

The Cabot Project

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This is an international and collaborative project set up in July 2009 to investigate the Bristol discovery voyages of the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries – in particular, those undertaken by the Venetian adventurer, John Cabot (a.k.a. Giovanni Caboto, Juan Cabotto, Zuan Chabotto). The origins of the project lie in Dr Jones' investigations of the [research claims](#) of Dr Alwyn Ruddock (d. 2005). Dr Ruddock, who was formerly a 'Reader' at [Birkbeck College](#), University of London, dominated research into the Bristol discovery voyages from the 1960s, making finds that promised to 'revolutionise' our understanding of Europe's engagement with North America in the three decades after 1492. However, Ruddock never published her key findings and, on her death, she ordered the destruction of all her work.

Since 2006, Jones and his associates have been engaged in a [widely-reported](#) search to determine what Dr Ruddock found and where she found it. The [published results](#) of their work can be found below – much of which is available for free – as well as information on [papers presented](#) by project members. In May 2011 the project received a significant boost, following a [major donation](#) from a Canadian benefactor, part of which is being used to fund a [Schools Group](#), to introduce the projects research to Bristol primary and secondary schools.

Current Research

Since 2009, the Cabot Project's work has concentrated on the following areas. [Dr Evan Jones](#) and his research partner, [Margaret Condon](#), have been finding out more about Ruddock's claims and sources, while, at the same time, they have been conducting more general investigations in English and foreign archives. These include: [The National Archives](#), the [British Library](#), the [London Metropolitan Archives](#), the [Bristol Record Office](#), [Gloucestershire Archives](#), [Southampton Archives](#) and [Archives départementales de la Gironde](#). They have recently completed an article about the Bristol merchant, William Weston, who, it has now become clear, was the first Englishman to lead an expedition to North America (1499). They have also found out much about other aspects of the Bristol voyages, including information that supports Dr Ruddock's claim that Cabot returned to England in the Spring of 1500.

Following discoveries made by Jones and Condon in the summer of 2010, Dr Francesco Guidi Bruscoli ([University of Florence](#) / [Queen Mary, London](#)) has joined the project as a research partner. In October 2010 he located documents that confirm that Cabot was, as Ruddock claimed, financed by an Italian bank in London.

Dr Guidi Bruscoli's discoveries include the location of a 1496 loan made to 'Giovanni Chabotte viniziano' (John Cabot, Venetian) to undertake his exploration voyages. An [article](#) on this subject has now been published by *Historical Research*.

Since September 2011 [Prof Peter Pope](#) ([Memorial University, Newfoundland](#)), who has been associated with the project since its inception, has been conducting archaeological work as part of his related 'Carbonear Project'. This is exploring the development of [Carbonear](#), which was one of the earliest settlements to be established in Canada. The settlement is of interest to the Cabot Project because Dr Ruddock identified it as the location of the church and religious community that she believed was established in 1498 by Cabot's supporter and companion, Fra Giovanni Antonio de Carbonariis.

From the summer of 2010 [Dr Heather Dalton](#) ([University of Melbourne](#)), has also been formally associated with the project. Her work focuses on John Cabot's son, Sebastian, and the international network of explorers and merchants with which he collaborated. In Bristol, [Dr Fernando Cervantes](#) and [Mr Gonzalo Velasco Berenguer](#) having been assisting with Spanish sources, [Dr Richard Stone](#) is working on an off-shoot project examining seventeenth-century English settlement in Newfoundland and [Tricha Passes](#) has been examining the historical reception of John Cabot in Bristol.

Broader project members include Dr Jeffrey Reed (Washington D.C.) and Susan Snelgrove (Newfoundland). Beyond this, we aim to encourage researchers who wish to carry out investigations in this field, either in direct connection with the project or as independent scholars. We also welcome offers of assistance from those who have knowledge, skills or experience to contribute, as well as those interested in offering material or financial support – the team having benefited greatly from such aid in the past.

Funding

The Cabot Project's initial investigations received £2,000 in funding from a Bristol-based television company and the University of Bristol, through the Arts Faculty Research Director's Fund. In June 2010, the project received £6,317 from the [British Academy](#) to pay for the travel and subsistence expenses of Condon and Jones until August 2011. During the summer of 2010, Dr Dalton received funding from the [Australian Academy of the Humanities](#), under its International Research Fellowships scheme for collaborative research, to carry out work with Jones and Condon.

In May 2011 the project received [£90,000 from Gretchen Bauta](#), a private Canadian benefactor, with an additional £30,000 in 'Gift Match' funding from the Government. This money is funding a further four years of research. At the same time, Mrs Bauta donated CAN\$90,000 to Prof Peter Pope, to provide support for the 'Carbonear Project' over the next three years.

