

The Institute looks at North-East Schools

David Northcroft

"Scotland is the best educated country in the world and the North-East counties are the best educated counties in it." (Sir Henry Craik, Head of Scotch Education Department, 1885-1904).

In its ever more wide-reaching efforts to serve the history and the culture of the North of Scotland, the Elphinstone Institute pursues a strong interest in the region's schools and the educational system.

The aim here is to explore the contributions that the local school has made to the shaping of our area's distinctive identity and cultural experience. The Scottish people have long prided themselves on the way in which their communities have valued education. They can point to a rich history where, for centuries, their nation led the world in its provision for all its citizens, however poor and lowly of rank. This is a commitment which has established a heritage of personal and social values which, it may be claimed, still has power today. And, with their lore of lads o' pairs, of dominies and the parish skweel, it has been the counties of the North East which have come to be regarded as the heartland of such ideals.

It is a tradition which deserves to be commemorated through research into the places and the characters which have contributed to the region's proud record in education. But it is also important to do this in a spirit of critical investigation, not mere celebration, for behind the official version there has always existed a more complex story, one that is to be encountered in the personal recollections and the local histories of the people of the North East. For some, there has been no doubt that 'opportunity' and 'getting on' have been true enough – but there are others who will point to a schooling that was narrow, over-disciplined, neglectful of the less academically inclined and repressive of their home culture and the tone that went with it.

In my role as Research Associate, I am attempting to engage with these issues in a number of ways:

- 1) In September 2000, the Institute hosted a conference on 'Local Schools and National Schooling'. I am currently editing a collection of articles which is based on that event. Contributors include Professors Robert Anderson and Ian Campbell of Edinburgh University, Gordon Booth, Derrick McClure, Peter Murphy, the late Robbie Robertson, Dr Douglas Young, and myself. Their topics range from the classroom position of Doric to the future of the local classroom in the computer age. There are also articles that deal with R. F. Mackenzie's place as a North-East romantic rebel, with the Keig upbringing of Robertson Smith, the prodigious 19th century scholar who was also arraigned for blasphemy by his church, and the way in which such writers as Lewis Grassie Gibbon, William Alexander, Jessie Kesson and Ian Macpherson have represented their own educational experiences in their literature. It is hoped that the book will come out some time later in 2003.
- 2) It is important to treat North-East education as a living experience. A series of 90-minute audio-taped interviews are being gathered together as an ongoing project. In them, local folk are being invited to record their own memories and views of what their school has meant to them. To date some 30 oral histories have been captured. They include Norman Harper, James Michie and Robbie Shepherd as well as a trio of vigorous nonagenarians.
- 3) In May, Edinburgh University Press will be publishing my book *Scots at School*, which brings together a wide-ranging collection of personal accounts of going to school in Scotland through the ages, complete with historical commentary. Although this work is national in scope, it is the North East which has provided the largest number of contributions. These range from patriotic pieces in the Aberdeen Magazine of 1832 to Evelyn Glennie's music (and mental arithmetic) lessons at Cairnrorrie some 150 years later.

In Scotland, the local school, along with death and the common cold, is just about the one life experience we all share. I would be delighted to hear from any friend (or friend of a friend) who might have any views about what I am trying to do. I should be especially grateful for any suggestions as to likely interviewees.



Balloch Public School, 1907, Upper Strathdon. All 19 pupils of this remote Aberdeenshire School are present for the photographer, along with their one teacher, Miss H. Singer. Depopulation led to its closure after the war; the building has long since become overgrown by foliage.

Photograph supplied by Mrs Campbell of Dingwall, grand-daughter of Miss Singer.

