

North-East Scots/Doric Anthology

We are pleased to be supporting a project to curate a North-East Scots/Doric anthology of new writing, a collaboration between me, The Friends of the Elphinstone Institute, and the Elphinstone Institute, which is funded by Aberdeen City Council Creative Funding.

New and established writers were encouraged to send their best poetry, short stories, flash fiction and short plays for consideration. All work had to be previously unpublished, and each contributor will receive a payment of £50 for their work and a copy of the anthology. The work will be selected by a panel of North-East writers, including me, Sheena Blackhall, Shane Strachan, and Mae Diansangu, whose work will also feature in the book.

The two main goals of the project are to create paid opportunities for new and established writers to showcase their work and to create a companion pamphlet to

accompany the anthology comprising of questions and activities that secondary schools and teachers can use in their Scots language work. The pamphlet panel will be led by Dr Dawn Leslie, lecturer in linguistics at the University of Aberdeen, who also teaches the Institute's Doric undergraduate course, and its online Doric/North-East Scots evening class, both of which are in high demand.

The project arose from conversations with teachers and others working in and around Scots. A lack of new work suitable for older students in Doric was identified, sparking the idea for an anthology of new writing.

Successful contributors will also receive an invite to the launch, which will be held on Tuesday, 21 February at The Blue Lamp, Aberdeen from 7pm. The anthology will be published through Doric Books - a community interest company dedicated to promoting NE Scots.

Jo Gilbert

Storytellers Enchant North-East Audiences



GAS at King's College Chapel, left to right: Pauline Cordiner, Diana Peers, Sheena Blackhall, David Brown, and Jackie Ross, with Dana Scott.

Our participation in the Scottish International Storytelling festival reached a new peak this term, giving opportunities to storytellers in the North-East and bringing marvellous tales to large and diverse audiences. Hungarian master storyteller, Zalka Csenge Virag, led our first event, sharing stories from the Carpathian Mountains and beyond, including a delightfully spooky tale of a man-eating princess. The following event saw Tania Allan and Ella Leith introduce British Sign Language storytelling, concluding with a powerful and evocative signing of a selkie legend. We were delighted to host new friends from Aberdeen Deaf Club, who gave valuable perspectives

during the Q&A. Our blossoming partnership with Grampian Association of Storytellers (GAS) led to the Institute hosting GAS at the University's historic King's College Chapel, with tellers Sheena Blackhall, David Brown, Pauline Cordiner, Diana Peers, and Jackie Ross doing their very best to wake up Bishop Elphinstone with their numerous numinous narratives. Each tale-teller was then interviewed by Dana Scott and the whole evening was live-streamed to an international

audience. Our next event was with rising star Ailsa Dixon, from Cruden Bay, whose Aberdeenshire coastal tales proved so popular that University library staff opened up an adjacent room and filled it with chairs in order to host the 80+ crowd. Finally, we hosted the Map of Stories Film Ceilidh with Grace Banks and Jackie Ross, an event that was originally to be hosted by the sadly shuttered Belmont Cinema. We were thrilled to raise £210 for Aberdeen students who lost their jobs at the Belmont, and this special multimedia event was the perfect way to close this year's festival offerings from the Institute.

Nicolas Le Bigre



From the Director

This past summer and autumn have seen more rewarding activities centred around researching, celebrating, and promoting the culture of the North-East and North of Scotland.

In the summer, we partnered with Scottish Culture & Tradition to offer the Youth Fiddle Workshop, directed by Laura Harrington and Kirsty Campbell. The week was a success with 120 young fiddlers taking part. Also with SC&T, Shona Donaldson and I ran a series of song workshops for young people, on bothy, ballad, and lyric. In the final session they performed Sleepytoon and The Bonnie Banks o' Fordie with conviction and fluency. It's a great pleasure to continue our close partnership with SC&T.

