Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of St Andrews

Unit of Assessment: 30 – History

Title of case study: Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Between January 2008 and July 2013 *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland* resource [hereafter *RPS*] has been accessed over 1.99 million times by users from all over the world. Whilst the principal purpose behind the publication of *RPS* was to further the study of Scottish history, this level of access reflects widespread engagement with the resource from a broad spectrum of users outside the traditional university sector. In 2007, following an editorial and research programme which lasted over a decade, the Scottish Parliament Project at the University of St Andrews published a full edition of the proceedings of the parliament of Scotland between the 13th century and its union with the English parliament in 1707. This edition of parliamentary texts was published online as a free-to-access and fully searchable website. Its value in supporting informed public debate in Scotland during a period of rapid constitutional change has received the recognition of major political figures and has been noted in UK and Scottish print and broadcast media. The online edition and associated research behind its production has also contributed to the continued enhancement of the history curriculum within the Scottish secondary education sector and its use in the field of Scots Law.

The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707 (RPS) is a fully searchable database containing the proceedings of the Scottish parliament from the first surviving act of 1235 to the union of 1707. The culmination of over ten years' work by researchers from the Scottish Parliament Project based in the School of History at the University of St Andrews, the online edition seeks to make this key historical source freely available to all in a technologically advanced and user-friendly format.

The inclusion of new parliaments and conventions of estates, committee records, parliamentary minutes and additional material makes the online edition the most comprehensive record of Scottish parliamentary proceedings ever available. All the sources which make up the proceedings of the pre-1707 Scottish parliament are fully cited and an extensive editorial apparatus included, enabling for the first time a proper understanding of the many and varied sources which make up Scotland's parliamentary record. A parallel translation of the original Latin, French and Scots text into English and the standardisation of place and personal names, where identifiable, enables keyword searches on an infinite number of subjects, with direct links from the modern translation to the original manuscript record.

Not sure where to start? Take a look at the *ideas for further research* page for more on what kind of information can be found within the parliamentary record and for areas suitable for further investigation.

Accessibility and transparency are watchwords for *RPS*. The provision of both the original manuscript text and a modernised translation ensures the database is accessible to a wide range of potential users. To aid comprehension, *RPS* has also been supplemented with a series of accompanying user tools and learning resources. An Editorial Introduction provides a clear explanation of the editorial policy adopted by the Scottish Parliament Project team in compiling this resource. In addition, a Short History of the Scottish parliament is provided for those unfamiliar with the background of the pre-1707 institution, while a more in-depth Historical Introduction traces the origins and evolution of parliament over its 500-year history. A detailed Glossary seeks to provide an explanation of some of the common legal and historical terms used in the database. Furthermore, an extensive Bibliography suggests further reading for users wishing to explore the history of the pre-1707 Scottish parliament in more detail. These elements represent the essential apparatus designed to deliver maximum accessibility to this significant historical resource.

Last updated: June 2013

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The Scottish Parliament Project was set up in 1996 under the directorship of Professor Keith Brown (Professor of Scottish History, University of St Andrews, 1995-2010) with the aim of producing a new and comprehensive edition of the extant archival manuscripts that record the proceedings of the Scottish Parliament prior to 1707. This would provide opportunities to understand this vital source for the history of Scotland and for the development of representative assemblies in medieval and early modern Europe.

In November 2007 the *RPS* website was completed and in May 2008 was publicly launched as an online edition with full critical commentary (www.rps.ac.uk).[1] In compiling the new edition, the project compared the largely obsolete nineteenth-century printed edition of the parliamentary acts against the surviving manuscripts of the parliaments, identifying serious methodological problems

with the earlier edition (a staple of Scottish historical scholarship). A large quantity (around 40% in total) of new material, including full meetings of parliament, statutes, parliamentary minutes and much other business, was unearthed, fully transcribed and added to the new edition. The project team used the earliest manuscripts of the medieval parliament alongside the earliest, surviving printed collections of statutes to produce the most reliable text and to make apparent the editorial decisions taken. A full scholarly apparatus of footnotes, references and source information was added to the text and the site was provided with a hierarchy of descriptive, editorial headings to facilitate navigation. With the aim of making *RPS* fully searchable and accessible to a non-scholarly audience, a full English translation was provided (whilst retaining the original Latin, French, Gaelic and Scots text in parallel). The published online database comprises about 16.5 million words of original text and English translation.[1] It includes material from the 1230s to the parliamentary union with England in 1707. It is far more extensive than the nineteenth-century printed edition and much easier to use, and *RPS* provides the first full analysis of the manuscript and printed sources for the parliamentary record.