A Date for Your Diary, 26-27 April 2003, The Traditional Storytelling Weekend at Woodend Barn

Who's Who at the Elphinstone

Dr Ian Russell, Director, *Ethnology, oral traditions, including music, drama and speech*
Dr Colin Milton, Associate Director, *Scottish literature and folklore, especially of the North East*
Sheena Blackhall, Scottish Arts Council Creative Writing Fellow, *Creative writing in Scots*
Dr Katherine Campbell, Research Fellow, *Scots fiddle, instrumental and song traditions*
Dr Thomas A. McKean, Archives and Research, *Oral tradition, songs and ballads, Gaelic tradition*
Stanley Robertson, Heritage Lottery Fund Keyworker, *Scottish Travellers Project*
Roddy Mackenzie, MPhil student *researching the contemporary use of healing wells*
Siobhan Tolland, PhD student *researching 'Mary Brookesbank of Dundee'*
Alison Sharman, Secretary

Honorary Research Fellows

Dr Mary Anne Alburger, *Traditional music and song, fiddle making, 18th century culture*
Dr Caroline Macafee, *Scots Language, Scottish National Dictionary Association*
Professor Bill Nicolaisen, *Ethnology, folk narrative, name studies, Scottish place names*

Research Associates

Evelyn Hood, *Scottish traditions of dance*
Dr David Northcroft, *Education in the North East*
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 Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen,
 24 High Street, Aberdeen AB24 3EB Scotland, UK

Tel: 01224 272996 Fax: 01224 272728 Email: elphinstone@abdn.ac.uk

Website: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/>

Elphinstone Public Lectures

From New Year to May, a series of public lectures has been arranged at the Regent Lecture Theatre, Regent Walk, Old Aberdeen, 7.30-9.00pm on the following Tuesday evenings:

21 January – Maureen Bell, Ythan Music Trust, *'Burns' Women*.

18 February 2003 – Dr Emily Lyle, School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, *'The Gudeman's Craft and Other Special Places and Times'*.

18 March 2003 – Hugo Manson, Oil Lives Project, Department of History, University of Aberdeen, *'What the Seagulls Saw: The Unlikely Invasion of Aberdeen by a Global Industry'*.

22 April 2003 – Siobhan Tolland, Doctoral Researcher, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, *'Mary Brookesbank: Song, Politics, and Women's Labour in Early Twentieth Century Dundee'*.

20 May 2003 – Dr David Caldwell, National Museums of Scotland, *'The Home Life of Celtic Kings: The Evidence from Medieval Finlaggan'*.

There is an admission charge of £2.00 and free refreshments.

ELPHINSTONE



INSTITUTE

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

2003

The Institute exists to study, record and promote the cultural traditions and language of communities in the North of Scotland and, in particular, of the North East. It is also concerned with the cultural traditions of groups that have recently come to live in the region, and of Scottish expatriate communities abroad – the Scottish diaspora. Under its Director, Dr Ian Russell, an imaginative programme of fieldwork, research, outreach, collaborative projects, education initiatives, and publications is underway.

REPRESENTING SCOTLAND IN THE USA

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival to feature Scottish Cultural Traditions

The 37th International Folklife Festival to be held in Washington DC this summer will have the theme of Scotland and Scottish culture. The festival is an annual celebration organised by the USA's prestigious national museum, the Smithsonian Institution, and takes place from 25 June to 6 July. It will provide a unique opportunity to foreground a wide range of vernacular culture and crafts that go beyond the stereotypical portrayal of Scottishness through tartan and pipebands. Members of the Leadership Committee include the First Minister, Jack McConnell, Aberdeen University's Chancellor, Lord David Wilson, and Vice Chancellor, Professor Duncan Rice. The Elphinstone Institute has been at the forefront, providing advice and assistance throughout the planning stage. Representing the Smithsonian, Dr Nancy Groce, Curator at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, has had the task of pulling the whole event together.

"The Smithsonian is delighted to be working with the Elphinstone Institute on what promises to be the largest and most prominent exhibition of Scottish culture ever held in the United States. Most Americans know little about North East Scotland or Doric culture. The 2003 Festival offers an opportunity to introduce the culture of Aberdeenshire to more than a million visitors who annually attend the two week event."

After hundreds of hours of conversations and interviews with scores of experts, artists, and community leaders, she aims to assemble a group of participants that reflects the traditional culture of contemporary Scotland in all its diversity and richness.

