

Professor Emeritus Ian Russell Honoured with MBE

Congratulations to former Director and Professor Emeritus, Ian Gordon Russell, who was awarded an MBE on the Queen's Birthday Honours List for his services to Music and Cultural Tradition. Staff, students, and members of the Friends of the Elphinstone Institute were pleased to support his nomination alongside numerous friends and colleagues from across the UK and around the world.

There is far too much to comprehensively list here, but a few examples of Ian's work give an idea of the breadth of his achievements. His major contribution for the past fifty years has been to document, research, and celebrate the marvellous carolling traditions of northern England, as well as parts of Ireland and the USA. He has worked with the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress, and has supplied the British Library with hundreds of recordings for their National Sound Archives.

Many of you will know Ian through the Traditional Singing Weekend at Cullerlie, one of the great festivals of unaccompanied song. Now in honour of its late founders Tom and Anne Reid, the festival invites guests

from around the world while also celebrating local North-East singing traditions. Others will know Ian as President of the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention, which he founded in 2001, and which has since travelled the world. Support for Ian's nomination also came from



Professor Emeritus Ian Russell, MBE

some of his friends bidding in the 'knuckle' of the North-East. Ian has regularly documented the wonderful Christmas and New Year flute band walks in Inverallochy, St Combs, and Cairnbulg, often bringing students to conduct fieldwork there. (Indeed, I remember a cold, windy, hail-filled New Year's Day when Ian instructed me to lug about an enormous video camera and tripod so as to document the fleet-footed fluters.)

I should say that it is without a doubt that congratulations are also due to Norma Russell, an equally driving force in many of Ian's endeavours. One final thought: though there are countless other examples of Ian's influential work and partnerships, no less remarkable is his talent as a singer and melodeon player who has brought mirth to many a party and ceilidh.

Well done, Ian!

Nicolas Le Bigre

Ten Years of Polish-Scottish Singing

It's hard to believe that ten years have passed since Agnieszka Waszkiewicz and then-Director Ian Russell co-founded the Polish-Scottish Song Group. The group has grown and changed since the early days, but its ambition – to bring together Scots, Poles, and people of all backgrounds through song – continues.

Our last face-to-face meeting was in February last year when we performed as part of a *Thusty Czwartek* (Fat Thursday) celebration at Peterhead. The mini-bus ride back to the MacRobert Building, during which we sang all the way, is a bittersweet memory, as none of us realised a pandemic was about to change everything.



Screenshot by Mara Shea

Since September, the Home-Home-Дом-Дом Project has kindly sponsored us so that we can sing together online. Workshop leader Janice Clark has done a brilliant job leading us as if we were all in the same room together. One advantage of the online workshops is that we have been able to welcome members from far and wide, not just from Aberdeen. We've enjoyed seeing the faces of new and old friends who had moved as far away as Finland, Poland, and North America, now being able to join us again.

Our latest achievement has been to perform virtually as part of the Mother Language Day, co-sponsored this year by Aberdeen Multicultural Centre and the Elphinstone Institute. It was a great success, and proves that song and culture can always bring us together, no matter how difficult the circumstances.

Here's to another ten years!

If you would like to join in the fun, please contact n.lebigre@abdn.ac.uk – all are very welcome.

Nicolas Le Bigre



From the Director

As the days of 2021 slowly begin to lengthen, our online Burns Night was a ray of light, offering a few inversions of the regular speeches, a Toast to the Laddies and Response, and culminating in a wonderful disquisition on ‘Tam o’ Shanter’ from Richard Bennett, exploring complex dimensions I’d never considered.

This last year has been difficult for all, and more than difficult for some. For folklorists and ethnologists, it has been fascinating to see the upswing of interest in traditional skills as many seek feelings of self-sufficiency and comfort in the domestic sphere. These coping skills have extended to the oral traditions, which I discussed in an article in *The Conversation* on the viral TikTok sea shanty trend, which, for me, is all about our need to take part, to interact creatively with others in these isolating times.

To crystalize our experience of the past year, what better place to look than our Buchan Lecture, ‘Responding to Tragedy: A Folklorist Collects the Pandemic’, delivered by distinguished folklorist, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, whose work includes curating the core exhibition for the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, and a wonderful book exploring her father’s decades of artistic memories of a Jewish childhood in Poland before the Holocaust. The talk was particularly germane in light of our ongoing Lockdown Lore Collection Project, led by Nicolas Le Bigre. If you’d like to contribute, please see our website or contact n.lebigre@abdn.ac.uk.

Meanwhile, our other work continues, with a consultation about regional cultural needs taking shape and planning for this year’s events coming together. In the last few months, Claire Needler and Simon Gall have brought Home-Hame-Дом-Дом to a fine conclusion, with online interactive events involving

many of the participants – ceilidhs, shared experiences, and food and craft traditions. As part of the project’s closing months, Jackie Ross and Jo Gilbert delivered a series of informal Doric classes, which were so popular that a second series was offered. These classes, coupled with the success of our undergraduate Doric/North-East Scots class run by Dawn Leslie, will inform our planned online Doric class, aimed at bringing worldwide access to our rich language and culture.

