

Researching, recording, and promoting the cultural traditions of North and North-East Scotland

NAFCo 2010 International Fiddle Convention Back in Town!

Following on from its great success in St. John's, Newfoundland, in 2008, the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention will return to Aberdeen in 2010, hosted by the Elphinstone Institute in partnership with Scottish Culture and Traditions Association (SC&T). It will be a wonderful opportunity to experience the excellence of Scottish fiddling and the many other styles, along with associated dance traditions found around the North Atlantic rim, particularly in Scandinavia, North America, Ireland, and elsewhere in Britain. Appropriately based in North-East Scotland, noted for its outstanding tradition of playing and composing, the Convention will celebrate centuries of cultural exchange, in which the northern seas, far from isolating communities, were and are the corridors through which they developed their distinctive but related musical traditions.

The Convention will consist of a five-day festival, 14-18 July 2010, featuring concerts,

ceilidhs, solo recitals, workshops (fiddle, other instruments, and dance), demonstrations, free performances, 'market-place' events, workplace events, hospital visits, sessions in pubs and at the Festival and Family Club at the Lemon Tree, paralleled by an academic conference to be held at King's College, based on the theme 'Local Roots, Global Routes'. Mornings will be reserved for the conference; the lunchtimes for free events including taster concerts and the busking trails in the city centre; the afternoons for the workshops and solo recitals; and the evenings for the main showcase performances, as well as ceilidh dances. Besides the many events taking place in Aberdeen itself, there will also be concerts and workshops at Banchory, Haddo, and Huntly, plus a village ceilidh at Garlogie.

Among our guests at the convention will be Paul Anderson, Liz Doherty, Alasdair Fraser, Kimberly Fraser, Natalie Haas, Ronan Martin, Bruce Molsky, Göran Premberg, the



NAFCo guest Liz Doherty

Cullivoe Fiddlers, and many more.

A steering committee has been set up of interested parties and regular meetings are being held. We are particularly looking for families who will host guests, volunteers to drive mini-buses, volunteers for stewarding, and other offers of help and support. By the time this newsletter is published we hope to have in place a Convention Assistant. If you would like to help us, please get in touch – nafco@abdn.ac.uk – or contact the Institute on 01224 272996.

Ian Russell

William Stanley Robertson

In the passing of William Stanley Robertson (8 June 1940 – 2 August 2009), Scotland has lost one of her national treasures. Honoured and respected in his lifetime as a storyteller, singer, piper, writer,



Stanley Robertson, eye to eye, heart to heart, 2004. Photo: Ian Russell

playwright, and lecturer, he synthesised history, experience, culture and creativity into spellbinding tales, stories and songs. Born into a large family of the Travelling people he was sadly regularly bullied at school by non-

Travellers and treated like a dunce by his teachers. Meanwhile, at home with his mother, Elizabeth (née MacDonald) from Lumphanan, he was avidly reading the classics, from Shakespeare to the Bible. He left school at fourteen without any qualifications and his talents unrecognised.

From his own people Stanley had a far richer education – wonderful stories about his hero Jack, who overcame all the odds to win through in the end, and the extraordinary ballads and songs that gave him a deep understanding of his country's history and landscape from Harlaw to Drum, from the Covenanters' wars to Culloden. His mentors were many, not just his aunt Jeannie Robertson, but his great aunt, Maggie Stewart, his father, his cousin Lizzie Higgins, and other members of this highly musical extended family, which included the pipers Isaac and Donald Higgins, and the fiddler Albert Stewart.

Although Stanley had sung to the family as a young child and entertained his childhood friends with his storytelling, it was not until he was well into adulthood that he performed in public. Within a few years Stanley established himself as a fine piper, a gifted ballad singer, and an inspirational storyteller. His reputation soon spread across the Atlantic and in time he was invited to lecture at Harvard, Brandeis, and in Vermont. In 1988 Stanley lectured at a six-week summer school at East Tennessee State University. 'When it came to Stanley's turn,' wrote Margaret Bennett, 'he outshone even the most experienced in his ability to convey his subject to the students.'

