their high-profile Burns Symposium. [i2]
- S8) Web-hosted report on [Homecoming 2009](#) from UK based economic and social development consultancy EKOS. Consulted for visitor numbers to Scotland and associated tourist spend during 'Homecoming 2009'. [i2]
- S9) Website for Visit Scotland, hosting pdf [Scotland: the key facts on tourism in 2009](#). Consulted for visitor numbers to Scotland and associated tourist spend during 'Homecoming 2009', and the centrality of the Burns theme to this Scottish Government initiative. [i2]
- S10) Website for Visit Scotland, hosting pdfs for [Tourism in Western Scotland](#) for years 2009-2011. Consulted for increase in visitor numbers to RBBM and to provide data used in calculating associated economic spend. [i3]
- S11) Website of The Times review of [Body Bags](#). Demonstrating 'Body Bags' was part of the exhibition at the Edinburgh College of Art. [i4]
- S12) Website hosting pdf of [Scotsman](#) review of Body Bags. Evidence of its 5 star review. [i4]
- S13) Website for the BBC Radio 4 corroborating [Simonides / Body Bags](#) was part of its programming schedule. [i4]