We partnered with Aberdeen Multicultural Centre to deliver their eighth International Mother Language Day in February, sharing our culture and celebrating the diversity of our region. The video of the event can be found on our Facebook page.

With Doric in mind, we’re pleased to be bringing together a new anthology of short story writing, based on ten years of the Toulmin Story Prize. The book, edited by Richard Bennett, with Alison Sharman, will feature all the winning stories and a selection of the best runners up, along with featured illustrations, and we’re grateful to the Doric Board for a grant to support publication.

Congratulations to Iain Fraser for completing the MLitt with Distinction, with a dissertation on musicians’ relationships with their instruments, and to Dr Dawn Leslie for achieving her PhD on the perceptual dialectology of Doric today. We welcome Dr Athanasios (Sakis) Barmplexis, and Dr Sheila Young as Honorary Research Fellows at the Institute.

Finally, I am sad to report the passing of Marc Ellington, a stalwart defender of North-East culture, from our unmatched traditional songs to heritage skills and crafts. Marc was instrumental in the foundation of the Institute, an enthusiastic supporter, and we had been discussing a number of potential projects over the last few months. The best way we can memorialize him is by continuing our work to celebrate and promote the rich culture of our region.

Thomas A. McKean



*MLitt Graduate, Mara Shea
November 2019*

Postcard from America

What a difference two years makes! Joyfully flipping the calendar to 2021, I thought about being at the Elphinstone Institute in 2019 – field schools, Christmas panto, lectures, laughter, a few tears, endless mugs of tea, and the comfortable book-covered walls of the Buchan Library. I had considered deferring for a year. But I was in my mid-60s, needed a sabbatical from teaching fiddle, and I wasn’t willing to wait.

That was a life-changing decision. In 2016, a good friend in Aberdeenshire told me about the Elphinstone; in 2018 I arrived in the doorway (no doubt looking a bit bewildered and excited) and met my six new classmates. We ranged from 22 to 70-something, with varied backgrounds, and interested in everything – perhaps a fingerprint of budding folklorists and ethnologists. We explored a wide landscape of languages, places, music, ritual, houses, food, animals, stone, farms, technology, and traditional crafts.

Now I share with my fiddle students the stories, music, and traditions that were shared with me. I continue to do research, write, participate in workshops and conferences, and follow paths that look intriguing.

I miss the Elphinstone and Aberdeen! This plague year, however, brought unexpected joys: I join my friends and colleagues online, playing with the Aberdeen Strathspey & Reel Society, singing with the Elphinstone’s Polish-Scottish Song Group, and volunteering with the Lockdown Lore Project, collecting stories and creative expressions of a challenging time. Aberdeen and North Carolina aren’t so very far apart.

Mara Shea

Elphinstone Projects

Amplifying North-East Voices through the Doric

In 2019, the first Doric Slam was held in Aberdeen, partly funded by the Doric Board, and in partnership with Elphinstone Institute. A crowd of over 120 people cheered on fifteen performers aged 16 to 75. The winner, Sheila Reid, scooped prize money and a place in the Scottish national slam championships. As a spoken word artist, in the weeks running up to the slam, I held four writing workshops to allow writers at any stage to emerge with at least one piece they could perform at the slam.

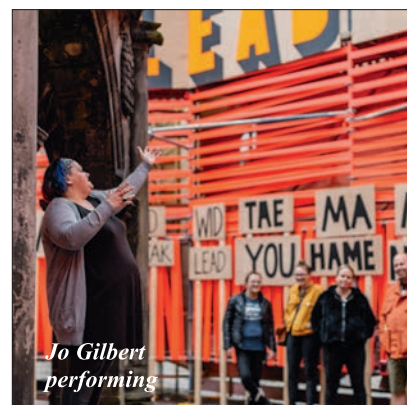
The idea came from competing in the Scottish nationals, where I found that I was the only Doric voice there – most competitors were Edinburgh or Glasgow based. I wanted to create a platform to send more North-East voices to the Scottish slam stage.

There is a wealth of wonderful Doric writing from the past, but only a smattering of new, contemporary material. The theme: ‘celebrate fit you love about the North-East in yer ain wirds’ was created to make the slam inclusive of non-Doric speakers and encourage writers to use Doric in their work.

The 2020 Doric slam wasn’t possible with Covid restrictions. Workshops were adapted online and in November 2020 I delivered slam workshops to local writers as well as participants from Canada, USA, England, and Slovakia. The series included writing poetry, writing in Doric, editing poetry, and performance techniques. The Zoom classes sparked lively engaging discussions, providing a safe space for writers to share their newly created ideas.

I plan to run more workshops, and hope to host an outdoor Doric slam event in summer, or later in the year.

Jo Gilbert



Doric for Teachers: Scots Language in Schools

As part of our programme to support the development of Scots Language in schools the Elphinstone Institute has been working with staff in the School of Education at Aberdeen University. Undergraduate and post-graduate students who will qualify as primary school teachers have received input, in person or online, on the teaching of Scots Language in schools.