The Hame Festival in July featured days of Story, Music, Song, and Community Partnerships. We await the go-ahead for 2023, to create a showcase event for the diversity of North-East culture. Cullerlie Traditional Singing Weekend, coordinated by Ian and Norma Russell, and the Polish-Scottish group, run by Nicolas Le Bigre, continue to go from strength to strength.

Throughout the autumn, Nick also coordinated a diverse programme of storytelling events, in partnership with the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh.

In November, we welcomed Dr Danielle Brown, musician and ethnomusicologist, who visited from the US to deliver our annual Buchan Lecture, entitled 'Remembering and Reclaiming Folk.'

Frances Wilkins has been on British Academy-funded research leave to pursue a major project on sacred singing in the Western Highlands. She's busy with fieldwork, surveying religious and spiritual practices.

Congratulations to Dawn Leslie, newly appointed lecturer in Linguistics. Dawn will continue her sterling work on our undergraduate Doric/North-East Scots course and the newly renewed online evening class, both of which she developed, along with input from Jo Gilbert and Jackie Ross.

Jo Gilbert and the Friends of the Elphinstone Institute were recently successful in getting grant funding from

Aberdeen City Council Creative Funding to create a Doric anthology – a new selection of prose, poetry, and more, specifically targeted at young people, from secondary to mid-twenties. Meanwhile Jackie Ross has started her own publishing company, Doric Books, in partnership with Aaron Gale, which has produced some fine-looking books for bairns.

Congratulations to our recent MLitt graduates, Michelle Soto, Sydney Hubbell, Brenna Quinton, and Megan Vanderhoef, with dissertations on contemporary spiritual beliefs, tattooing as storytelling, layered beliefs within established churches, and legend tripping and the supernatural. We wish them well.

Welcome to our new MLitt students, Mary Stratman, Andrada Maries, David Fayle and Rawan Alfuraih. The first term, included a long-awaited Field School in Aberdeen and then Newtonmore, where we spent valuable sessions at the Highland Folk Museum and the Macpherson Museum, before visiting various sites near Loch Ness.

This summer, I took part in the International Council on Traditional Music conference in Lisbon (virtually), as part of an international team coordinated by Ardian Ahmedaja from the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. We hope to support future artist and staff exchanges and create opportunities to share expertise in traditional arts promotion. In September, I was at the 50th conference of the Kommission für Volksdichtung in Tirana and Gjirokaster, Albania, hosted by Olimbi Velaj. The conference was diverse and fascinating and the cultural programme outstanding.

This Spring, I'll be on research leave, working on a book about the burning of the Clavie, some ballad papers and publications, and an initiative about North-east culture. I plan to visit Riga to work with Ardian's international team; New York to continue my work with Rocking the Boat; and Slovenia to learn from Anja Moric's Putscherle Institute, with similar interests.

The next iteration of this column will come from Acting Director, Frances Wilkins. I wish her well in the role and I'll see you all next Autumn.

Thomas A. McKean



Postcard from Taiwan

I completed the MLitt degree with a dissertation titled 'Sacred singing - Cross-Cultural Comparison of Gaelic Psalms Singing in Lewis and the Unaccompanied Sacred Songs of the Formosan Aboriginal Bunun Tribe' in November 2005. Studying in Aberdeen was a fairy-tale time of my life. I learned traditional Scottish fiddle, ceilidh, and Gaelic at SC&T (Scottish Culture & Tradition). I joined the Elphinstone Fiddlers (student's club) at the University. I did fieldwork on the Isle of Lewis and participated in the Up Helly Aa fire festival in Shetland.

Under the tutelage of Professor Ian Russell, Dr. Thomas McKean, and the late Dr. Colin Milton, I learned various academic theories and research methods of Ethnology and Folklore at the Elphinstone Institute. I was equipped with various academic tools, which enabled me to deal with any research problems that I encountered after graduation. I advanced my PhD study of Ethnomusicology and Austronesian studies at Dunedin in New Zealand. Nowadays I work as a music teacher in primary school as well as an adjunct assistant professor at the University of Taipei.

