

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

## Scottish Craft Traditions at the May Festival, 9-11 May 2014

**T**he Institute will have a strong presence at the University's May Festival, 9-11 May 2014, sponsoring four displays of traditional Scottish crafts by master craftsmen and women. Although known for work in oral traditions, the Institute is equally committed to research in material culture and its associated craft traditions.

At the Elphinstone Hall, Elaine Lindsay will present straw work, the art of weaving decorative objects and figures out of oat straw – the 'corn dolly' – once a feature at end of harvest celebrations. Lindsay has brought the art of straw weaving into the twenty-first century; she has taught on the continent and in the USA and her work has featured at catwalk shows in New York, Paris and London.

Ian Kinnear demonstrates the making of Scottish bellows-blown bagpipes. These beautiful instruments, revived in the last few decades, are growing in popularity year on year. Ian – currently enrolled in our MLitt – has been making pipes for more than twenty years and his craftsmanship and teaching are in demand around the world.

Also at the Hall, Alan Steele represents the Wrights and Coopers of the Seven Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen, demonstrating the art of woodturning. Since the twelfth century, the members of the Seven Trades have shared the common aim of 'using their work for the good of the burgh' and Alan's quality workmanship and specialist skills have stood the test of time.

Finally, a group from the Portsoy Coastal Rowing Club will present a part-built St Ayles skiff, ten of which are currently being made in Banffshire schools. Based on a small Fair Isle fishing boat, the skiff is ideally suited to racing and, as part of the Coastal Rowing Project, Portsoy women built and now race *Soy Quine*, recently joined by the *Soy Loon*.

Together, these skilled practitioners represent the best of Scottish craftwork, drawing on ancient roots and aesthetic traditions, updated and relevant for today.

*Thomas A. McKean*



Alison Sharman, Nick Le Bigre, Ryo Yamasaki, Keiji Minato, Masahiro Katoh, Mizuki Nakayama, Keiko Wells, Sakura Wells, and Yann Wells at Dunnottar Castle. Photo by Thomas A. McKean

## The Institute Hosts Visitors from Ritsumeikan University, Japan

**I**n February, the Institute hosted a group of ballad scholars and students from Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto. The group joined our Taught MLitt students for lectures on Lyric Song (including bothy songs and discussions on variation, localization and adaptation) and on Gaelic Song from bardic poetry to twentieth-century topical verse.

That evening, PhD student Nick Le Bigre and staff arranged a sampling of North-East foodways, including specialties like smoked salmon, Arbroath smokies, bridies, haggis, and finishing off with cranachan. MLitt student Ian Kinnear provided some tunes for dancing and we shared a few songs, including 'The Barnyards o Delgaty', and a Japanese version of 'Auld Lang Syne'.

On Wednesday, Nick Le Bigre led the party on a walking tour of Old Aberdeen, taking in the Snow Kirk graveyard and associated legends, St Machar's Cathedral, the Brig o Balgownie and Seaton Park, followed by a lecture/seminar on ballads. I introduced them to prominent singing families of the North-East – mainly the Fetterangus Stewarts, the Stewarts of Blairgowrie and the Robertsons – and we explored the expressive depths and extraordinary poetry of some classic ballads.

Thursday's fieldtrip to Auchquhorthies stone circle, near Portlethen, and Dunnottar rounded off their experience, contextualizing the traditions heard about in lectures, with an experience of North-East land and sea scapes, from the oldest visible layers of civilization, to the more recent vernacular architecture of a typical farm steading and Aberdeen Harbour's oil service vessels.

We hope to continue this exchange, building on our common interest in the incomparable Scottish song tradition.

*Thomas A. McKean*

### Electronic Newsletter

With rising postage and printing costs, we are planning to issue our newsletter in an electronic format from Autumn 2014. Don't worry, those of you who prefer printed copies will still receive them – you need do nothing.

If you would prefer an electronic version, please e-mail us, with 'electronic newsletter' in the subject line, at [elphinstone@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:elphinstone@abdn.ac.uk).



