



UNIVERSITY OF
STIRLING



British Institute
in Eastern Africa

**Politics, Society and Christianity in Malawi and Beyond
A Memorial Conference for John McCracken and Jack Thompson**

Thursday 26 April 2018
New College, Mound Place, Edinburgh, 9am-5:45pm

hosted by
Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh
Centre for the Study of World Christianity, University of Edinburgh
Division of History and Politics, University of Stirling
Scotland-Malawi Partnership

sponsored by
British Institute in Eastern Africa, Nairobi

Registration from 08:30 to 09:00.

Two Malawi Historians Remembered (09:00-10:00; Martin Hall)

Opening remarks by Gerhard Anders and Brian Stanley (University of Edinburgh)
(09:00 to 09:10)

John McCracken and Jack Thompson: Malawianists and friends to remember
Kings M. Phiri (Mzuzu University)
(09:10 to 09:25)

Memories of John McCracken

- (i) Megan Vaughan (UCL)
 - (ii) David Bebbington (Stirling)
- (09:25 to 09:45)

Memories of Jack Thompson

James L. Cox (Edinburgh – prerecorded)

09:45-09:55

The Academy in Society (10:00 to 11:15; Martin Hall)

The influence of John McCracken's scholarship on historical writing about Malawi between 1977 and 2017

Wapulumuka O. Mulwafu (University of Malawi, Zomba)

John McCracken's research and publications contributed significantly to the broadening of the thematic areas of historical writing and to the inspiration of a new generation of scholars. He should be appropriately remembered as one of the few scholars who have consistently written on Malawi for a period of forty years, yet his work remains as refreshing as before. This paper examines McCracken's contribution not only to the production of historical knowledge in Malawi but also his influence on scholarship more generally. It shows that in the period prior to the early 1980s, much of the historical writing tended to focus on the fairly familiar themes of political, economic and religious history. However, it was in the early 1980s that the new direction was charted. By writing on the policy frameworks and historical experiences of those affected by the police, agricultural changes, colonial expertise, conservation, racial identities and economic entrepreneurs, he provided a direction that many subsequent scholars would either follow or engage in debates. In particular, his influence can be seen in three aspects: opening up new themes of scholarship, networking with Malawianist scholars, and a strong sense of passion for documenting and archiving historical knowledge.

Commemorating and speculation in Malawi: The Past and Future role of the arts and humanities researcher in Malawi

Chisomo Kalinga (University of Edinburgh)

In the past 2 years, Malawi has lost pioneers across the humanities: Jack Thompson and John McCracken (history), Chris Kamlongera (theatre) and Steve Chimombo (literature). The first objective of this presentation is to reflect upon the legacies of these pioneers within the arts and humanities and their roles developing and supporting arts and humanities-based dialogues and research frameworks in Malawi. I will discuss the unique ways in which they contributed to developing both local and international friendships and communities within Malawiana studies. The second objective is to speculate the possibilities of what the arts and humanities might look like and to engage in new understandings of scholarship and the role of the academic in fostering these networks. The paper essentially pays respect to tradition while advocating continuity and innovation in Malawiana research.

Andrew Ross, John McCracken and Jack Thompson: Three Malawi Historians and their Influence on Scotland-Malawi Relations Today

Kenneth R Ross (Scotland-Malawi Partnership)

Three near-contemporary Scottish-based historians made Malawi the primary focus of their work, with all three having a special focus on the history of the Scottish Presbyterian missions in Malawi. This paper reveals the background to this apparent coincidence by setting it in the context of the long history of interaction between Scotland and Malawi. It then explores how each of the three came to be absorbed by Malawi's history, with particular attention to the intertwining of the personal and the professional dimensions. It compares and contrasts the contribution to historical understanding made by each of the three before examining the influence that their historical work exercises on Scotland-Malawi relations today. This can be seen in the appeal to history on which contemporary interaction is often founded, in the strongly relational character of the development work undertaken between Scotland and Malawi, in the anti-racism and commitment to social justice that inspires common action today, and the commitment to Malawian leadership and initiative that marks the outworking of the partnership between the two nations.