The result has been that there is a fuller appreciation of the business of the Scottish Parliament and its surviving documentary records, which has led to a renewed interest in the institution and to new perspectives on a wide range of themes, including law and the enforcement of justice, political thought, royal finance and social regulation, which are a small variety of the numerous subjects present in the parliamentary material. This interest was reflected by the parallel publication of three edited volumes in a series entitled *The History of the Scottish Parliament*, which were produced by the project team in conjunction with the research that created the online database. These volumes were edited by Professor Brown and other members of the project (Dr Alan MacDonald [1995-2000], Dr Roland Tanner [1998-2003], Dr Alastair Mann [1998-2005]) and comprise thirty essays (including by Dr Michael Brown, St Andrews, 1997- present), on both specific parliamentary meetings and the contexts and themes arising from the discoveries of the Scottish Parliament Project.[2] Monographs arising from the project were published by Tanner in 2001[3] and by Dr Gillian MacIntosh, who worked on the *RPS* 2002-2008, ultimately as Project Manager, in 2007.[4] The series of major grants received by the project from 1997 to 2008[5] indicates recognition of its quality and the importance of its objectives.

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

1. *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707* (searchable database, www.rps.ac.uk, 2007 to present), c. 16,500,000 words, ed. K.M. Brown *et al*

2. K.M. Brown, R.J. Tanner, A.J. Mann and A.R. MacDonald (eds), *The History of the Scottish Parliament*, 3 volumes (Edinburgh, 2004, 2005, 2010)

3. R.J. Tanner, *The Late Medieval Scottish Parliament: Politics and the Three Estates 1424-1488 (East Linton, 2001)*

4. G.H. MacIntosh*, The Scottish Parliament under Charles II 1660-81* (Edinburgh, 2007)

5. Research grants:

RPS project grants 1997-2008 [£1.2 million in total], indicating recognition of the quality of the project and the importance of its objectives

  The Scottish Office, £500,000 in 1997 [Brown]

  The Scottish Executive, £250,000 in 2002 and £293,593 in 2004 [Brown/Mann/Tanner]

  The Scottish Executive, £293,593 in 2004 [Brown/Mann/Tanner]

  AHRB, enhancement grant £18,000 in 2000 [Brown/Mann/Tanner]

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

One of the guiding principles behind *RPS* was the production of a record which has value and recognition beyond the academic sphere, exciting a general interest in the institution, being used by genealogists and linguists, in education and in Scots law. To that end *RPS* was designed to be as accessible as possible to the non-specialist, with an extensive search facility to allow a wide range of different uses for the data contained within the parliamentary record. The success of this approach is borne out by the numerical data relating to website traffic. The site received over 1,997,000 page views from January 2008 to July 2013. These visits came from nearly 150,000 different users and represented a wide geographical distribution. Over 60% were visits from within the United Kingdom, over 13% came from the United States, c.5% each from Australia and Canada and the remainder from the rest of the world.[10] These figures reflect the interest generated in the resource in general. They also indicate the distribution of information and awareness of the resource well beyond the UK and beyond the academic community. The distribution of use also

