

Alex Green Tin Whistle Project, Conference, and Festival

The Elphinstone Institute is delighted to be partnering with the Friends of the Elphinstone Institute, Aberdeen Performing Arts, TMSA Aberdeen, Fèis Rois, WayWord Festival, and SC&T Youth, to deliver 'The Tin Whistle Project', in celebration of the musical legacy of renown North-East tin whistle virtuoso, Alex Green (1930–2017), 1–3 March 2024.

Known locally for his colourful personality and unmistakably North-East 'spit staccato style', Alex's presence inspired a love of traditional music in multiple generations of young Scottish players. As a performer, his iconic style tackled a wide Scottish repertoire, from the most challenging strathspeys and reels of fiddler and composer, James Scott Skinner, or the graced precision of Highland pipe tunes, to the joyful, upbeat tempos of traditional Scottish dance music. A dedicated teacher, he brought recognition to the tin whistle as an accessible instrument, worthy of serious musical attention.

Acknowledging Alex's commitment to encouraging young players the project aims to encourage new young whistle players, and to inspire musical confidence, participation, and enjoyment of traditional music, from the earliest years on. Led by local tutors, our project partners are currently providing whistle lessons to



multiple primary schools in the Aberdeen and Fraserburgh area. Future plans include creating a tutor book and new educational materials for young players.

We are also very excited to announce the very first 'Alex Green Tin Whistle Festival' which will take place from 1–3 March, in Aberdeen. Following a one-day conference focusing on early traditional musicality and the importance of readily accessible, small instruments, the festival will exemplify the rich diversity and stylistic flexibility of whistle playing traditions, whilst welcoming complete beginners, young musicians, and players of other

instruments to come and take part. The festival weekend will feature a host of concerts, multi-level whistle workshops, 'meet the artist' talks, and informal sessions. Guest artists (to be announced) will include local players, traditional artists from Scotland and beyond, and some notable 'tin whistle legends' of international renown. For further updates and booking information, please refer to our website and social media pages.

In recognition of Alex Green's invaluable contribution to Aberdeen and North-East traditional culture, the Institute looks forward to welcoming you to this unique event.

Sara Reith

Seinn Spioradail: Spiritual Soundscapes of the Highlands and Islands



I am very pleased to announce that, following six years of research, I will launch a touring exhibition, digital sound archive and website for the project, Seinn Spioradail: Spiritual Soundscapes of the Highlands and Islands.

Seinn Spioradail is an exploration of the incredible wealth of sights, sounds, and memories of spiritual singing and song writing in everyday life in Highland and Island communities, something which has been part of Highland culture for millenia. Fieldwork for the project was made possible through a Research Incentive Grant from the Carnegie Trust (2019–22) and a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship (2022–23).

The exhibition commences at Museum nan Eilean in Stornoway on 19 January 2024 and will be touring Hebridean communities including Balallan, Portree, and Lochmaddy until March 2025. For more information and access to the digital archive, please visit www.seinn.org.

Many thanks to everyone who has been involved in the project over the last few years.

Frances Wilkins



From the Director

We're delighted to welcome our MLitt students, Marie-Pier Chevrier, Cho Yu Ching, Elizabeth Cook, Brian MacQuarrie, and Kaitlyn Woodruff. Once again, we have a fine variety of backgrounds and range of ages, which always enriches the course. We had a great Field School in October, with four days in Aberdeen exploring unseen parts of the city's culture, followed by three days in the central Highlands.

The Institute was well represented at the 2023 Congress of the Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore (SIEF) in the Czech city of Brno, 7 to 10 June 2023, with myself, Nicolas Le Bigre (Teaching Fellow), Carley Williams (PhD researcher), and Honorary Research Fellows Sheila Young, Pat Ballantyne, and Nataliya Bezborodova, all in attendance.

In the summer our PhD research students, Mary Cane, Lauren Hossack and Claire Needler convened the Folklore, Ethnology and Ethnomusicology Conference Aberdeen 2023 (FEECA), 'Connection, Creativity, Community: Insider-Outsider Perspectives', 30 June to 2 July, with keynote speaker Willow Mullins from University of Edinburgh.

In November, I attended the American Folklore

Society Annual Meeting, in Portland, Oregon, where I ran a #MeToo session specifically for men to reflect on their own behaviours and positions of power. Women have done most of the heavy lifting in the #MeToo movement, but it is really up to men to make the movement redundant.

November also saw the arrival of Sadhana Naithani, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, who delivered our 2023 Buchan Lecture, 'When Humans, Animals, and Plants Talk to Each Other', (the lecture can be seen online via our website).

Congratulations to Frances Wilkins on the launch of her exhibition (see feature on the front page), and to Kristin Jonzon who graduated with a PhD with an ethnographic study of Northern cultural performance, and to our graduating MLitt students, David Fayle, Mary Stratman, Andrada Maries, Kayleigh Mair, and Forbes Inglis. I never fail to be impressed with our MLitt students' dissertations – imaginative, thoughtful, and engaging.

I am sad to note the passing of both Robbie Shepherd and my neighbour, Charlie Allan, champions of North-East culture sadly missed.