Stanley had a remarkable ability to take you into the heart of tradition, not just through history or where he had learnt it, but what it is really all about. He will be sadly missed by all who care about Scotland and her traditions.

Ian Russell and Tom McKean



From the Director

It's good to be back after my six month's leave and I'm pleased to say that I have managed to progress my research with the following results: three refereed articles accepted for publication, two more in the pipeline, three conference papers given, and a volume of an international journal edited. Subjects covered include: the evolving repertoire of bothy ballads, negotiating the secular and the sacred in the soirée, the folk arts as intangible cultural assets, tracing the history of a murder ballad in tradition, and the contribution of the performer as scholar to our understanding of fiddle music. In addition, I have made progress with my monograph on vernacular performance in the North-East. I am very grateful to Dr McKean, the Deputy Director, who has managed the Institute in my absence, and to Alison Sharman the Institute Secretary, for her strong support.

The winner of the 2009 Toulmin Prize of £500 was Eleanor Fordyce with 'Sae Mony Summers'; a copy of her winning short story can be read in the June issue of the *Leopard* or at the Leopard online. I am very grateful to our judges – Jack Webster, Lindy Cheyne, Norman Harper, and Paul Dukes. In 2010, the short story competition in memory of David Toulmin will run for the third consecutive year, supported by the *Leopard* magazine and the Scots Language Centre. The competition is open to amateur writers of 16 years and over. Entries should reach the Institute by 31 March 2010 and must be unpublished, of no more than 4,000 words in length, in MS Word format and as A4 typescript. The winner will be announced in May at the 2010 WORD Festival. For full competition rules, please consult our website.

One of our PhD students, Les Donaldson, who is researching the history of Aberdeen's Seven Incorporated Trades, is currently in Delaware attending a conference organised by the Society of Antiquaries and Winterthur Museum, 'Transatlantic Craftsmanship: Scotland and the Americas in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries'. Two of our other PhD students, Irene Watt and Adam Grydehøj, together with Dr McKean and I, will be presenting papers at the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society in Boise, Idaho, later this month.

Warmest congratulations are due to another of our students, Jennifer Fagen and Henry Mangkusasono who were married on 5 September in Ruch, Oregon. Jennifer also kindly provided participants in the Friends of the Institute's Ballad Bus outing with an insight into the folklore and history of the 'Back o Bennachie' on 26 September. *Ian Russell*



Conference delegates at Clickimin Broch during the excursion. Photo: Adam Grydehøj.

The Old Ship of Zion

In May this year my PhD thesis, 'The Old Ship of Zion: Singing in Evangelicalism in North-East and Northern Isles Scottish Coastal Communities 1859–2009', passed the scrutiny of Dr Vic Gammon from Newcastle University and Prof. Donald Meek, Emeritus professor from the University of Edinburgh and I graduated with a doctorate in July. In June, I had the privilege of being part of the EVIA (Ethnographic Video for Instruction and Analysis) digital archive project which took place over two weeks at the University of Indiana, Bloomington. This was a fantastic experience, and I was accompanied by around fifteen ethnomusicologists and anthropologists from the USA, UK, Irish Republic, and Austria each with in-depth knowledge of cultures including those of Cuba, Turkey, Romania, Russia, and Portugal. We were trained in using video annotation software, developed by staff at Indiana, to write detailed analysis of ten hours of video recordings which each of us had made during field research. Once completed, the work will be peer-reviewed and published online. I am now working as a visiting tutor for the Music Department and archive assistant at the Elphinstone Institute. I also have a variety of musical projects on the go, including a CD, 'Instant Ceilidh', with the band Danse McCabre, working in the three-piece group, 'Ellefish', with Christine Kydd and Kit Watson, and planning a nine-day tour of Ireland in March 2010 with Shetland fiddler Claire White as Blyde Lasses, where we will be performing and giving workshops in arts centres and in the University of Limerick's music department. *Frances Wilkins*

Island Cultures Conference in Shetland

Taking Islands out of the Box: Island Cultures and Shetland Identity took place in Lerwick, Shetland in May 2009. The four-day event – the first in the Island Dynamics series of biennial conferences – was a collaboration of the Elphinstone Institute, UHI Millennium Institute's Centre for Nordic Studies, and Shetland Museum & Archives.