## From the (Acting) Director

We've had an extremely busy time, this last six months. Ian Russell retired at the end of January after fifteen years of sterling and indefatigable service. His imagination and creativity have left the Institute a much stronger and more vibrant place. We look forward, of course, to his continued association through his emeritus status and, indeed, our students have already benefited from some 'guest' lectures.

Let's back up for a minute, though, and congratulate our graduating MLitt students Liz Campbell (Scotland), Jamie Johnson (Québec), Carleigh Tierney (USA), Natalie Brown (USA), Wibke Reimer (Germany) who researched subjects as diverse as the Thainstone mart, psychic abilities, online knitting forums, traditional music in formal education and contemporary encounters with the supernatural, a testament to our students' imaginations and the breadth of our discipline.

I took part in the 43rd International Ballad Conference in October in Stellenbosch, South Africa, which was a wonderful event, full of interesting papers on song traditions from Scotland to Zimbabwe and points between and I've just recently returned from 'Tales that Travel: Storytelling in Eurasia 10th-16th Centuries', in Abu Dhabi, organized by Evelyn Vitz and Maurice Pomerantz of NYU, at which I talked about the Stewart family's traditions associated with King James V.

On a sad note, we're sorry to hear that Norman Mackenzie recently passed away. Norman was one of our first MLitt completions – on Aberdeen's Madame Murray – and was a constant source of insight into the early folk revival, of which he was a part. After a career as a research chemist, Norman returned to study with us, earning his MLitt at the age of 82.

On a brighter note, we are very pleased to welcome Frances Wilkins back from maternity leave (little Seumas is thriving and seems to have been a big hit on his first trip to visit the James Bay Cree, on Frances's latest research trip; see report).

Finally, we're very happy to welcome the latest EI baby, Isla Mairi Leith, to the fold. Congratulations to PhD student Carley Williams Leith and Phil Leith!

*Thomas A. McKean*

**Addendum/correction:** We are pleased to affirm that Frances Wilkins has joined us on a permanent lectureship (part-time, at present).



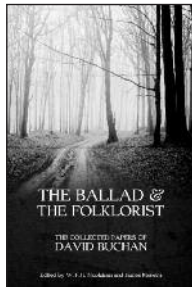
Bill Corston in conversation with Frances Wilkins. Photo by Ronan Martin

## Return to Moose Factory with the James Bay Cree

**I**n January, I was delighted to have the opportunity to return to Moose Factory, Northern Ontario, to continue my research into the James Bay Cree fiddle music and dance tradition. This was following a week spent in Toronto where I gave the annual lecture for the St Andrew's Society of Toronto on my James Bay research and also visited and spoke at the Centre for Scottish Studies at the University of Guelph.

This latest research visit to James Bay was funded by a small research grant from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland. During my time in Moose Factory I stayed with James, Daisy, and Treena Cheechoo, and worked closely with the family to document the square dances which are a fundamental aspect of James Bay Cree fiddle performance. I also interviewed a number of musicians and dancers, attended a round dance event, and took part as a performer in the 'Pathways to Peace' conference which was taking place at the same time. The research visit was very successful and has led to further discussions and plans for the further development of James Bay-Scottish links, including a possible Scottish contingent of performers at the annual 'Gathering of Our People' festival in 2015 and an ethnographic film. I will also be writing a journal article on the James Bay square dance tradition for publication later in the year. I am looking forward to attending the 'Transnationalization of Religion through Music' conference at the University of Montreal in October 2014, and plan to continue my research on the east coast of James Bay at that time.