Representing the Elphinstone Institute will be Sheena Blackhall, the Scottish Arts Council Creative Writing Fellow, and Stanley Robertson, the Keyworker for the Heritage Lottery Fund project on Scottish Travellers. Both have much to offer including their skills in writing, extensive knowledge of North-East Scots, storytelling, ballad singing, and the experience of working with children. The Director will attend to supply expertise, and to introduce and contextualise performances and demonstrations. Also invited from the University is the Oil Lives oral history team of Hugo Manson and Terry Brotherstone representing the contemporary face of Scotland's industries.

It is anticipated that about a hundred participants will be invited from Scotland to the Festival, which is to be held on the National Mall. Besides the very best of Scotland's traditional song, music and dance, visitors can expect to see an area devoted to textiles: sporan and kilt making, Harris tweed weaving, Shetland and Fair Isle knitting, Sanquhar knitting from Dumfries & Galloway, and tapestry weaving from Edinburgh. Other crafts proposed include silversmithing, paperweight making from Perth, crystal making from Penicuik, bagpipe and clarsach making, chairmaking from Orkney, basketmaking, crookmaking and horn working, golf club and curling stone making, as well as boat building.

There are plans to feature traditional industries including crofting, livestock farming, mining, fishing, and, of course, whisky distilling. To strengthen the image of urban Scotland there is even a scheme to take over a Glasgow taxi driver together with black cab to help correctly orient his American 'passengers'...

Other areas envisaged include foodways with cooking demonstrations, and a children's area for traditional games, storytelling, and other activities. While it may be possible to represent certain customs and events, the challenge of 'Up Helly-A' or other fire festivals may prove a bit too risky for the National Mall, and who would condemn the North Queensferry Burry Man to Washington's heat?



Kilt maker Robert McBain, founder and course leader of the Keith Kilt School demonstrated the fine points of the art of kilt making for Smithsonian researchers.



Left: In preparation for Scotland at the Smithsonian, Smithsonian researchers interviewed and documented traditional craftspeople and artists throughout Scotland, including Andrew Bradley, Master Sonemason for The National Trust for Scotland at Culzean Castle.

Right: Master craftsman James Wyllie explains how he puts the finishing touches on a curling stone made from Ailsa Craig granite at Kays of Scotland in Mauchline, Ayrshire.



"The Silk Road" was the topic at last year's Smithsonian Folklife Festival. More than 1.3 million visitors attended the 10-day event, which highlighted two-dozen cultures from Japan to Italy

From the Director



We are all looking forward to another fulfilling year, with the participation of the Institute in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, the two weekend festivals, and the evening public lecture series – not forgetting our publications programme. There is also the taught M.Litt. in Ethnology and Folklore, now approaching its second year, and a joint convention with RSAMD on free reed instruments, as well as our educational outreach work with Sheena Blackhall and Stanley Robertson. New areas of research include the performers' edition of Greig-Duncan led by Katherine Campbell and further work on the HLF funded Scottish Travellers project.

Greig-Duncan Complete at Last

It is a great cause of celebration that the eighth and final volume of *The Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection* under the editorship of the late Patrick Shuldham Shaw, Emily B. Lyle, and Katherine Campbell, has been published by the re-launched Mercat Press (<http://www.mercatpress.com/>). The volume is distinguished by contributions from members of the Institute and friends, including Ian Olson, Bill Nicolaisen, Katherine Campbell, Colin Milton, Mary Anne Alburger, and Tom McKean.

The Friends of the Elphinstone Institute together with the Friends of the University Library are to mark the achievement with a celebratory dinner, addressed by Jack Webster, on Thursday 27 February in Elphinstone Hall. Tickets are available from the Secretary of the Friends (Mrs J. Shirreffs, 72 Gray Street, Aberdeen AB10 6JE – 01224 321998).

The Saltire Society is also to be represented at the dinner and to make a presentation of Volume 8 to the Institute to join the seven volumes which were previously donated.

Gift of The Scottish National Dictionary

I am pleased to report that a major donation of the 10 volumes of *The Scottish National Dictionary* has been made to the Institute by Lady Alexander, wife of the former Chancellor of the University, the late Sir Kenneth Alexander.

The Friends AGM

The AGM of the Friends of the Elphinstone Institute will be held in the Seminar Room, Queen Mother Library, on Wednesday 12 March 2003, 7.30 – 8.30 pm.