The theme was the role of islands as meeting places for cultures and the influence these meetings have on the formation of local identities. With 57 speakers from 22 sovereign states and autonomous regions, the event's exploration of local communities had a decidedly international perspective. Although the majority of presenters came from Western Europe, some had travelled from as far afield as Iran, Newfoundland, New Zealand, and North Cyprus.

Delegates heard talks with topics ranging from traditional music to microeconomics, from folk belief to fire festivals, from archaeology to tourism. The two keynote speakers, Carsten Jensen and Bo Almqvist, spoke about Danish island literature and Shetland legends respectively. Additionally, seven politicians and government ministers from European island communities participated in a series of talks and a discussion forum investigating 'Perspectives on Island Autonomy'.

Local storyteller Lawrence Tulloch hosted a bus tour of Shetland's North Mainland, including an exhilarating trip to the Eshaness cliffs, where blustery weather sent waves crashing over the sea stacks; more than one conference delegate was photographed while clinging for dear life to a boulder on the plateau. We finished with a conference dinner, a performance of the Papa Stour sword dance, a storytelling session by Elma Johnson, and a buffet dinner and concert hosted by the European Commission Office in Scotland.

The next Island Dynamics conference, *Taking Malta out of the Box: Island Cultures, Economies, and Identities*, will take place in Malta on 4–8 May 2011. The deadline for abstract submissions is 1 September 2010. For more information, and a full programme from Shetland, see www.islanddynamics.net.

Adam Grydehøj

The Cullerlie Traditional Singing Weekend 2009 – A View from Sweden

Strong voices, individual voices, beautiful voices, voices solo and in chorus completely filled the Cullerlie tea-room, the bothy and the marquee for three days in July. Out of doors, that weekend was probably the coldest and wettest this summer, but indoors warmth prevailed both literally and figuratively. As a Swedish singer and colleague of Elphinstone staff, I had heard of this event and eventually managed to attend. It was a lovely experience, and a unique one. The Singing Weekend team seem to have found a very good balance of ceilidh concerts, singarounds and workshops; I appreciated the opportunity to both listen and to take part. Adam McNaughtan's talk on Burns, illustrated by Gordeanna McCulloch's singing, was very interesting to an outsider, especially as he compared Burns to the contemporary Swedish 'singer-songwriter' Carl Michael Bellman!

The relaxed and comfortable mixture of well-known with lesser-known singers is a phenomenon you do not often meet in this era of professionalization. It seems to me that the unplugged character of the weekend, and everybody's intent attention to each others' singing, contributes greatly to the Cullerlie spirit.

Even more striking is the fact that Scotland, especially, seems still to have quite a number of mature singers with a family tradition of some kind. In several other countries in Europe, that generation hardly exists; what remains is revival and post-revival singers who draw mostly on archival recordings for their repertoire. I can only hope that more young people will come to Cullerlie and take inspiration from it in the coming years.

Ingrid Åkesson



Alana Henderson and Con Ó Drisceoil at Cullerlie 2009.
Photos: James Dyas Davidson

The Elphinstone Collection

November will see the culmination of almost four years of work and the fulfilment of one of my main fellowship objectives: to see to the publication of a collection of previously unpublished and out-of-print North-East fiddle repertoire. Initially, I thought that the *Elphinstone Collection* would contain around forty tunes but, as is often the case with projects of this nature, I discovered more and more material as I went along. The collection now contains around 100 tunes, including previously unpublished compositions by North-East fiddle legends William Marshall, James Scott Skinner and Peter Milne.