*Frances Wilkins*

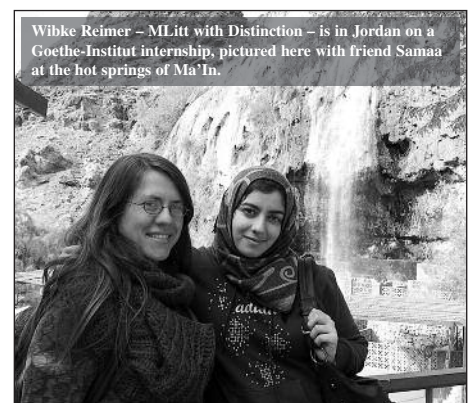


## David Buchan's Collected Essays

**The Institute** is pleased to announce the publication of *The Ballad & The Folklorist*, which brings together a lifetime of scholarship by the eminent folklorist, David Buchan (1939–1994). The beautifully-crafted essays, edited by professor emeritus W. F. H. Nicolaisen and Dr James Moreira, and published by Memorial University, Newfoundland, in association with the Institute, take the reader beyond David's ground-breaking work on ballads, to articles on tale-roles, folk narrative, and the ethnology of North-East Scotland. With contributions on contemporary legend, folk drama, rhyme, joke, riddle, anecdote, custom and folk medicine, the collection celebrates the complex and wide-ranging achievements of one of the twentieth century's most innovative and influential folklorists. The book is available from the Institute, or from our online store, [www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/publications](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/publications).



Congratulations to Liz Campbell (MLitt with Commendation). Photo by Gordon Casely



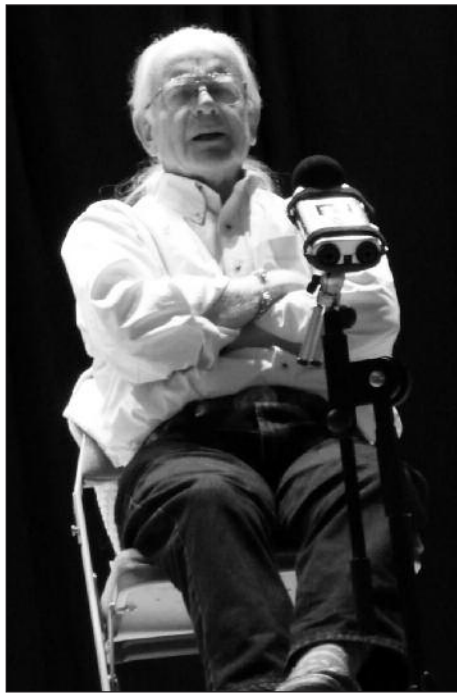
Wibke Reimer – MLitt with Distinction – is in Jordan on a Goethe-Institut internship, pictured here with friend Samaa at the hot springs of Ma'In.



## Singing with 'Warp and Weft'

**N**orman Kennedy, one of Scotland's finest ambassadors of traditional songs and ballads, is our special 'Homecoming' guest at this year's Traditional Singing Weekend at Cullerlie, on 25–27 July.

Norman was born in Aberdeen into a family of shipbuilders and merchant seamen. He learned songs, stories and folklore from family members and neighbours, notably Jeannie Robertson, and also picked up the skills of the last of the local hand weavers during his teenage years. He travelled



regularly to the Outer Hebrides where he learnt to card, spin,

weave and waulk the tweed in the traditional manner, and also absorbed Gaelic songs and culture. Norman moved to the USA in 1966 and, since that time, he has kept alive the singing and weaving traditions across the States and in his adopted home of Vermont.

In 2003, Norman was awarded the NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) National Heritage Fellowship for his work in preserving the traditions of Scottish ballads and handloom weaving and is the only recipient from the UK to have achieved this honour. It is appropriate that we welcome another craft weaver to the weekend, as well; singer Jimmy Hutchison from Fife will be bringing his loom. Lacemaking by the Bon Accord Bobbin group and quilting by Eleanor Chadburn and Lynne Marco will also be demonstrated, as will the craft of making smallpipes by piper Ian Kinnear and farmhouse cooking with Shirley Foulkes.

The Irish song tradition will be well represented, too, particularly the singing of the border counties of Down in Northern Ireland and Donegal in the Republic. Róisín White hails from the Mourne Mountain area of south County Down. She grew up in the 1950s and 60s in a home filled with music, song and story. Her mother sang constantly as she worked around the house and small farm. Róisín has a great love for the songs and singing of her native Ulster, and songs in the Irish language.

Kevin Mc Gonigle is from the Inishowen Peninsula in County Donegal. Born into a family of singers and musicians, he inherited his love of singing and a wealth of songs from

his mother Roseanne and his late father, Charlie. With a strong commanding voice and easy going nature, Kevin is warmly regarded as a performer and as a caller in sessions. He is Chairperson of the Inishowen Traditional Singers' Circle and co-organises the annual singing festival in March.