Tea-Coffee (11:15 to 11:30)

Material and Visual Culture (11:30-13:00; Elizabeth Templeton Lecture Room)

Malawi's political culture: Shared and Contested historical memories

Clement Mweso (National Archives of Malawi, Zomba)

This paper examines contestations, deployments, uses of images and significance of historical memory in public discourse during and after the political transition in Malawi between 1994 and 2004. The paper explores how Malawian media deployed images from the past and cartoons to ridicule the new political elite. Meanwhile, civil society and new political elite invoked repertoires of historical memory of one-party dictatorship to very different ends. On the one hand, civil society actors invoked a shared memory of social and political repression during Kamuzu Banda's thirty year dictatorship to contest moves by the new governing party to introduce anti-democratic constitutional amendments whilst, on the other hand, the new political rulers deployed the same collective memory to justify and morally legitimize their proposed constitutional changes to extend the terms of office. Drawing from theoretical debates in the field of memory studies mainly in the disciplines of politics and history to frame the argument, the paper argues that as much as collective memory is a critical, composite and shifting shared discursive resource from which societies draw to narrate, negotiate and make political claims, it is also mobilized in multiple and contradictory ways, including by ruling classes and institutions that influence the public sphere. These multiple

contestations on the meanings of collective memory are, the paper contends, crucial for entrenching a democratic citizenry in public discourse and political practice.

The UMCA at Pitt Rivers Museum: object lives and histories of Malawi collections

Chimemwe Phiri (University of Oxford)

The Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) holds collections from the missionary and colonial eras of Malawi. During the 19th century the Universities Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) was a core supplier of missionaries and many returned materials from their encounters. This paper will centre on the donation to the PRM by the estate of Rev William Coleman Piercy. The collection includes objects such as musical instruments, jewellery and homeware. The paper will highlight relationships between missionaries, source communities and museums by following the shifts in meaning of objects, starting from their point of origin with special attention to the network of exchanges between the UMCA and PRM. The trajectory of these objects offers a rich perspective for exploring the impacts of missionary activities in Malawi and the social relations the objects have been embedded in their social lives.

Stirrings in Africa – The Peter Mackay Archive

Rosanna Al-Mulla (University of Stirling)

The Peter Mackay Archive is a major new resource which documents the struggle for independence in a number of countries in Southern Africa through the personal experiences of a committed political activist. Peter Mackay (1926-2013) was born into a Scottish family with strong links to the Stirling area. He served in the Scots Guards before emigrating to Southern Rhodesia in 1948, where he devoted himself to the cause of African liberation. His volume of memoirs, *We Have Tomorrow: Stirrings in Africa, 1959-1967* provides remarkable insights into Southern African nationalism in its most principled phase. In his introduction to *We Have Tomorrow* Terrence Ranger described Mackay as ‘an unknown hero’ and he recognised the research value of Mackay’s archive, noting that ‘one hopes that Peter’s own papers will become available.’ Upon Mackay’s death in 2013, John McCracken was a key figure in bringing these papers to the University of Stirling.

By examining a selection of material in the archive, this talk will look at the research value of the collection and how it can help to address the gaps in the current textual record of the period. To give some idea of the wide-ranging impact of this, this talk will use a case study of a researcher who came to us looking for information on his grandfather and great-uncle who were active and key members of the Malawi Congress Party, Dunduzu and Yatuta Chisiza, wanting to know more than what the official record could tell him. Finally, this talk will mention efforts taken to make this collection available for further research through our 2017 crowdfunding campaign.

The African Collections of National Museums Scotland

Lawrence Dritsas (University of Edinburgh)

This paper takes as its premise the idea that missionaries became *de facto* specialists of the places in which they worked, and of local cultural practices. Many returned with examples of African material culture that are now held in the African Collections of National Museums Scotland (NMS), forming the backbone of the museum's early ethnographic collections. The focus of this paper will be approximately 1000 objects left to the museum by Scottish missionaries in the decades immediately around the turn of the twentieth century. It will also consider the contested links between 'mission' and 'secular' ethnography of the Lake Nyasa and Tanganyika Plateau. The paper takes a material turn in the history of missionary practices, exploring the processes and objects by which the British scientific community and the wider public learned about central African environments and societies.