M.Litt in Ethnology and Folklore 2003-2004

This postgraduate taught programme can be taken full-time (12 months) or part-time (24 months). The component courses cover the theory and practice of Ethnology and Folklore. They aim to develop a broad-based understanding of how the disciplines have evolved, and offer an introduction to the major genres of study – material culture, custom and belief, oral traditions, childlore and games, sports and pastimes – with a special concentration on the Scottish context. For more information and application forms, please contact the Institute.

PhD Studentship

Oral Heritage of Scottish Travellers

Applications are invited for a 3-year PhD Studentship commencing October 2003 under the provisions of the George Reid Memorial Fund (closing date 30 April 2003). Full fees at the Home/EU rate and a maintenance allowance of £6500pa will be provided. The successful applicant will contribute to the Heritage Lottery Fund 'Oral and Cultural Traditions of Scottish Travellers' Project. For further information contact the Director or visit our website.

Tam Reid of Cullerlie 'The Bothy Ballad King' 1929-2003



Courtesy of The Press & Journal

On Wednesday 29 January Tam Reid, the celebrated North-East singer, died of a heart attack as he was going about his farm tasks.

Thomas Christie Reid was born on 15 May 1929 in Countesswells near Aberdeen and moved to Cullerlie with his family when his father, James, took over the tenancy of Nether Woodside Farm. His apprenticeship in farming included, as a matter of course, working with heavy horses and, of necessity, living in the farm bothy, both activities representing a way of life which slipped away after the Second World War. These early years imbued in him a love of the language and traditions of the North East, which stayed with him and moulded the rest of his life.

His creation of Cullerlie Farm Park, with his wife Anne whom he married in 1975, with its traditional livestock, including Clydesdale horses, extensive farm museum, and welcoming tea room, was a public affirmation of these values. However, Cullerlie was much more than just another visitor attraction, for with Tom's natural talent as a bothy singer (in the tradition of George Morris and Willie Kemp), his unflinching good humour, ever present in the twinkle in his eye, and Anne's lovely singing and hospitality, the enterprise achieved the status of a 'ceilidh hoose', with regular singsongs and entertainment. Coach parties went out of their way to call at Cullerlie to sample its unique atmosphere - 'hame bakes, fancy pieces, an a sang'. Events were organised for school children and the farm became a popular venue for steam engine rallies and vintage tractor shows.

In 1977 Tom's singing achieved legendary stature when at the Haughs in Turriff he sang at the Bothy Ballad competition. Organised by Marc Ellington and Charlie Allan, with major prize money at stake, the event attracted an unprecedented crowd of over 10,000 to hear the 23 competitors. The judges, including television celebrities Robin Hall and Jimmy MacGregor, unanimously chose Tom; he was awarded the Bothy Ballad King and crowned, literally, with an amazing golden crown by Lady Aberdeen. The competition has never been repeated and Tom's title has remained undisputed ever since.

Tom, often performing as a duo with his wife Anne, was a regular guest at numerous events in the North East, including the Doric Festival, and the TMSA festivals at Keith, Kirriemuir, and Auchtermuchty. They also sang further afield at the National Folk Music Festival in England, in Issoire and Clermont-Ferrand in France, and in Nevada USA. This summer Tom was to be a guest at the prestigious Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC.

In 2000 the Institute formed a partnership with Tom and Anne to host the Traditional Singing Weekend. This annual gathering of outstanding singers from Orkney, Scotland, England, and Ireland, in the setting of Cullerlie proved an instant success. (News of the 2003 festival, planned for 25-27 July, will be announced in due course.)

Tom leaves an older brother, Peter, and two sisters, Molly and Gladys. His wife Anne has the excellent support of her family - three daughters and their husbands, seven grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. Recordings and videos of Tom's singing are available - from Ross Records, Sleepytown Records, and Carnie and Lyall Productions.