Our English guests are from a rural background. John Greaves grew up in North Yorkshire and farmed at Little Beck near Whitby, the district from which his songs are mostly drawn. He tends to sing in his own dialect and has also written songs about farming and his locality. He is one of the founding members of the Yorkshire Garland Project, which is a website devoted to collecting and recording songs. Cuthbert Noble comes from Shepley in the foothills of the South Pennines – an area rich in traditional singing which has survived largely through the after-hunt sings of the Holme Valley Beagles. He has learnt many songs from his father Will and at local sings. As well as working at the family trade of dry stone walling with his sister Lydia, Cuthbert is a practising contemporary artist and has recently graduated from Wimbledon College of Art.

Scottish singing is also strongly featured through Aileen Carr from Perthshire, Kathy Hobkirk from Hawick, John Crawford from Aberdeen, John Valentine from Cove near Aberdeen, and Emma Spiers from Crudie near Turriff. The two song workshops relate to singing traditions from the North-East and Northern Ireland – 'Greig-Duncan's Women' with Aileen Carr, and 'My Journey through Songs', by Róisín White.

For booking and further information see [www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/)

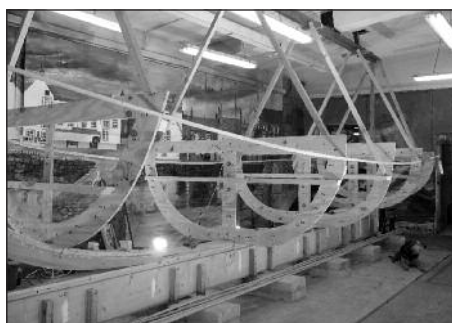
*Ian Russell*

## The Salmon Coble Returns – Building a Traditional Wooden Boat in Portsoy

**N**ot so long ago, salmon cobsles, open boats built of oak and larch and crewed by four to six men, could be seen all around our coast. Venturing out to fish their nets in all but the stormiest weather, these were tough sturdy and dependable little craft. Usually 24–28 feet in length (7.3–8.5m), cobsles were designed with flat bases and recessed propellers to work among floating nets. Despite this, they were powerful enough to tow heavy ropes and carry massive anchors with all the gear needed to rig the complicated bagnets. Often launched from sandy or rocky shores, the coble's distinctive high bow enabled it to cope with varying sea conditions. Clinker-built locally, sizes and angles were varied to suit the needs of individual fishing stations; craftsmanship was often superb, making them highly versatile and giving them a long working life.

Since the collapse of commercial salmon fishing in the 1990s, the coble, once common to many small harbours, has almost disappeared. Able boatbuilders often constructed them purely by eye with no details, or formal plans, ever recorded. Few of these builders remain and, as a result, an important part of our boat building heritage has almost disappeared.

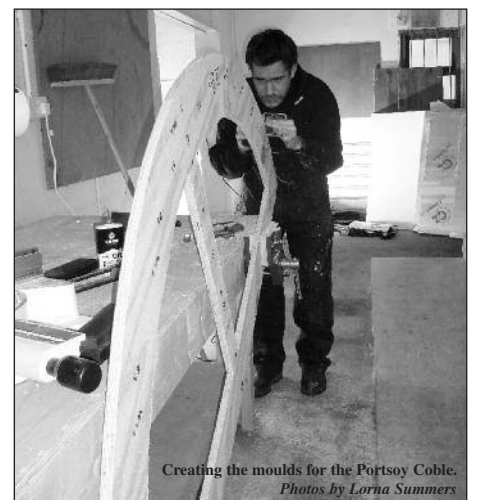
No wooden cobsles have been built on the Moray Firth since the 1970s (although fibre glass versions continued to be made for a time). To remedy this, a group of enthusiasts from PORT (Portsoy Organisation for Restoration and Training, the boatbuilding arm of the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival, held in the town each summer), have begun building a coble from scratch, investigating skills and revivifying building techniques as they go. They are delighted to have the advice and support of former boatbuilders who worked in the Portsoy area. Generous funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund has enabled them to build in the traditional manner and we are documenting and filming all aspects the



coble's construction, following the process from timber selection to launch and beyond.