One particular reason for its size is that I have included all of the known compositions of Peter Milne. Though Milne is considered to be one of Scotland's great fiddle composers, his complete known works have never been published within a single collection, unlike those of Marshall and Skinner. After the discovery of Peter's last resting place in a pauper's grave in 2006, and the erection of a suitable memorial stone in 2007, I decided that it would be fitting to publish all of his tunes, including 18 previously unpublished pieces.

As well as containing tunes by some of the legends of the Scots fiddle, the collection also includes music by less well-known composers, such as Jock Morgan and Alexander Walker, legendary exponents of the North-East style, such as Hector MacAndrew and Bert Murray and, although my own collection of 308 tunes, *The Lochnagar Collection*, was published in August, I have included a few of my own more recent tunes.

The *Elphinstone Collection* is not a definitive record of previously unpublished North-East fiddle music, but it is a contribution towards bringing some unknown and forgotten music to the attention of the fiddle playing public. Without a doubt there are musical gems still waiting to be discovered, but I am happy that in a small way the *Elphinstone Collection* will contribute to our great fiddle tradition.

Paul Anderson



THE ELPHINSTONE COLLECTION OF FIDDLE TUNES FROM NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

COMPILED AND EDITED
BY PAUL ANDERSON



The Elphinstone Collection is published by Taigh na Teud in association with the Elphinstone Institute and *The Lochnagar Collection* is published by Highland Music Trust; both are available from the Elphinstone Institute.

Who's Who at the Elphinstone

Dr Ian Russell, Director, *Ethnology, oral traditions, including singing, music-making, drama and speech*

Dr Thomas A. McKean, Deputy Director, archives and research, *ethnology, ballads, beliefs, Gaelic tradition, preparing a critical edition of the J.M. Carpenter Collection*

Dr Colin Milton, Associate Director, Hon., *Scottish literature and folklore, especially of the North-East*

Dr Julia C. Bishop, NEH & BAc Research Fellow & team leader for: *a critical edition of the J.M. Carpenter Collection of traditional song and drama*

Dr David Atkinson, NEH & BAc Research Fellow, *preparing a critical edition of the J.M. Carpenter Collection of traditional song and drama*

Dr Elaine Bradtke, BAc Research Fellow, *preparing a critical edition of the J.M. Carpenter Collection of traditional song and drama*

Dr Eddie Cass, NEH & BAc Research Fellow, *preparing a critical edition of the J.M. Carpenter Collection of traditional song and drama*

Fiona-Jane Brown, PhD student, *researching Belief in East and West Coast Fishing Communities*

Les Donaldson, PhD student, *researching the Seven Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen*

Jennifer Fagen, PhD student, *researching the landscape of the Garioch*

Adam Grydehøj, PhD student, *researching Tradition and Cultural Promotion on Shetland*

Sara Reith, PhD student, *George Reid Studentship, researching Ethnology and Folklore of Scottish Travellers*

Irene Watt, PhD student, *researching lullabies*

Dr Frances Wilkins, Archive Assistant

Alison Sharman, Secretary

Honorary Research Fellows

Dr Mary Anne Alburger, *music and song, fiddle making, eighteenth century culture*

Dr Caroline Macafee, *Scots Language, Scottish National Dictionary Association*

Professor Bill Nicolaisen, *ethnology, folk narrative, name studies, Scottish place names*

Research Associates

Paul Anderson, *Reconnecting today's Scottish traditional musicians with Scotland's North-East traditional fiddle styles and repertoires*

Sheena Blackhall, *Creative writing in Scots*

Dr Katherine Campbell, *Scots fiddle, instrumental and song traditions*

Evelyn Hood, *Scottish traditions of dance*

Dr David Northcroft, *Education in the North East*

Dr Robert Young Walser, *Maritime musical traditions, the J. M. Carpenter Collection research team*

Les Wheeler, *Scots language, education*

Postscript

If you have any information, comments or suggestions of relevance to the work of the Institute, do not hesitate to contact us.