A Way of Life

Stanley Robertson

Since joining the staff of the Elphinstone Institute I have had plenty of time to reflect upon many happy occasions spent amongst the Travelling People of the North-east of Scotland. Their whole way of nomadic life and rich traditions have helped me to become a steward of the lore and perpetuate the culture. I relish with much pride my inheritance and I keep it alive with a passion.

Reflecting upon the special characters - singers, musicians, storytellers and philosophers - I have met it brings to mind the oral tradition by which the lore was preserved. Times, events, occasions and ceilidhs spark the creative juices within my mind and keep the oral art very active. People like Jeannie Robertson, Lizzie Higgins, Maggie Stewart, Lizzie Ann Higgins and my own parents William Robertson and Elizabeth McDonald were great influences for good upon me as I grew up.

The Old Road of Lumphanan plays a vivid role in my memories of Traveller life, because that was the natural theatre where the ceilidhs took place. The place is steeped in ancient Scottish History and has connections especially with Macbeth. The elements of the supernatural are apparent in the ballads and music that were sung and played there. The sighing of the winds and splashing of the stream could be heard like onomatopoeic enhancements throughout their renditions of the ballads. So when one revisits the old road, the floodgates of memory are opened in the mind. Thus the oral traditions are renewed.

Deep rooted Travellers are like Mater, who, each time he fell to earth, his mother made stronger; we too are empowered by the magical strengths alive within the old road. The spiritual depths between the Traveller traditions and the camping grounds are deeply interconnected by invisible ties. Yet the feelings vibrating in the soul bear witness to the truth that oral tradition is the living instrument that connects the past with today.

Celebrating Traditions of Storytelling at Banchory and Crathes

'The story is told eye to eye, mind to mind, and heart to heart'
Stanley Robertson

For the second year the Institute in partnership with Woodend Arts Association is to hold a storytelling festival at Woodend Barn on 26 to 27 April 2003, following the great success of last year's event. This year we feature four distinct traditions:

Scottish Travellers with Sheila Stewart and Stanley Robertson, **Northern English Travelling Showpeople** with Vanessa Toulmin, **Northern Ireland** with Mick Quinn and Patricia Flynn and **North-East Scotland** with Grace Banks, Sheena Blackhall, Maggie Fraser, and Jake Simpson.

Plus two brilliant wild cards - Bob Pegg, originally from the English East Midlands, who now draws his inspiration from the Highlands where he has lived for many years; and Ewan McVicar who has Highland roots but is now based in Linlithgow.

The weekend will provide a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere in which those that wish can participate and those that don't can just listen and enjoy the *craic*.

Alongside workshops, storyrounds, and ceilidhs, there will also be two talks – one by Dr Vanessa Toulmin, Director of the National Fairground Archive at Sheffield University, and the other by Stanley Robertson, who is the Keyworker for the Scottish Travellers project at the Institute, which is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

This year there will also be a special additional event at Crathes Village Hall for children and families on the Saturday with Bob Pegg, Ewan McVicar, and other storytellers.

Martha Stewart was one of over seventy people who enjoyed the first festival and wrote to tell us so: 'I have never enjoyed a weekend so much in a long time. My friend and I along with her daughter and Sam thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Sam I'm especially proud of, brave fellow. I went away feeling uplifted and privileged to witness at first hand master storytellers like Stanley Robertson and Alec John Williamson. It made me feel proud of my Traveller culture.'

So don't delay to book. Places will be strictly limited.



In search of the conyach – Sheila Stewart in action

© Bob Pegg

Exodus o Traivellers

Oor wearie fitsteps leave behind the Babylon o Aiberdein,
An wi lichtsome heart the folks traivel tae a fairer scene.
Whaur Nesmore Nature caas oor pining sowel tae repose
An be at een we bracken, birk and briar rose.

Tae savor in the reek o burnin whins
Or lie about whaur the lispin burnie rins,
An tae listen tae stories roon a living fire –
Big ballads warble oot an niver tire.

A land o music whaur pipes and fiddles reign,
A Traiveller's Nirvana, is maakin in the main.
Aye, oor fitsteps hae brocht us oot tae auld Lumphanan's fame,
We're happy tae be here again. "Dear Mither we are hame".
By Stanley Robertson about his Travelling ancestry.