Building is currently underway and visitors are welcome to call in to the workshop in Portsoy's South High St, where boatbuilding volunteers will explain what has been achieved so far. An exhibition illustrating the development of salmon fishing and coble building will be held in the Salmon Bothy in this summer.

*Lorna Summers*



## IMPORTANT DATES for your DIARY

### 9–11 May 2014

Elphinstone Institute events at the University's May Festival

### 11 May 2014

Toulmin Prize celebration with readings

### 25–27 July 2014

Cullerlie Traditional Singing Weekend

### 6 September 2014

'Pioneer Collectors' Song Conference, at the Elphinstone Institute in association with Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh

### 20 September 2014

Friends of the Elphinstone Institute Ballad Bus

### Public Lectures 2014

Tuesdays at 7.30-9.00pm Admission £3.00 includes refreshments  
Room MR051, MacRobert Building, King's College, University of Aberdeen

### 25 March 2014

Title: 'The "Mouth" of the River Don: Metaphor in Names and Language'  
Speaker: Carole Hough  
Institution: University of Glasgow

### 29 April 2014

Title: 'What is an "Urban Legend"?'  
Speaker: Sandy Hobbs  
Institution: University of the West of Scotland

### 27 May 2014

Title: *Special Event*, 'The Turra Coo Centenary'  
Speaker: Graeme Cruickshank  
Institution: Independent Researcher

## Celebrating David Toulmin

**J**oin us for the 2014 Toulmin celebration and the award of the Toulmin Prize, 11 May, 3:30–4:30, in the Linklater Room, on the quad. Contributors include Professor Paul Dukes and Sheena Blackhall, who will read the winning short story. (to be followed by the *Leopard* magazine tea in the marquee).

## Elphinstone Institute Publications

**O**ur publications, including books, CDs and DVDs, are available at the University's on-line store. Point your browser to [www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/publications](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/publications), to purchase *Taking Part in Music*, *The High-Kilted Muse*, *Crossing Over*, *The Elphinstone Collection*, Stanley Robertson's and Elizabeth Stewart's CDs and a range of other publications on fiddle traditions, songs and ballads, education, and more.

## Who's Who at the Elphinstone

### Who's Who at the Elphinstone

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

**Dr Frances Wilkins**, Lecturer, *ethnomusicology, ethnology, sacred singing in coastal communities, Scottish fiddle traditions in northern Canada*

**Emeritus Professor Ian Russell**, *ethnology, oral traditions, including singing, music-making, drama and speech*

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

### Honorary Research Fellows

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

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

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

### Research Students

**Pat Ballantyne**, PhD student, *researching Scottish step dance traditions*

**Richard Bennett**, MLitt Res student, *researching a Speyside distillery community*

**Kristin Borgehed**, PhD student, North Studentship, *researching an ethnographic study of northern cultural performance*

**Janet Byth**, MLitt Res student, *researching schooling in the Fintry area of Aberdeenshire*

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

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

**Ronnie Gibson**, PhD student, *researching the relationships between contemporary and eighteenth-century fiddle traditions*

**Bee Kerr**, PhD student, *researching changing patterns of women's work in the North-East*

**Nicolas Le Bigre**, PhD Student, Margaret Jones Studentship, *researching narratives of immigrant experience*

**Roderick McKenzie**, PhD student, *researching Scottish healing wells, their contemporary use and the implications for nursing practice*

**Máire Ní Bhaoil**, PhD student, *researching traditional singing among children in Ireland*

**Sara Reith**, PhD student, George Reid Studentship, *researching ethnology and folklore of Scottish Travellers*

**Carley Williams**, PhD student, *researching the North-East's intangible cultural heritage in relation to UNESCO policies*

**Sheila Young**, PhD student, *researching women's pre-nuptial rituals in northern Scotland*

**Alison Sharman**, Secretary

### Research Associates

**Paul Anderson**, *North-East fiddle styles and repertoires*

**Sheena Blackhall**, *Creative writing in Scots*

**Dr Elaine Bradtke**, *Preparing a critical edition of the J. M. Carpenter Collection of traditional song and drama*

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

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

**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.**