The Elphinstone Institute is highly recommended. The University of Aberdeen isn't just about a long history and a beautiful campus with friendly people, it's an ideal place to develop great erudition and scholarship. I miss you all. Lang may yer lum reek!

Lancini Jen-Hao Cheng

Elizabeth Stewart

Our extraordinary friend, Elizabeth Stewart, has died at the age of 83, a peerless singer, pianist, storyteller, dealer, and raconteur, deeply missed by all who value Scottish tradition and Traveller culture. She was an abundantly talented force of nature whose deeply felt renditions of traditional songs, or indeed those of her own composition, I will never forget.

Elizabeth and I spent many hours together since I first met her in 1988, at the Edinburgh Folk Festival. Standing in the lobby after her performance, she took my hand, looked me in the eye and sang to me, into me, and, it seemed, to me alone. No one, and I mean no one could put a song across like Elizabeth. Sometimes she did it so well that she herself couldn't go on, overcome by the unfolding tragedy and by the constellation of family, history, love, and emotion that informs the songs. I'll never forget that.

Driving together around Buchan and beyond, I absorbed so much more than her wonderful songs and stories; I experienced her absolute conviction about the value of her culture and identity. We drove a lot together in those days, visiting the Abbey at Old Deer, Aden, and lord knows where else; we just drove, sometimes to look at something, sometimes to tour the countryside, perhaps go by Aikey Brae, or through Fetterangus to see the old house(s) and fields, and the graveyard to pay tribute to her dear mother, Jean, and beloved aunt Lucy, to sing a song for them. Or maybe we'd drive through to Aberdeen for an Elphinstone event, or up to Keith, or Kirrie, for the festivals. Or maybe down to Edinburgh for her star turn at the Edinburgh International Festival alongside Jock Duncan and Tom Reid - what a night that was. She sang the Plooman Laddies, of course, and we dueted on The Jolly Beggar, with her harmonizing on the chorus. Later I recorded that duet and sent it to American folklorist, Kenny Goldstein, who was delighted to hear it all those years after he had recorded Lucy singing it (1959-60) and happy to think of a young protégé, me, connecting with Elizabeth whom he'd first known as a teenager some 35 years before. One afternoon, I recorded her singing it, up tempo on piano for the dance floor, at the New Deer Hall. Unstoppable joy.

Another time, we went up to Rathven Fair, outside Buckie, with her and her daughter and grand-daughter. It was a grand afternoon and in at the deep end for me. We

visited a cousin who sang a beautiful version of Lang Lang a-Growin followed by a great (very) bawdy song and I soon learned of Elizabeth's ability to cross genres and traditions. On the one hand, she was a peerless traditional singer while on the other a fan of Winifred Atwell, Country and Western music, and Rock 'n' Roll.

In 1997, Elizabeth and I, together with Valentina Bold, went off to the USA. First stop, Memphis, where we went to Sun Records, home of Elvis's first recording sessions, but also pioneering recordings by Roy Orbison, Johnny Cash, and - goodness, gracious - Jerry Lee Lewis, bad boy and bad boy piano player, right up Elizabeth's street. She loved his sheer appetite for life and was thrilled to play The Highland Wedding on the very piano he used (pictured left).



Next stop, Graceland. What an eye opener. We were all converts, if we had not been before. Again, Elizabeth was in heaven.

Onwards then to Austin, where Elizabeth was a singing, piano playing, storytelling, knitting, and dealing polymath for our session at the American Folklore Society Annual Meeting. She held court in the lobby between sessions, reunited once more with Diane Goldstein, whom she had babysat long before. So good to see them together. We flew up to New Hampshire then, visiting my mother, with whom Elizabeth talked knitting. She wasn't feeling too well the first night and went to bed early, but my cousins Rick and Elise brought up a portable keyboard and Elizabeth was out of bed in a trice, playing marches and strathspeys with us into the night.