signals the special interest in the resource from expatriate Scottish communities in other parts of the world and the wealth of genealogical information that it contains.[10]
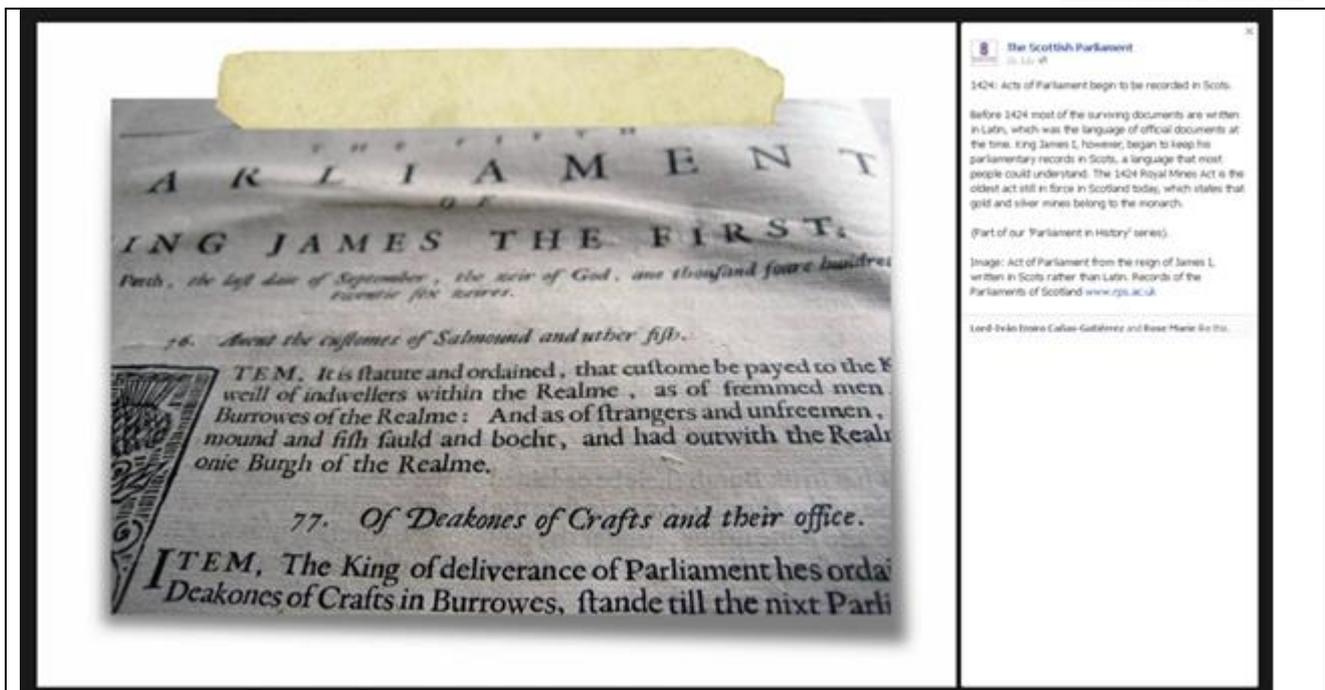
This interest from outside the higher education sector is also revealed by the extensive archive of queries sent to the Project Manager, Dr Gillian MacIntosh. These include inquiries from the new Scottish Parliament about pre-1707 parliamentary procedure, from genealogists and family historians, and from school teachers and librarians. Along with Alastair Mann (Stirling), MacIntosh has also been involved in collaboration with the Scottish Law Commission in compiling a list of pre-1707 statutes still in force, used by SLC in drawing up new legislation (www.rps.ac.uk/static/statutes_inforce.html). Interest in the resource is also related to its significance for continuing developments in the constitutional status and government of Scotland during the period since early 2008. Since the launch of *RPS* it has been recognised as providing the historical evidence and underpinning for the discussion of contemporary developments in the public sphere. Coverage of its formal public launch in the Scottish and UK media reflected this. On 13 May 2008 *The Times* reported that the project had "brought almost five centuries of parliamentary history into the public domain for the first time". *The Daily Express* in a comment piece by Kerry Gill described the resource as "superb stuff, not only for academics and researchers, but also for the likes of you and me". Items discussing the launch of the website and its significance for public debate and historical awareness were also carried in *The Daily Telegraph, The Herald*, *The Courier* and *The Press and Journal* and on BBC Radio Scotland news.[1]

Awareness of the public importance of the project was also shared by figures in the Scottish government and parliament. The formal launch of the *RPS* website took place in the parliament building at Holyrood on 15 May 2008. It was attended by two former first ministers, Henry McCleish MSP and Jack McConnell MSP, by the current deputy first minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP, and the then presiding officer Alex Fergusson MSP. The Presiding Officer of the parliament stated of the website that "it will provide our people with a greater understanding of their past and the historic chapters of Scotland's parliamentary life". The Deputy First Minister called *RPS* a "landmark project", commending the resource for making "publicly available, in an accessible form, some of the most important documents in Scotland's history".[2] On 19 May 2008 the Scottish Parliament passed a motion with cross-party support congratulating the project team on the publication of the resource and noting its relevance to the current Scottish Parliament and to contemporary politics.[3]

