I am delighted to welcome you to the inaugural edition of *Northern Light*, the Newsletter of the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture. I hope you find it a stimulating insight into the wide range of research and teaching activities we undertake. We are a thriving community of scholars working across a range of disciplines, including English, Linguistics, Modern Languages, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Studies, Music and Film and Visual Culture. The diversity of our interests are reflected in our extensive range of taught postgraduate programmes; our undergraduate courses attract around 1,000 students per year.

The School is also home to a number of research centres, including the Centre for the Novel, the Washington Wilson Centre for Visual Culture, the WORD Centre for Creative Writing, and the Centre for Linguistic Research, as well as the Elphinstone Institute, with its distinctive focus on the culture of the North East and North of Scotland. We look forward to welcoming you to Aberdeen soon, whether as a future student, a fellow academic or an interested visitor.

Edward Welch, Head of School
Since 2014 the School has introduced a range of Masters (MSc) degree programmes in vocational subjects – Professional Communication, TESOL (Teaching English as a Second or Other Language) and Translation Studies. These programmes represent a new strategic direction for the School and mark a commitment on its part to using our many strengths in ways which prepare students for specific vocations in the world of work. The programmes have achieved their preliminary goals, attracting a range of students diverse in both origin and experience. The programmes are designed to provide them with a number of skills central to their chosen professions.
Student News

Essay Award for Doctoral Student
David Rennie, a final-year PhD student, has been awarded a prestigious essay prize from the leading society for American studies in the UK. David’s essay, ‘In the Fields of Democracy: the Midwest in World War I’, is based on research he has completed during his work towards a PhD on American Literature of the First World War, to be submitted later in the year. He is supervised by Dr Hazel Hutchison.

David said: ‘I am delighted to be the winner of the 2016 British Association of American Studies Postgraduate Essay Award. I intend to use the £500 prize money to travel to the Ernest Hemingway Society Conference taking place in Oak Park, Illinois later this year’.

On 18 March Dr Amy Bryzgel and Jasmina Zaloznik, her PhD student, organised Perform. Play. Art., a one-day event involving talks and live performances using the University of Aberdeen as a canvas. A Belgrade performance of 1971 was re-performed. Gera Urkom, a Serbian artist who was at the original performance, gave advice on how to reconstruct the event.

Finally, a Public Readings performance was organised on the ground floor of the University Library, with local involvement along with input from participants broadcast live from Slovenia. The audiovisual installation in the library was by Kwangrae Kim (PhD student in Composition) with the support of Dr Suk-Jun Kim (Lecturer in Music).

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School hosts Undergraduate Linguistics Conference
On 8-10 April the School hosted the 6th International Conference of ULAB (the Undergraduate Linguistics Association of Britain). This is the largest undergraduate linguistics conference in the UK, bringing together approximately 100 undergraduate students from seventeen universities and seven different countries.
During the three days the visitors were able to attend approximately 50 student research presentations and various other events, such as workshops and poster presentations. The conference hosted three plenary speakers: Professor April McMahon (Aberystwyth University), Professor Robert McColl Millar (University of Aberdeen) and Professor Anders Holmberg (University of Newcastle). More information is available at www.lingstudents.co.uk.

Shift-Enter, our new live coding group
Last October, five Aberdeen Music postgraduates (MMus in Sonic Arts) undertook a well-attended Live Coding performance at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary’s Suttie Art Space. They called themselves Shift-Enter for this performance. The group were preceded by the performance of two works by electronic composers, Kim Cascone and Haworth Hodgkinson.

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MLitt programmes in Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Studies, Creative Writing, English Literary Studies, Ethnology and Folklore, Irish and Scottish Literature, Literature, Science and Medicine, Migration and Postcolonial Studies, The Novel and Visual Culture.
MMus programmes in Music, Sonic Arts and Vocal Music.
Postgraduate Taught Degree Programmes and Courses
The Chilean Arpilleras

The arpilleras, handmade tapestries mounted on hessian fabric, were first made as a means of protest against the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile. Since 1975, Roberta Bacic has collected these textiles, retracing the testimonies of loss and survival of individual women and communities. The University of Aberdeen was the latest stage in the journey of the arpilleras, which have been exhibited and discussed in many places in Europe and beyond. Roberta Bacic visited the School in March, giving a seminar on why and how they were produced but also leading a workshop on how to produce an arpillera.

University of Aberdeen to launch Vox Regis label

In May, the University of Aberdeen launches Vox Regis, a label showcasing the range of music it fosters. Funded by the university, all proceeds will go to charity. The first release, to be launched at the University’s May Festival, illustrates the diversity of the label’s plans: the album – O Sacrum Convivium – will feature, among others, works by university staff, including Dr Phillip Cooke and Professor Paul Mealor, as well as choral music from a range of places and times.

The label plans two or three releases a year. Planned releases will involve interpretations of work from the ‘traditional’ repertoire as well an album of electro-acoustic works by Dr Suk-Jun Kim.
The Wave attracts record-breaking box office numbers
More visitors than ever came to see this year’s performances by the German Drama Group in the Arts Lecture Theatre on 21 and 22 March. The German Consul General in Edinburgh, Jens-Peter Voss, as well as many members of the local community came to see The Wave, produced by Peter Graf von Kalkreuth, Claudia Sein and Lara Felsch.
This year members of the Drama Group decided to perform The Wave by Reinhold Tritt after having studied the film of the same title in their German culture class. The Wave tells the story of a history teacher, who, in a desperate attempt to teach his uninterested class about the seductive power of fascism and dictatorship, runs an experiment in which he founds his own totalitarian movement, the Wave. As the story unfolds, the Wave becomes more powerful than the teacher ever expected and eventually spirals out of control.