Cultural Traveller... Sheena Blackhall

Some folk work as commercial travellers...as outreach worker in Scots with Aberdeen University's Elphinstone Institute I'm more of a Scots-cultural traveller, and this year this has taken me into hospices, drop in centres, children's wards, and schools from Angus to Moray promoting the use of Scots by song, story and poem. Collaborative work with Les Wheeler one of the Institute's Research Associates and co-editor of the Elphinstone Kist (www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/kist) has continued as have joint projects conducted with Aberdeen Art Gallery, the National Trust, and the Conoco Centre which hosted writing workshops I ran for Reachout. In-service days are planned for 2003 to introduce teachers to the Kist's rich resources throughout the coming months.

50% of the post is funded by the SAC to enable me to develop my own work, and this year I have set time aside for personal writing on two retreats, one at Dhanakosa, Balquidder, the other at Pluscarden in Moray, as well as participating in an Arvon Foundation course at Moniak Mhor. *The Fower Quarters*, a collection of short stories in Scots and English (non-children's market) was published by G.K.B. Enterprises in association with the Elphinstone Institute, Autumn 2002. A poetry collection entitled *A Bourich o Breetis* (non-children's market, limited edition) was also produced at that time, to raise funds for a local mental health charity, *Forak*.

Two Scots novellas, *Minnie* and *Loon* are currently being considered for publication. *Loon* was commissioned by Matthew Fitt for pupils aged 13-15 and various stories and poems have appeared this year in national anthologies. Itchy Co Publishers have been calling for 'daft, rude, scunnersome, haiverin' poems for bairns, and I've submitted several (see two below):

BLUE BLUID

Flechs, flechs, if ye sookit the Queen
Wid aabody ken fit ye hid deen?
Wid yer wings an yer stings turn Royal Blue
Is monarchy's bluid like blaeberry stew?

PUDDUCKS

If pudducks war like evergreens
They'd breed the haldie year roon
Wi sic a rowth o taddle eggs
The lave o us micht droon!

I also continue to write songs linked to the school's 5-14 curriculum, part of which covers 'Inventions'. The concluding song was inspired by a traditional verse sung by Stanley Robertson, Elphinstone's newest recruit, a one-man ceilidh of international standing. Many of his traditional rhymes are excellent springboards into creativity as the popularity of 'Machines' has proved. It sings reasonably well to a variant of 'Macnamara's Band'

Traditional (as sung by Stanley Robertson)

*The goldfish is a bonnie wee fish, the best fish in the toum,
Ye pit it intae a goldfish bowl an it gings roon an roon,
An it gings roon an roon an roon, an it gings roon an roon,
Ye pit it intae a goldfish bowl an it gings roon an roon.*

Machines: Sheena Blackhall

The washin machine is a rare machine it is an afa boon,
Ye pit yer claes in the washin machine an watch them furl aroon,
Ye watch them furl aroon, aroon, ye watch them furl aroon,
Ye pit yer claes in the washin machine an watch them furl aroon.

The Hoover is a rare machine it sooks the stoor awa,
It rins roon neuks it sooks an sooks fin ye plug it inno the waa,
Fin ye plug it inno the waa, the waa, it's nae the type tae blaa,
It rins roon neuks, it sooks an sooks, it wheechs the stoor awa.

The TV is a rare machine it keeps ye aff the street,
It brings ye news an films an views an ye dinnae leave yer seat,
Ae click o the thoomb in yer sittin room an ontae the TV screen
Cam soaps an jokes an wrestlin ropes fae Rome tae Aiberdeen.

The microwave is a rare machine ye dinna hae tae cook,
Cam hame fae wark, takk aff yer sark, sit doon an read a book,
Pit fit ye ett on a plastic plate, kebbabs, or mince, or fish,
Spaghetti baas or broccoli shaas, it heats them on the dish.

Oh aren't ye gled ye niver bedd in a time fin wives war slaves,
Fin rinnin a hame, a daily pain, pit fowk inno early graves,
Jist sit on yer dowp an makk them lowp they slice yer wark in half,
Bit pye yer bill or the Hydro will be sure tae cut them aff!