Publications: articles

Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, 'John Cabot and his Italian Financiers', *Historical Research*, 85 (August, 2012). Published online in April 2012.

Evan T. Jones, 'Henry VII and the Bristol expeditions to North America: the Condon documents', *Historical Research*, 83 (August, 2010). Copies of this article, which was published online in August 2009, are [available for free](#) from the journal.

Evan T. Jones and M. M. Condon, '[Weston, William \(d. in or before 1505\)](#)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, May 2010.

Evan T. Jones, 'Alwyn Ruddock: "John Cabot and the Discovery of America"', *Historical Research*, 81 (May, 2008), 224-254. Copies of this article, which was published online in April 2007, are [available for free](#) from the journal.

An earlier article in this field is also relevant, although some elements of it have been superseded by more recent research:

'The *Matthew* of Bristol and the financiers of John Cabot's 1497 voyage to North America', *English Historical Review*, 121 (2006). An [Abstract](#), [HTML version](#) and [PDF copy](#) are all freely available from the journal.

Publications: document transcriptions

The Project has published a number of annotated document transcriptions through the University of Bristol's electronic repository (formerly ROSE, now [PURE](#)), some of which include photographs of the original documents and / or lengthy introductions. These are permanently-available sources for use by students and researchers.

[Aldobrandino Tanagli and Francesco Cattani: Chancery petition, c. 1490](#) (Aug 2013)

[William Weston v Thomas Smith: Chancery Petition, 1490](#) (Dec 2012)

[John Johns \(Jonys\) of Bristol, merchant vs. John Day alias Hugh Say: Chancery petition, c. 1502](#) (Dec 2012)

[Thomas Nash of Bristol, bowyer, vs. John Day alias Hugh Say: Chancery petition, c. 1502](#) (June 2012)

[Will of George Smith, merchant of Bristol, 1490](#) (Dec 2011)

[Warrant for the payment of John Cabot's pension, 22 February 1498](#) (Oct 2011)

[The grant of a pension of £20 per year to John Cabot, 13 December 1497](#) (Oct 2011)

[Will of Hugh Say, mercer of London, 10 December 1517](#) (June 2011)

[Henry VII's letter to John Morton concerning William Weston's voyage to the new found land](#) (April 2011)

[John Esterfeld vs. William Weston of Bristol: Chancery petition transcript, c.1499](#) (Jan 2009)

[Will of John Foster, merchant of Bristol, 6 August 1492](#) (Jan 2009)

[The Quinn papers: transcripts of correspondence relating to the Bristol discovery voyages to North America in the fifteenth century](#) (Jan 2009)

[Christopher de Carbonariis vs. Sheriffs of London: Chancery petition transcript, 1490](#) (Dec 2006)

[Fr. Giovanni Antonio de Carbonariis vs. Sheriffs of London: Chancery petition transcript, c.1496](#) (Nov 2006)

Publications: web articles

Dr Jones has posted a number of short web-articles, one MA dissertation and some out-of-print publications that relate to the Bristol voyages of this period. While these are intended to be of use to students / researchers, the permanence of these items is not guaranteed and the articles themselves may be revised over time.

[Salazar's account of Bristol's discovery of the Island of Brasil \(pre 1476\)](#)

[Robert Ricart's Chronicle of Bristol, 1480-1508](#)

[John Cabot in Seville, 1494](#)

['Cabot Roll': 1496-99](#)

[The Fust MS. / Maurice Toby's Chronicle of Bristol, 1565](#)

[Annabel Peacock, 'The Men of Bristol and the Atlantic Discovery Voyages of the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries \(MA Dissertation, Bristol, 2007\)](#)

Academic conferences / seminar papers

[The World of the Newport Ship, 17-19 July 2014](#)

E. T. Jones (University of Bristol), 'Constructing Cabot: the making of a Bristol hero' and R. Stone (University of Bristol), 'John Guy: the hero who wasn't', Imperial City: Bristol in the World, UWE / MShed conference, Bristol, 20-21 September 2013.

Margaret Condon, 'The Cabot Project', The Fifteenth Century Conference, Oxford, 5-7 September 2013

M. M. Condon 'Alwyn Ruddock, John Cabot, and the early Atlantic explorations': Medieval Studies Summer School, University of Cambridge (ICE) 15 August 2013.

F. Guidi-Bruscoli, "'So that he could go and find the new land': Italian money for John Cabot's voyages of 1496-7", University of Bristol, 14 January 2013.

F. Guidi-Bruscoli, 'Beyond Iberia: Florentine bankers and John Cabot's voyage to the "New Land"' at '*Mundus Novus*. Vespucci: Ancient World and New World', Lisbon, 13-14 December 2012.