The May/June 2008 edition of *History Scotland*, an illustrated magazine written by academic specialists for a general readership, was entirely dedicated to the launch of *RPS*, with six specially commissioned articles on specific parliamentary events and online publication of historical resources written by the project team (including MacIntosh and M. Brown). The special issue had sales of c.14,000 copies.[4]

The link between *RPS* and the present Scottish Parliament has been maintained since the original launch of the resource via the Scottish Parliament's official website (www.scottish.parliament.uk). This provides numerous links to, and information about, the *RPS* resource, from, for example, its frequently asked questions page.[5] An interactive timeline, *The Scottish Parliament: Past and Present*, which was authored by the project team (MacIntosh), is provided as a freely-accessible learning resource.[6] This provides an illustrated history of the Scottish Parliament, aimed at a non-specialist audience, which draws on the discoveries of the project to give a clear and accessible overview of the institution and of Scottish parliamentary history. The timeline links directly to the *RPS* website. A downloadable PDF version of the timeline in twenty-one pages is also provided. From July 2013, the Scottish Parliament has been running regular illustrated excerpts from the timeline, as part of its 'Parliament in History' series on its official Facebook profile, with entries linking directly to the relevant legislation found within the *RPS* database.[7] In addition to partnering with the present Scottish Parliament's internal education outreach service on initiatives such as the above, and in order to promote the use of *RPS* as a teaching resource in schools, a stand-alone educational website has been established by a former member of the project team, Dr Alastair Mann, now at the University of Stirling.[8]

The impact of *RPS* outwith academia is not only testified by the widespread level of usage of the resource mentioned previously. In March 2013, *RPS* (specifically a record contained therein) was cited in the US Supreme Court in an argument presented by one of the Court's justices, indicating the value of making such once-obscure historical records freely available online to a global audience.[9]

In order to ensure the continuance in perpetuity of the significant research underpinning the *RPS* resource, an agreement has been reached for the migration of the existing *RPS* website and its core data to the National Records of Scotland (NRS), Scotland's national archival repository and the location of the original manuscript records of pre-1707 parliament (www.nrscotland.gov.uk). It is expected that this transfer (scheduled for completion by June 2014) will allow for further enhancement of the initial research, specifically the integration of the comprehensive genealogical and place-name data therein with complementary historical resources currently provided by the NRS, such as ScotlandsPeople (www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk), one of the largest worldwide online sources of original genealogical information.

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

1. National UK media coverage of the official launch of *RPS*: *The Times* 13th May 2008, page 29; *Daily Telegraph* 13th May 2008, page 10; *Scottish Daily Express* 13th May 2008, pages 5, 12; *Newsdrive*, BBC Radio Scotland, 14th May 2008; *The Herald* 16th May 2008, page 12.

2. National press release for official launch at Scottish Parliament, with quotations from Scottish MSPs and ministers, 14th May 2008.

3. Motion of congratulation passed in Scottish Parliament, 19th May 2008: www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advance&Reference Numbers=S3M-01932.

4. *History Scotland*, special issue dedicated to *RPS*, May-June 2008.

5. Ongoing linkage with the present Scottish Parliament: The Scottish Parliament 'Holyrood and History' FAQ: www.scottish.parliament.uk/help/61877.aspx.

6. 'The Scottish Parliament – Past and Present' interactive timeline, authored by the project in conjunction with the Scottish Parliament education outreach department and hosted on the Scottish Parliament website: www.scottish.parliament.uk/visitandlearn/Education/22108.aspx.

7. *RPS* feature (part of regular series) on The Scottish Parliament official Facebook page: see 26 July 2013 post at www.facebook.com/scottishparliament.

8. Learning resource based on *RPS* aimed at secondary school teachers and pupils, hosted by the University of Stirling: http://scotparlhistory.stir.ac.uk/index.html.

9. Citation of *RPS* in recent (March 2013) US Supreme Court decision: http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/12pdf/11-564_5426.pdf and related Scottish legal coverage at www.elhblog.law.ed.ac.uk/2013/04/11/jardines-drugs-and-medieval-scots-law-miami-vice.

10. Google Analytics traffic and traffic sources data, 1 January 2008 to 31 July 2013, corroborating website usage and geographical breakdown.