The Institute relies on outside financial support to make many of its activities possible. If you would like to help us in this way and/or become a Friend of the Elphinstone Institute, please contact the Secretary.

The Bennachie Colonies

Last winter, when I was interviewed for the BBC's *Drive Time* on stories of Bennachie and its Colony, the interviewer suggested that studies about abandoned settlements are neither new or interesting. I was so surprised that such sites could be shrugged off so blithely, despite obvious local community interest and the significance of the Lowland Clearances.

Research on built heritage is one way to bring communities face to face with their sense of place and to strengthen group identity. I was fortunate to find support for my research on the colonies from the Bailies of Bennachie conservation charity. The Colony had been documented, but these accounts focused on 1890s media attention, rather than on the individual families that settled there. The research culminated in a guided walk of the community during this August's Bennachie Homecoming Festival in which two descendants participated; all were moved when they saw their ancestors' home for the first time.

During the festival, Chapel of Garioch was overrun with hill walkers and enthusiasts, ready to drink, dance, and sing their love for Bennachie. Doric night was a hit, with George Smith as compère, and Algy Watson reciting a moving version of 'I Wudna Be an Orra Loon', while the Garioch Fiddlers provided lively musical interludes. On Saturday night, the village hall was rocked by Danse McCabre, as the first Bennachie Ceilidh attracted people of all ages. On Sunday, the Annual Rally featured Sheena Blackhall, who sang her own version of the Maiden Stone story, included in her new book, *The Barley Queen*.

The results of my research on the Colony have been written up and will be made available to the public, while Colony descendants are learning about each other and forming new connections. Above all, it has opened a dialogue between community groups on how to interpret and conserve the built heritage on Bennachie. If you are interested in being a part of the project, see www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk for updates; monthly work parties are held. In the meantime, please continue sending your Bennachie stories to me at the Elphinstone Institute.

Jennifer Fagen

IMPORTANT DATES for your DIARY

Ceilidh, Friday 30 October
Dancing to 'Rolling Stovies'
Elphinstone Hall, 8pm–12 midnight.
£8 (£6 conc.)
All Welcome!

Open Evening
Thursday 12 November (6–9pm)
A Tribute to Stanley Robertson, with members of his family, 7–8pm
Refreshments!

Public Lectures 2009/2010
Tuesdays at 7.30–9.00pm
Admission £3.00 includes refreshments
Room MR028
(CPD Suite/James Scotland Room),
MacRobert Building, King's College,
University of Aberdeen

29th September 2009
Title 'Voices from the Scottish Diaspora'
Speaker Dr Marjory Harper
Institution University of Aberdeen

27th October 2009
Title 'A Different Viewpoint – Archaeology from the Air'
Speaker Moira Greig
Institution Archaeologist, Aberdeenshire Council

24th November 2009
Title 'Documentary Film-making in Scotland'
Speaker David Peat
Institution Film Director of 'Gutted'

26th January 2010
Title 'Corn Dollies and Straw Work in Scotland: from Cornfield to Catwalk'
Speaker Elaine Lindsay
Institution Inverurie, Aberdeenshire

23rd February 2010
Title 'North East Humour'
Speaker Stephen Robertson
Institution Rector, University of Aberdeen

30th March 2010
Title 'Piping Traditions in the Southern Outer Hebrides: An Illustrated Talk'
Speaker Joshua Dickson
Institution Head of Scottish Music, Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama

27th April 2010
Title 'In Search of Traveller Identity'
Speaker Sara Reith, PhD Researcher
Institution University of Aberdeen

25th May 2010
Title 'Walking Culture and Outdoor Access'
Speakers Professor Tim Ingold and Dr Jo Vergunst
Institution University of Aberdeen

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