Lunch (13:00 to 14:00; Martin Hall)

PANEL A: Malawi and Global History (14:00 to 15:15; Martin Hall)

Chieftaincy in Kasungu: Reinvented, Re-emergent, or Resilient?

Joey Power (Ryerson University, Toronto)

Interest in chieftaincy or "traditional governance" today is not only of scholarly interest as evidenced by the proliferation of papers, books and newspaper articles on the topic. These investigate the role of chiefs historically and ask what their present and future roles ought to be in the context of modern African national governance. This paper makes a modest contribution to the debate by exploring a Malawian example to ask how far the tenacity of this institution can be attributed to its "reinvention"(the instrumental adaptation of the office to contemporary circumstances by multiple actors from the level of the state on down to chiefs and headmen themselves as well as local organic intellectuals, invoking a legitimizing nostalgia); "reemergence" (chiefs reentering politics after a period of dormancy to take on new roles to champion people's interests in the face of state failure to do so and whose legitimacy lies mainly in individual effectiveness rather than claims to some primordial right; that is, chieftaincy persists as a bulwark against poverty and political corruption but also because it "works" better than any other mechanism to deliver the goods to constituents); or "resilience" (the notion that chieftaincy endures primarily because of popular legitimacy rooted in links to the past draw on and reproduce ties that nurture and build community). The paper focuses on chieftaincy in that area of Kasungu district with a radius of roughly fifty kilometres around Kasungu boma. I will argue that to some extent, the patterns found in this small part of the country reflect general patterns in chiefly authority from before colonial rule up to present.

Malawi and Migration: Enduring Concerns and New Directions

Zoë Groves (University of Leicester)

Malawi has occupied a marginal position in histories of southern Africa, and in global histories, more broadly. However, it is an ideal place to study movement and migration - central forces in global history. Migration in Malawi (like elsewhere) has been the norm, rather than the exception. In the nineteenth century, the territory experienced significant immigration with the settlement of new communities, and the upheavals associated with the expanding slave and ivory trades of East Africa. During the colonial era, 'Nyasas' made up a vital part of the labour market of southern Africa. Throughout the twentieth century, virtually every Malawian was affected by migration, either as a migrant themselves, or as a member of a migrant's family (Boeder, 1974). John McCracken's work was always sensitive to the ways in which people and ideas from outside of Malawi shaped the history of the nation. In recent years, historians have begun to explore in more detail the ways in which people from Malawi influenced events and processes beyond the territory. This paper will reflect on the enduring concerns and new directions of scholarship exploring migration to and from Malawi.

Clements Kadalie in Imperial Britain: Confronting the Limits of Race, Christian Brotherhood and Socialist Solidarity

Henry Mitchell (University of Edinburgh)

At the start of the 20th century many black subjects of empire explicitly identified themselves (often subversively) as British. Black appeals to Britishness were particularly important in a South African context, where the first half of the 20th century was defined by the intra-white struggle of 'Boer vs Briton'. In the 1920s, Clements Kadalie - the Malawi-born leader of Southern Africa's first major black trade union - appealed to 'British justice' and the British labour movement in an attempt to halt the advance of racist Afrikaner nationalist-led legislation. As the South African government unrolled its 'Hertzog Bills', black liberals welcomed the Scottish missionary Donald Fraser, who asserted "It is not the cry of 'Africa for the Africans' or Africa for Europeans, that will hew out the open way, but Africa for Christ". Kadalie's trade union, the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU), however, rebuked the fact that "not a word is heard from this eminent missionary denouncing the economic and political slavery now existing in all British possessions in Africa." Appealing to international socialism and universal Christian brotherhood, Kadalie attempted to radically overturn the discrimination of not only the South African government and the imperial labour movement, but also the very missionaries who educated him. On arriving in Britain, Labour leaders including Margaret Bondfield - one of Britain's first women MPs - were seen by Kadalie as part of a "reactionary set-up", and his attempt to rally international support in Scotland was in many ways a failure. Nevertheless, it brought the ICU's challenge about what it meant to be black, British and working class to a global stage, and contested the limits of Christian "brotherhood". This paper demonstrates how, in crossing the boundary between colony

and metropole, Kadalie influenced a new generation of left-wing activists in Britain at the same time as falling catastrophically short of his radical goal of creating a “New Africa”.