Topics covered have included: Government policy on the teaching of Scots; the History of Scots language; raising awareness that teaching/speaking Scots in the classroom is permitted; highlighting the value of teaching in local language; ideas for using poetry and storytelling in class at all levels; creative exercises to generate teaching ideas; demonstrating how Scots can be used cross-curriculum, and providing a wealth of materials and links geared towards developing talking, listening, reading, and writing skills in Scots.

Feedback from the students has been positive, and several have signed up for the Elphinstone’s regular North-East Culture and Language in Education Bulletin with information on resources, training and cultural activities.

The programme co-constructed with Education staff is now embedded in the MA and PDGE curriculum and aims to encourage new teachers to participate actively in the promotion of Scots Language in primary schools. The next step is to work on a programme for PDGE (Secondary) students.

Jackie Ross and Jo Gilbert

Home Hame Дом Дом

Home Hame Дом Дом is a creative learning project to bring people from different backgrounds together to build a sense of community belonging in the North-East. In partnership with the WEA and Modo, the Elphinstone Institute was commissioned, with LEADER funding by the North Aberdeenshire Local Action Group, to deliver ‘social integration solutions for migrant workers.’ A programme of arts and culture-based activities in Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Banff, Macduff and Turriff were developed. Publicity materials were translated into Lithuanian, Polish, Latvian, and Russian, and with local networks and tutors, co-created opportunities to learn something new and strengthen our communities.



In the past 18 months, more than 1000 people took part in 114 activities including workshops, classes, and online events. Highlights include: ‘A Taste of Home’ events, sharing food, music, song, dance, stories and languages, celebrating Scottish Burns Night, Polish Fat Thursday, and Lithuanian St Casimir’s Fair. In lockdown, we moved online with a Doric for Beginners course. The grand finale was Celebration Week including a series of films, ‘A Long Way from Home’, made by Modo.

As part of our evaluation participants said: ‘I say well actually I’m home here. I’ve lived longer here than I have ever lived anywhere else. What is it that makes home? It’s your family and community connections.’

The Evaluation Report is available online: www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/public-engagement/homehamedom.php. For more information contact claire.needler@abdn.ac.uk

Claire Needler

Elphinstone Updates

The Return of the Ethnographic Film Series

After a break in 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions, we are pleased to re-start the Ethnographic Film Series in 2021. Online, via Zoom, each film will be followed with a question and answer session with the film maker.



Karen Boswall

On 4 February, Andrew Davidson showcases *Fraserburgh on Film*, an online archive he created of digital moving images filmed by residents of Fraserburgh and surrounding area in the 20th century (see <https://www.fraserburghonfilm.com>).

On 4 March, *Solas*, explores the life and work of musicologist Margaret Fay Shaw (1903–2004), folk music collector, photographer, and film maker, who lived in South Uist and latterly on the Island of Canna. Fiona MacKenzie, film maker, will join us.

Finally, on 1 April, visual anthropologist and film maker Karen Boswall's series of musical portraits, *Speak my Sister*, made between 2016 and 2020 on the creative voice of women in Mozambique. The Elphinstone Institute Ethnographic Film Series, 7:00pm on Zoom, first Thursday of the month until April 2021.

Frances Wilkins

Cultural Heritage and Tourism

At the end of 2020 we completed the Cultural Heritage and Tourism project with Visit Scotland. Project coordinator, Dr Fiona-Jane Brown, worked with 33 groups and individuals, collecting and collating some of the region's stories and supporting the local heritage sector with training sessions.

Funded by the LEADER north and south Local Action Groups, a range of new media outputs was created based on Dr Brown's fieldwork including videos, photographs, audio recordings, and eBooks; they are available to view on our interactive map: www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/map/

A social media promotions campaign generated interest in the cultural heritage of the North-East and the newly created assets, with 270,000 people across Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. A further 117,000 actively engaged with our posts. Visit Scotland promoted the content on their international channels reaching many more.

You can access all the of the assets in the Resources section of our website: www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone

Simon Gall

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, 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

Dr Colin Milton, Associate Director, Hon., Scottish Literature and Folklore

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

Simon Gall, Public Engagement Officer

Claire Needler, Project Co-ordinator

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

Ronnie Gibson, relationships between contemporary and eighteenth-century fiddle traditions

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

Nicolas Le Bigre, narratives of immigrant experience

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

Máire Ní Bhaioill, traditional singing among children in Ireland

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

Paul Anderson, North-East fiddle styles and repertoires

Dr David Atkinson, J. M. Carpenter Project

Dr Pat Ballantyne, Scottish step-dance traditions

Dr Athanasios (Sakis) Barmplexis, contemporary shamanic healing in Scotland

Dr Julia Bishop, J. M. Carpenter Project

Sheena Blackhall, creative writing in Scots

Dr Elaine Bradtke, J. M. Carpenter Project

Dr David Northcroft, education in the North-East

Dr Robert Young Walser, J. M. Carpenter Project

Les Wheeler, Scots Language, education

Dr Sheila Young, women's pre-nuptial rituals in Scotland

What's On

We're working hard organising public events to deliver in person or online, depending on changing government guidelines. 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