Sometimes, Elizabeth, Jessie Milne, and I would play at old folks' homes, or in sheltered housing. Piano, fiddle, and bouzouki. Jigs, marches, reels, and songs. The Cameron Highlanders, with her inimitable lift, and her tour de force, The Highland Wedding 'with variations', the very best piano you'll ever hear. Kenny Goldstein was always impressed with that piano playing. No one played with such vivacity and she brought pipe tunes to life with her instinctive musicianship. She leaves behind remarkable recordings, a candid, emotionally honest memoir, and indelible memories for anyone who encountered her. She was one of a kind and I'll miss her deeply.

Thomas A. McKean

Launch of Toulmin Prize 2023

We are pleased to announce that the Toulmin Prize 2023 has opened for submissions. The short story competition has inspired a wide range of creative writing in a mixture of Doric and English since its inception in 2008. It is sponsored by grandsons of David Toulmin (AKA John Reid), Steven and Martin Reid.

John Reid (1913-1998) was an Aberdeenshire farm labourer from Rathen, near Fraserburgh. As David Toulmin, he had some articles printed in local newspapers. The first of his ten books was published when he was fifty-nine years old. They consist of short stories and reminiscences, with his one novel, *Blown Seed*, painting a harsh picture of farm life. He was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Aberdeen in 1986.

The Toulmin Prize is open to all amateur writers over the age of sixteen. The story should be concerned with some aspect of life in North-East Scotland and may be written in Scots, including Doric, or English, or a mixture of the two. The short story of up to 4,000 words in length should be submitted along with an entry form by the deadline, Monday, 1 May 2023.

The winner will receive a £500 prize, and the story will be read aloud by well-known North-East writer, Sheena Blackhall, at a University of Aberdeen event later in the year. Entry forms are available on our website www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/public-engagement/toulmin.

Alison Sharman

Our events at a glance...

Thursday, 19 January 2023 *Public Lecture Series*

Seinn Spioradil: The Sacred Singers of the West Highlands and Western Isles - Frances Wilkins

Thursday, 26 January to Thursday, 8 June 2023

Polish-Scottish Song Group (2nd & 4th Thursdays)

Thursday, 2 February 2023 *Ethnographic Film Series*

Govan Young (2018) and Comrades Together-Apart/ Camarades Junts-I-A-Banda (2021)

Thursday, 16 February 2023 *Public Lecture Series*

Being an African: The Burden of Proof in Being in a Space - Bertha Yakubu

Thursday 2 March 2023 *Ethnographic Film Series*

Two Ears, One Mouth (1999) and Imagine Waking Tomorrow (2011) - Filmmaker Andy Benfield Q&A

Thursday, 16 March 2023 *Public Lecture Series*

Burnbanks Village - Joe McLeod

Thursday, 30 March 2023 *Ethnographic Film Series*

Elphinstone Institute Staff and Student Ethnographic Film Showcase

Monday, 1 May 2023 Toulmin Prize Submission Deadline

Check our website for updates: www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone

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

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

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

Simon Gall, Public Engagement Officer

Alison Sharman, Administrator

Research Students

Kristin Borgehed, North Studentship, an ethnographic study of northern cultural performance

Mary Cane, the grandmother experience in family life today

Mollie Carlyle, the legacies of Stan Huggill

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 Bhaoill, traditional singing among children in Ireland

Lorna Summers, community boat building 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

Paul Anderson, North-East fiddle styles and repertoires

Dr David Atkinson, J. M. Carpenter Project

Dr Pat Ballantyne, Scottish step-dance traditions

Dr Athanasios Barmplexis, contemporary shamanic healing in Scotland

Nataliya Bezborodova, custom and belief

Dr Julia Bishop, J.M. Carpenter Project

Sheena Blackball, 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 the exciting things that we are up to at the Elphinstone Institute by following us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram

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*