PANEL B: Christianity and Political Change in Africa (14:00 to 15:15; Elizabeth Templeton Lecture Room)

Christianity, Colonialism and the Gikuyu Body Politic

Tom Cunningham (University of Edinburgh)

A widely acknowledged aspect of social, political and cultural life in the Gikuyu highlands of colonial Kenya in the 1920s was the sudden emergence and ascendancy of a young generation of mission-educated Gikuyu men who sought to mobilise (or, we might say, “invent” or “renovate”) the category of the “tribe” for political ends (John Lonsdale, 1992). In this paper I explore the gendered and generational debates that took place *among* this generation of “ethnic patriots” and *between* them and their elders. I do this by focusing on a significant yet largely overlooked aspect of their discourse: their frequent and vivid use of bodily images and metaphors in their references to their land and the political community they sought to rally. Using *Muigwithania* (the vernacular newspaper of the Kikuyu Central Association, edited by the Scottish-mission-educated Johnstone “Jomo” Kenyatta), the paper traces the ways in which this generation of male political leaders elaborated and contested a new notion of a “Gikuyu body politic”. Reading the source material against the backdrop of the Church of Scotland Mission’s attempt to prohibit the custom of “female circumcision” in the Gikuyu highlands, the paper points to the historical conditions that underpinned and informed these ideas of an ethnic, tribal body. I argue that although their patriarchal vision of the “Gikuyu body politic” was shaped by local notions of masculinity, uprightness, and health which were centuries old, it was also a product of the distinctive relationship between the body and power that emerged under colonialism. Taking seriously the values, aspirations, ideas and idioms of Gikuyu actors of this era the paper builds on John Lonsdale’s research. At the same time in charting African arguments and histories of Scottish missionaries, and in exploring the relationship between politics and Christianity in Africa, the paper is also intended as a tribute to the work of both Jack Thompson and John McCracken.

Frederick Nkhonde and the African Church of Christ: the invention of orthodoxy

Joshua Newell (University of Oxford)

This paper will examine the emergence of an African Independent Church in 1930s southern Nyasaland. Wislade has described these churches as examples of ‘simple secessionism’: products simply of individual power struggles blindly adhering to ‘orthodoxy’ as defined by the first missionaries. This, he has argued, explains their lack of theological creativity. More recently, Ogbu Kalu has sought to grant these churches historical purpose by integrating them into the bigger

picture of his ‘trail of ferment’ theory. However, there is also value in looking in more detail at these churches. Secessionist groups did not just blindly adhere to orthodoxy because they lacked theological creativity. In fact, just as Ranger has described how traditional authorities could invent or imagine ‘tradition’, African church leaders could create and own an ‘orthodoxy’ which could legitimise their claims to independence.

Frederick Nkhonde would oversee the gradual breakaway of the African Church of Christ from missionary control between 1930-33. Nkhonde was rejecting white control of his church just 15 years after John Chilembwe had launched his rebellion against the colonial authorities. Nkhonde himself had been jailed for suspected involvement in the rising. To break from external missionary control he needed to be very careful about the reasons he gave and doctrines he preached. Using missionary diaries, publications and letters, as well as letters from Nkhonde himself, I will examine what Nkhonde’s claims to orthodoxy were actually meant to achieve, who or what threatened to constrain his agency, and the degree to which he was able to realize his goals in a colonial system still traumatized by the legacy of John Chilembwe.

Federation, the Church of Scotland, and the Visual Image

Jeffrey G. Cannon (University of Edinburgh)

The Church of Scotland could not avoid involvement in the controversy over the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Scots had been on the ground since David Livingstone explored the area around Lake Malawi in 1859. His namesake mission, Livingstonia, was established by Free Church missionaries in 1875 and Scottish missions of the Free Church and the Church of Scotland soon dotted the landscape. With such longstanding ties, how did these missionaries and the Kirk respond to the highly contentious issue of the Federation? Various and often opposing answers have been proffered. Every answer notes missionary opposition, some blaming the missionaries and the church for scuttling the Federation. Brian Glass argues that although the missionaries were adamant in the opposition, the Kirk dragged behind them in opposing Federation. Others, give such ideas little credence.