Subversions of Classical Learning
In January 2016 the School hosted an interdisciplinary conference on ‘Subversions of Classical Learning’, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the birth of Sir Herbert J.C. Grierson, inaugural Chalmers Professor of English Literature at the University. The event celebrated Grierson’s wide scholarly interests, with particular focus on exciting transformations and subversions of Classical themes in the mediaeval and early-modern worlds. The conference featured colleagues from across the School as well as international scholars, and sparked interdisciplinary dialogue between established academics and PhD students. In recognition of Grierson’s legacy, the University founded the Sir Herbert Grierson Centre for Textual Criticism and Comparative Literary History was founded in 2013.

Visits of distinguished Ethnology scholars
This spring, the Elphinstone Institute, the School’s centre for the study of ethnology and the culture of the North of Scotland, welcomes two visiting scholars for seminars and student consultations. Petr Janeček, of Charles University in Prague, will talk about contemporary legends, including their transmission
across languages and borders, with particular focus on the ‘spring-heeled Jack’ legend, originating in Britain but now found in the Czech Republic. Luisa del Giudice is an internationally recognised fellow of the American Folklore Society. While in Aberdeen, she will offer a public seminar on the multiple resonances of the Watts Towers, a US National Historic Landmark built by a visionary Italian immigrant labourer over a span of three decades. The talk will explore the importance of the buildings within local cartographies and global migrations, contested social and urban spaces, and the relationship between art and economic development.

Director’s Cut
The Film and Visual Culture programme, in collaboration with University External Affairs, has presented seven Director’s Cut events and masterclasses this academic year, including Mumbai-based documentary filmmakers K.P. Jayasankar and Anjali Monteiro, Berlin-based ‘thumb cinema’ artist Volker Gerling, Scottish/Burmese multi-media artist Fiona Soe Paing and feature film editor Peter Lambert. We look forward to hosting two further events at this year’s May Festival.

British Culture?
On 1 March 2016 Professor Alison Lumsden took part in a debate to mark the 10th anniversary of the AHRC (watch the debate). Taking place at the Byre Theatre in St Andrews, the discussion revolved around the topic ‘Is British Culture a Myth?’ The event was chaired by Professor Gerard Carruthers (University of Glasgow) and Professor Colin Kidd (St Andrews University) and other speakers included Professor Murray Pittock, Professor Robert Crawford and Professor Ali Ansari. Alison, who directs the School’s Walter Scott Research Centre, discussed the role that Scott and his work have played in shaping both Scottish and British identity.
Fellow of Word Centre gains prestigious award

Acclaimed poet Jen Cooper, who obtained her MA (Hons), MLitt and PhD in the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture and who is an Associate Fellow in the Word Centre for Creative Writing at the University has been named one of the Scottish Book Trust’s New Writer Awardees 2016.

One of the judges of the poetry entries, Jennifer Williams, said:

‘Choosing the awardees was a challenging but gratifying process, and we believe the poets who have been selected show great promise and will benefit greatly from the development opportunities provided by the New Writers Awards’.

The Archers and language

In February, Dr William Barras presented the paper Rural Voices: What can Borsetshire tell us about accent change? at an interdisciplinary conference on The Archers in fact and fiction: Academic analyses of life in rural Borsetshire. He discussed how The Archers, a long running radio serial, can be used to track changes in an individual speaker’s accent over their lifetime. By comparing recordings of Judy Bennett, who plays the character Shula in the programme, he demonstrated that some of her vowel sounds had changed over a forty-year timeframe to match the way that younger speakers have begun to speak over that period.

As 2016 marks the 65th anniversary of The Archers, there was significant media interest in this research. Dr Barras was interviewed live by Eddie Mair on Radio 4’s PM programme, as well as on Good Morning Scotland on Radio Scotland. The research was also covered in a range of newspapers from the Press and Journal and the Sunday Post to the Daily Mail. More information can be found using the hashtag #academicarchers on Twitter. A book featuring content discussed at the conference will be published later this year.

The Power of Meaningful Communication

TEDx UniversityofAberdeen was an evening event held in February, curated by a dedicated group of Aberdeen students. More than a hundred people participated. The conference’s goal was to bring...
together bright minds to give idea-focussed talks on a wide range of subjects, to foster learning, inspiration and wonder – and provoke conversations that matter. The theme of the event was Reframing and Shifting Perspectives.

Central to the event was the contribution by Dr Tania Fahey Palma, the Convener of the School’s MSc in Professional Communication. Her talk focussed on the power of meaningful communication in professional and daily life. She made a strong case for the importance of human connections through meaningful communication in the workplace and beyond.

STAFF PROFILE

Dr Thomas McKean, Director, Elphinstone Institute

I specialise in creativity and performance as manifested in singing, manual craftwork and customary practice. I’m interested in how people make sense of the world around them through verbal and material art. A particular focus is the individual creativity involved in how people adapt cultural frameworks to suit their own needs and circumstances. My postgraduate teaching includes custom and belief, Scots and Gaelic song, fieldwork methodology, and the history of the disciplines of Ethnology and Folklore. Our Public Engagement work this spring includes our Partnership with a local secondary school. Our Postgraduate students engage with the school’s Scots Language and Scottish Studies pupils, and various events at the May Festival.

For more information about Dr McKean’s profile, visit his university profile page.