Thomas A. McKean

How to Support the Elphinstone Institute



Elphinstone Institute Staff and Students

We're excited to report a recent wonderfully generous legacy donation from Forbes Hurry: just over £100,000, given specifically for the promotion of Doric and North-East Scots. Such visionary support underwrites so much of our work.

Although part of the University, the Institute relies heavily on donations, legacies, and outside funding for our valuable public work and projects across the North-East and the staffing that makes it all possible.

In these times of uncertainty, we need culture more than ever. We need your help to continue with our projects and research. Please consider supporting our work in whatever capacity you can, whether financially or

with your time. Contact me at the Elphinstone Institute (elphinstone@abdn.ac.uk or tel: 01224 272996) to discuss ways to help. Thank you.

Thomas A. McKean

Aberdeen and Beyond Storytelling Success

We were thrilled to be able to partner with our friends from the Grampian Association of Storytellers (GAS) this year to produce the Aberdeen and Beyond Storytelling Festival in October and November, our biggest festival of stories yet! Generously funded by our partners at Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland as part of the broader Scottish International Storytelling Festival, this year's festival featured over twenty international and local storytellers and musicians across fourteen different events.

The events were a great success, with over 400 attendees from around the North-East. We heard empowering legends from Iran and Syria, moving memories of forced migrations in Greece and Turkey, seasonal tales from the Traveller tradition, Nigerian Yoruba stories of the tortoise and his tricks, Bulgarian epic wonder tales of magic and mystery, and much more.

Thanks to all who attended, and if you are a storyteller and are keen to get involved with our storytelling events for next year, please do get in touch.

Pictured right are Zahra Afsah telling a tale, and Adib Rostami playing the kamancheh.



Nicolas Le Bigre

Elphinstone Tributes

Robbie Shepherd, 30 April 1936–1 August 2023

Robbie nivver hid ony doots about e warth o Nor-East culture. He focht tirelessly fer its future – nivver switherin, nivver wintin fer effort nor enthusiasm. Best o aa, he didna jist blether about it, bit lived it an shared it ilkae day thro e radio, e P&J, in iveryday life, an at thousands o Hielan Games, far his inimitable voice cuid aye be heard. He wis a stalwart champion o the Elphinstone Institute, tee, an fer that we'll aye be gratefu. Rest in peace, Robbie, an thank ye fer aathin.

Thomas A. McKean

Robbie Shepherd and I made a great double-act! When the Friends of the Elphinstone Institute came into being, he was the Chairman and I was the Secretary ('Jist keep me right!') and when he became President, I took over as Chairman. It was a great partnership and I like to think we always worked, with our committees, to bring the work of the EI to the public's, and the University's attention. Robbie was a multi-talented yet self-effacing man, but he was also an unrelenting champion of the Doric language and culture – and a nightmare when chairing Friends' meetings! His passion for his subject didn't always make for an orderly agenda but his genuine concern for the Institute and everyone connected with it always shone through and he usually got what he wanted in the end!

Robbie and I were both honoured by MBEs and we were the proud possessors of Master of the University honorary degrees. We always said we were Masters of the Universe and, although we weren't everybody's image of superheroes, we and our fellow MUnivs were a force to be reckoned with when it came to defending our local heritage and the future of its culture!

I first met Robbie and Esma over forty years ago when we were all involved in charity fundraising and promotion and I was always impressed by the way Robbie threw himself into whatever he was doing. He had a real passion for life and people which never changed. As he got older and less active physically, he may not have been as visible as before but his



Pictured left, Robbie Shepherd and Jenny Shirreffs at the Elphinstone Institute 25th Anniversary Celebration, January 2020

enthusiasm never waned and he was always happy to respond to phone calls and even e-mails! We all appreciated his input and advice.

Robbie Shepherd was a one-in-a-generation original. He never forgot his roots, his cultural heritage, and he never forgot his friends. He was genuinely loved and respected by everyone he met and worked with and will be sadly missed.

Jenny Shirreffs

For Robbie Shepherd, Doric Champion I.M.

He wis a born broadcaster, screiver, maister o the Doric
On TV an on radio his programmes met success
At local gaitherins he wis socht, a couthie, skilled announcer
At Meldrum Sports an Turriff, as a compere he'd impress

Fowk mind on Takk the Fleer, The Beechgrove Gairden,
sheepdug trials

For aa o North East culture, Robbie Shepherd wis yer man
He screived Let's Hae a Ceilidh, Dash o Doric, Doric columns
At the Braemar Royal Games, he welcomed spectator an clan

He wis gien a weel earned MBE fur heistin Scottish culture
The years rowed on, an thanks poored in for aa his dedication
Kings College it awardit him an honorary degree,
Thon Dunecht loon, a dynamo, a Doric inspiration

He sang as a performer wi the famed Jack Sinclair band
An later in his column in the P & J he strove
Tae champion oor bonnie airt in ilkie wurd he penned
Luik ower his darg o mony years...Ye'll find a treisur trove

The warld grows smaaer ilkie day, near smorin places oot
Robbie niver left his hame ahin, tae takk the gangrel's pairt
Bit bedd, tae fecht his corner in oor muckle neive o lan
He kept oor wyees an spikk alive, an won the public's hairt

Sheena Blackhall

Charlie Allan, 19 August 1939–13 December 2023

We are sad to learn of the passing of well-known north-east writer, economist, and farmer Charlie Allan on 13 December 2023. A University of Aberdeen graduate who became a lecturer in economic history at Glasgow University, later at St Andrews University, and then Strathclyde University.