This paper will address how the visual image was deployed within the Church of Scotland to influence perceptions of Malawi and the Central African Federation. In doing so, I will address two of the conference’s themes: *Christianity and power* and *material and visual culture*. I will examine images used in the church magazine, *Life and Work*; the newspaper, the *British Weekly*; and slides and filmstrips produced by the church and used in various church gatherings. Using these sources, I will argue that parties within the church’s structures used the visual image to argue for a pro-African, anti-Federation position despite an official church position in cautious support of the Federation.

Tea (15:15 to 15:45)

Christian Missions and the Making of Modern Malawi (15:45 to 17:15; Martin Hall)

The Rise and Fall of Christian Humanism in 19th-Century Malawi

Harri Englund (University of Cambridge)

Historians have remarked on an apparent shift from the early- to mid-19th-century egalitarianism of missionary encounters in Africa to what Olufemi Taiwo has recently described as late-19th-century ‘attitudes that questioned the viability of African agency, placed Africans at the bottom of the human ladder, and proceeded to treat them as if they were children’. Without questioning the possible shift itself, this paper discusses the changing fortunes of egalitarian Christian humanism in late-19th-century Blantyre Mission through two of its key figures, David Clement Scott and Alexander Hetherwick. While both championed African causes, Hetherwick’s paternalism contrasted with Scott’s radical egalitarianism. Rather than attempting an overview of their many and varied engagements with, for example, slave traders, white settlers and colonial administrators, this paper focuses on their language-ideological differences in the work of translation. For Scott, ‘Greek, the civilization of the past, has closer affinities with Mang’anja than the modern language of today’; for Hetherwick, ‘Greek thought flows in a wholly different groove from Mang’anja or Nyanja thought’. By attending to their different approaches to linguistic translation, the paper recovers an early instance of egalitarianism that Malawi’s subsequent developments have rendered all but invisible.

Mobilities and medicines in colonial Malawi: networks of empire, missions and labour

Markku Hokkanen (University of Oulu)

Both John McCracken and Jack Thompson wrote about the history of Malawi in important ways as global and interconnected history. They paid attention to contacts, exchanges and mobilities that transcended national and regional boundaries long before such approaches became fashionable in many fields of historiography. Perhaps one reason for this was that their early work on politics, Christianity and missions investigated multiple agents with diverse backgrounds, identities and connections. Their insights continue to influence and inspire scholars interested in a plethora of topics – in my case, medicine and healing.

In this paper, I explore the histories of medicine and healing in colonial Malawi through the prism of mobility and networks. I argue that this approach allows us to learn more about how medical knowledge was made, how expert careers were created, how medicines were acquired, given meanings and contested, and how colonialism took shape. These themes can be discussed through three partly interconnected networks: an imperial network of medical authorities, a Protestant mission network, in which medicine played an important part, and a network of Malawian migrant

labourers that connected Malawi with Southern African region and beyond. The case of Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who was part of all these networks, is illustrative of the possibilities and limitations afforded by Malawian medical mobility in the colonial period. The paper is based on archival, published and oral sources in Malawi and the UK.

Pastors, priests and prophets: poverty and religion in Malawi 1953 – 2018

John Lwanda (Glasgow)

Poverty has been a feature of the Malawi landscape even before the territory achieved independence in 1963. This poverty has been extensively studied from historical, economic, developmental, social and other perspectives but comparatively much less so from perspectives that highlight religious and other factors. This paper looks at the dynamic between religion as belief and practice and economic poverty in Malawi between 1961 and 2018. The aim is to examine the manner in which the two variables have interacted and impacted on each other at crucial and transitional periods in Malawi history. Some of the factors, like politics and ethnicity that impact on or are influenced by this dynamic will be highlighted.

A Wind of Change Blew through the Mission, too

Colin Cameron (Scotland-Malawi Partnership)

Reflections on personal experiences of church and state in Malawi

Closing Remarks and Performance

(17:15 to 17:45)