F. Guidi-Bruscoli, 'Capitali fiorentini nei primi viaggi verso il Nord America: Giovanni Caboto e Giovanni da Verrazzano', at 'Vespucci, Firenze e le Americhe', Florence, 22-24 November 2012.

E. T. Jones, 'William Weston: Bristol's forgotten explorer', University of Bristol, 7 Feb. 2012.

F. Guidi-Bruscoli, 'John Cabot's Italian Financiers' at the 'Ninth European Historical Economics Society Conference', Dublin, 2-3 September 2011.

Heather Dalton, 'The Cabot Project: International collaboration and the voyages to America of John Cabot and the merchants of Bristol', University of Melbourne, 18 April 2011; University of Sheffield, 9 Nov. 2011.

E. T. Jones, 'Rediscovering Cabot, 1496-1500' at 'A Second City Remembered: Rethinking Bristol's History, 1400-2000', Bristol, 23 July 2010.

E. T. Jones, 'Bristol, Cabot and the New Found Land, 1496-1500'. The public lecture at 'Exploring New World Transitions: From Seasonal Presence to Permanent Settlement', St Johns, Newfoundland, 16 June 2010. Also presented as a public lecture at Carbonear, Newfoundland, 14 June. A version of this paper is to be published in Peter E. Pope and Shannon Lewis-Simpson, eds. *Exploring Atlantic Transitions : Archaeologies of Permanence and Transience in New Found Lands* (Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology Monograph no. 7. Woodbridge, Suffolk, forthcoming 2013)

Public engagement

Having been aware, from the start, of the strong public interest in the Cabot voyages, the project has made efforts to communicate its research findings to a wider audience. This includes public lectures to local societies and the creation of a [Schools Group](#) to introduce the research to Bristol school children. In addition, there has been extensive media coverage of the project's findings, the highlights of which are listed below.

Guido Moltedo, [Cabotaggi in banca e libri gialli](#), *II* (Oct. 2012), 180-81

[John Cabot's celebrated ship dabbled in smuggling](#), *The National Post*, Windsor Star, et al. (8 July 2012)

Francesco Guidi Bruscoli, 'A shoe box of discovery', *The American* (July, 2012)

[Discovery of a £16 Advance Sheds Light on John Cabot's Adventures](#), *New York Times* (19 June 2012)

[Italiener finanzierten Entdeckung Nordamerikas](#), *Der Spiegel* (6 May 2012)

[Did an English expedition BEAT Columbus to the Americas? Record of bank loan to sailor who found North America in 1497 hints that others may have been there first](#), *Daily Mail* (4 May 2012)

Rossella Lorenzi, '[Columbus may not have been first to America](#)', *Discovery News* (3 May 2012)

'Cabot may have known of new world before Columbus, newly discovered document suggests', *Vancouver Sun*, *The Province*, *National Post*, *Edmonton Journal* et al. (29 April 2012)

['Italian bankers paid for Cabot voyage'](#), *The Post* (28 April 2012)

'Italian bank backed Cabot voyage to Newfoundland, new research reveals', *Montreal Gazette*, *Times Colonist*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Calgary Herald* et. al. (20 Oct. 2010)

Douglas Hunter, [Rewriting History: Alwyn Ruddock and John Cabot](#) (July 2010). This is an extended version of the article published in *Canada's History* (April, 2010).

'Bristol's early navigators', *Current Archaeology* (November 2009), pp. 46-7.

'The lost voyage', *Global TV News* (Canada) broadcast and podcast (12 October 2009)

[The Cabot Mystery](#), audio podcast for 'The Atlantic Conference' (10 October 2009)

'Search hopes to find 510-year-old Nfld. church', *National Post*, *Windsor Star*, *Star Phoenix*, *Edmonton Journal*, *Ottawa Citizen*, et. al. (6 September 2009)

'A Tudor mariner's epic exploits', *The Big Story*, *BBC History Magazine* (September 2009), pp. 12-13

[William Weston, an English merchant, 'first to land in North America'](#), *The Times* (28 August 2009)

[Evidence for first English-led expedition to North America discovered](#), *The Daily Mail* (28 August 2009)

[John Cabot was not Bristol's only explorer](#), *Western Daily Press / Bristol Evening News* (28 August 2009)

[Britânicos chegaram a América em 1499](#), *O Globo*, Brazil (28 August 2009)

[Revela carta de Henry VII primera expedición inglesa a Norteamérica](#), *El Porvenir*, Mexico (28 August 2009)

'Fee for discovering Canada: 40 shillings', *The National Post*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Windsor Star* (27 August 2009)

[King's letter reveals epic voyage](#), BBC News Online (27 August 2009)

'510-year-old royal letter points to Englishman's contact with Canada', *The National Post*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Calgary Herald*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Times Colonist* (26 August 2009)