**Objectives, Accomplishments, and Challenges**

*Mapping the Scottish Reformation* (MSR) is a database of the Scottish clergy that allows users to explore and visualize clerical careers between the Reformation Parliament of 1560 and the Revolution in 1689. Built with data from manuscripts held at National Records of Scotland (NRS), this is the first project to comprehensively chart the growth, movement, and networks of the Scottish clergy during and after the Reformation. By extracting data from thousands of pages of ecclesiastical court records, MSR tracks where ministers were educated, how they moved between parishes, their age, their families, their disciplinary history, and more. This early modern data drives a powerful mapping engine that allows users to build their own searches to trace clerical careers over time and space. As such, MSR provides crucial framing for scholarly inquiries into religious beliefs, political conflicts, and institutional change, as well as unprecedented information on critical figures for genealogical research.

The NEH HCRR Foundations grant funded the pilot phase of this project, which focused on the clergy from the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, a large and important region including modern-day Edinburgh. Our goals for this phase of the project were threefold: first, we wanted to gather the pertinent data on the clergy from this region using the rich and voluminous records of Scotland’s ecclesiastical courts, with an eye to building our pilot user interface once this data was complete. Second, we wanted to identify challenges and inconsistencies in this data that could be used to develop editorial guidelines for the project. Last, we aimed to expand interest in and access to Scottish history in North America, as well foster transatlantic collaboration in the fields of Scottish history, the digital humanities, and genealogy. All of these objectives amounted to what we have thought of as the “proof-of-concept” phase for the project: if we could demonstrate the success of our methods for one part of Scotland, we could then seek to expand our remit to the whole of the country.

Thanks to the support of the NEH as well as colleagues from a range of fields, we are delighted to report that we not only met but exceeded our goals for this phase of *Mapping the Scottish Reformation*. In early summer 2020, we completed our dataset for the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale. Ultimately, we went through over 10,000 pages of manuscript material and gathered data on nearly 900 clerical journeys across 116 Scottish parishes, the “significant events” of 500 ministers (depositions, suspensions), information on more than 200 clerical wives, and the alma maters of over 400 clerics. As part of this work, we formulated internal editorial guidelines about how to categorize and record key parts of the clerical career.

Thanks to the extension of the NEH grant due to COVID as well as a grant from the Strathmartine Trust, we successfully identified and implemented technologies to record and visualize our data. We entered our data from NRS manuscripts into Wikidata, thanks to the bulk upload tool QuickStatements, and ultimately, we were able to build and launch our pilot website: maps.mappingthescottishreformation.org. Since its launch in December 2020, we have had well over 1,000 users in places ranging from the US to France to Japan.
This site allows users to trace the careers of the Scottish clergy across time and space using 5 different map views: Tenures (where users can learn about the length of ministerial tenures in a given parish), Journeys (where users can trace the movements of the clergy), Education (where users can see the influence of different universities on particular parishes), wives (where users can learn more about clerical spouses, a key but understudied group), and Events (where users can learn about things like rates of depositions and suspensions during moments of political turmoil). We worked closely with the Interactive Content team at the University of Edinburgh in fall 2020 to build this site, and we are already in talks about ways to grow and rearchitect it as we expand our dataset.

From the outset, we also wanted to prioritize open communication with the public—from historians to digital humanists to genealogists and beyond—about our project and the methods we are using. We often refer to this as “pulling back the curtain,” and to that end, we did a number of presentations to academic and family historian groups over the course of the grant period, including: the Center for Data, Culture, and Society at the University of Edinburgh, the Washington and Lee digital humanities cohort, the Scottish Indexes Society, and the Aberdeen and North East Scotland Family History Society. We also posted regular updates on our blog and on our Twitter account, @mappingscotsref. We also had two meetings with our Advisory Board and were in very regular communication with those members about our ongoing work.

Our final objective for the pilot phase of MSR was to plan for the future of the project, and this work has begun in earnest. Moving forward, we will expand our dataset to encompass information on clerical careers across all of Scotland. Using feedback from a wide range of parties—from the scholars on our Advisory Board to internationally-based genealogists to the general public engaged with our social media accounts—we have also made tweaks to our current website, and we will be launching version 1.1 in March.

Over the course of this work we have come to appreciate the immense complexity and richness of clerical careers, which were far less straightforward than often presented in the current literature. As such, one of our challenges remains how to capture essential, machine “readable” data while remaining sensitive to messiness and intricacies of clerical experiences. To put it differently, we have been thinking through how to tell stories with our data. A more basic challenge, especially in Fall 2020 during the extension period, was building in time to work on MSR while also teaching during a pandemic. As such, we are very grateful for the support of the NEH.