He joined the BBC as a producer and presenter and was also editorial adviser to the Leopard Magazine, which showcased north-east life, people, places, history, and heritage. In addition to his creative prowess, as a published academic author, bothy ballad singer and writer, he was also a heavy athlete on the Highland Games circuit.

In 1999 Charlie received the honorary degree of Master of the University in recognition of his contribution to the cultural life of the north-east – which included support for the Elphinstone Institute which was set up as part of the University quinqucentenary in 1995. He will be sadly missed by all those who knew him. *Elphinstone Institute Staff*

Elphinstone News and Events

Annual David Buchan Lecture

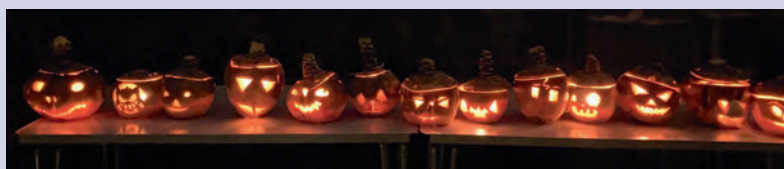
We were delighted to welcome Sadhana Naithani, professor of Literature and Folklore at the Centre of German Studies, and Coordinator of Folklore Unit at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, to give the annual David Buchan Lecture in November, 'When Humans, Animals, and Plants Talk to Each Other', which was well received by the large audience in attendance and online at the Sir Duncan Rice Library, Craig Suite. Our MLitt students also benefitted from her seminars on colonial legacies of folklore in India. Professor Naithani (pictured right) is also the current president of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research and a Fellow of the American Folklore Society.



Toulmin Prize Winners 2023



Congratulations to the Toulmin Prize winners for 2023. Tracy Geddes and Rachel Matheson shared the prize. They are pictured with Martin Reid, grandson of John Reid (aka Toulmin).



Neepie Lantern Workshop

Alison Sharman ran a successful Neepie Lantern Workshop in October with lots of wonderful creepy and very creative lanterns (pictured above) created by those who attended the workshop. It was great fun, and they were entered into the annual Neepie Lantern competition, and some were prizewinners. We hope to run the event again this year, look out for details on our website and social media.

Who's Who at the Institute

Patron

Very Rev. Prof. Sir Iain Torrance, Pro-Chancellor

Staff

Dr Thomas A. McKean, Director, Ethnology and Folklore, ballads, custom and belief, Gaelic tradition, J. M. Carpenter Project

Dr Frances Wilkins, Senior Lecturer, Ethnomusicology, sacred singing in coastal communities, Scottish fiddle traditions in northern Canada

Nicolas Le Bigre, Teaching Fellow, Ethnology and Folklore, archives

Professor Emeritus Ian Russell, Ethnology, Folklore, and Ethnomusicology, oral traditions, including singing, music-making, drama, and speech

Simon Gall, Public Engagement Officer

Alison Sharman, Administrator

Research Students

Mary Cane, the grandmother experience in family life today

Mollie Carlyle, the legacies of Stan Hugill

Lauren Hossack, Elphinstone Scholarship, literature, heritage, and the making of Scottish communities

Tolheishel Khaling, Uipo (Khoibu) folk songs

Robert Milne, composition and Doric language texts

Claire Needler, Elphinstone Scholarship, bilingualism in North-East schools

Máire Ní Bhaoil, traditional singing among children in Ireland

Brenna Quinton, vernacular religion: blended christian and spiritual well-being practices in modern-day Scotland

Edda Starck, landscapes of music: the more-than-human lives and politics of musical instruments

Lorna Summers, community boatbuilding on the Moray coast

Carley Williams, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Scotland

Chris Wright, Elphinstone Scholarship, the role of traditional arts in place-based education

Honorary Research Fellows

Dr David Atkinson, J. M. Carpenter Project

Dr Pat Ballantyne, Scottish step-dance traditions

Dr Athanasios Barmplexis, contemporary shamanic healing in Scotland

Nataliya Bezhborodova, custom and belief

Dr Julia Bishop, J. M. Carpenter Project

Sheena Blackhall, creative writing in Scots

Dr Elaine Bradtke, J. M. Carpenter Project

Dr Katherine Campbell, ethnomusicology, music performance

Dr Robert Young Walser, J. M. Carpenter Project

Les Wheeler, Scots Language, education

Dr Sheila Young, marriage ritual during the pandemic

What's On

Keep up to date with all of our events by following us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, or our website: www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone

Support the Institute

The Institute relies on outside financial support to make many of its activities possible. If you would like to help, join the Friends of the Elphinstone Institute, volunteer, or have suggestions, please contact the Administrator, a.sharman@abdn.ac.uk



Edited by
Alison Sharman