**Project Team and Process**

The co-directors of *Mapping the Scottish Reformation* are Michelle D. Brock (Washington and Lee University) and Chris R. Langley (Newman University). We have spent the period of the NEH grant gathering and completing the dataset on clerical careers in the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale using digital images of church court records held at the National Records of Scotland. We initially recorded this data into in Google Sheets, and then uploaded this information to Wikidata, a free and open data storage platform. We then queried the data to generate the JSON files that drive our pilot website. Working with partners at the University of Edinburgh, we built the pilot MSR website, maps.mappingthescottishreformation.org.

Mackenzie Brooks, Digital Humanities Librarian at Washington and Lee University, worked as team member on the project throughout the NEH grant phase. She introduced us to critical digital
humanities methods, advised on how to best structure data, and generally provided some much-needed technical insights and encouragement over the course of this work.

Members of the Mapping the Scottish Reformation Advisory Board include Julian Goodare (University of Edinburgh); Jane Dawson (New College, Edinburgh); Elizabeth Ewan (University of Guelph); Michael Graham (University of Akron); Roger Mason (University of St. Andrews); Tessa Spencer (National Records of Scotland); Paul Youngman (Washington and Lee University). They attended two Advisory meetings and engaged in regular correspondence with the project co-directors to offer invaluable feedback.

Robin Urquhart has been the main project contact at National Records Scotland, working generously to provide us with virtual access to the church court records containing essential data about the Scottish clergy.

We also collaborated between August 2020 and January 2021 with Stewart Cromar and Hristo Meshinski, both part of the Interactive Content team at the University of Edinburgh, to build the pilot website. Their invaluable work on the project was funded by a grant from the Strathmartine Trust. Ewan McAndrew, Edinburgh’s “Wikimedian in Residence,” has also been an essential collaborator since January 2020, when he introduced us to Wikimedia and the technological side of the project began to take shape.

Our entire process has been documented on our blog, where we have posted regularly about topics such as the complexities of clerical careers as revealed by the archival documents, how to work with imperfect manuscripts, the benefits of using Wikidata for a project like MSR, and our approach to transatlantic collaboration. This blog has recently been nominated for “best DH blog” the 2020 Digital Humanities Awards.

**Findings and Impact**

The pilot phase of Mapping the Scottish Reformation centered on the gathering of manuscript data about clerical careers. It culminated in version 1.0 of our website, which provides quick and reliable information on previously elusive questions at the heart of understanding religious, social, and political change in Scotland. This site represents the first stage of our work, and it is our hope that as we expand the project, MSR can become the first point of reference for scholars seeking information on the Scottish clergy as well a guide to the archival documents that contain this data.

Already, MSR has proven a useful resource for scholars, students, and genealogists. Thanks to the quantitative tools on our site, users can ask a wide range of exciting questions about the men and families at the center of early modern Scottish history. We now know, for example, that the average tenure for a minister appointed in the synod of Lothian and Tweeddale between 1560 and 1689 was 12 years, but that this number was significantly lower—close to 7 years—in the first generation of clergy after the Reformation, when challenges in staffing and training persisted, and similarly brief for those appointed amid the ecclesiastical upheavals of the post-Restoration period. We also know that there were 9 ministers in this region whose careers were longer that 50 years. All of these long-serving men first took up their posts between 1560 and 1620, suggesting that career stability—and perhaps personal longevity—was more attainable for those with appointments made before chaos of war and revolution mid-seventeenth century. Expanding our dataset beyond this single synod region will test whether these tentative patterns hold for other areas of Scotland.
More generally, our work to date has revealed that despite common assumptions about the rigidity and consistency of the Church of Scotland’s structure, there was in fact tremendous diversity over time and space in the career paths of the post-Reformation clergy. In these volatile years, ecclesiastical policy was hotly debated; parishes were created, dissolved, or united with each other; and ministers’ roles changed, from mere exhorter to preacher of God’s word. As such, our records reflect frequent deviation from the typical path from student to expectant to parish minister, and instead suggest greater informality and flexibility in clerical careers than has previously been appreciated by historians.

In terms of the archival records, our project has provided more detail on the types of data related to clerical careers found in different records. For example, we confirmed our assumption that kirk session records—the local parish ecclesiastical courts charged with moral discipline—are more likely to contain details on clerical families and the deaths of ministers than the minutes of the presbyteries, and we have integrated some data from these records into our website. This is useful knowledge not only for our own project, but for less-specialized historians or genealogists seeking a "starting point" in exploring the voluminous church court records at NRS.

Last, MSR has contributed to the growing intersections between the field of history and the digital humanities, particularly by helping historians think about how they can use Wikidata to record and query their data while also making this data open to the public. Our aim has been to be transparent, accessible, and collaborative at every phase of our work in order to reach the largest possible audience and provide a model for similarly structured projects (as we ourselves learn from the work of many others!).

This is just the beginning, as this NEH HCRR Foundation grant has supported the critical first phase of a much larger project. Eventually, Mapping the Scottish Reformation will allow users to explore and visualize data about clerical careers across the entirety of the country. We hope that its importance to the fields of Scottish history, Reformation studies, and the Digital Humanities, as well as the genealogical community, will continue to grow along with the scale of our work.