



Professor Bill Nicolaisen on his 80th birthday

# Bill Nicolaisen's Rant

Paul Anderson



Composed by Paul Anderson to mark Professor Bill Nicolaisen's 80th birthday on 13 June 2007

## 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, NEH & BAC Research Fellow, *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**, preparing 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*
- Paul Anderson**, AHRC Research Fellow in the Creative and Performing Arts, *Scotland's North-East traditional fiddle styles and repertoires*
- Fiona-Jane Brown**, PhD student, *researching belief in east and west coast fishing communities*
- 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*
- Frances Wilkins**, PhD student, *researching sacred singing in coastal communities in North Scotland and the Northern Isles*
- Alison Sharman**, Secretary

### Honorary Research Fellows

- Dr Mary Anne Alburger**, *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*

### Honorary Research Associates

- 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*
- Stanley Robertson**, *Scottish Travellers*
- Dr Robert Young Walser**, *JM Carpenter collection*
- 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, Tel: 01224 272996  
 MacRobert Building, Fax: 01224 272728  
 King's College, Email: elphinstone@abdn.ac.uk  
 Aberdeen AB24 5UA, Website: www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone  
 Scotland, UK.

## IMPORTANT DATES for your DIARY

- 26-28 October 2007**  
 'Button Boxes and Moothies', Free Reed Convention, various venues, Aberdeen City Centre and University of Aberdeen
- 8 November 2007**  
 Elphinstone Institute Open Evening, 5.00-9.00pm
- Public Lectures**  
**Tuesdays at 7.30-9.00pm**  
**Admission £2.00 includes refreshments**  
**Marischal Museum, Marischal College**
- 25th September 2007**  
*Title: Between the Sacred and the Secular: Exploring the Soirée in North-East Scottish Coastal Communities*  
 Speaker: Dr Ian Russell  
 Institution: Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen
- 30th October 2007**  
*Title: The Rise and Fall of the Tee Name System in North-East Fishing Communities*  
 Speaker: Professor Edward E. Knipe  
 Institution: Emeritus – Virginia Commonwealth University
- 27th November 2007**  
*Title: tbc*  
 Speaker: Allan MacDonald  
 Institution: Piping Centre, Glasgow
- 29th January 2008**  
*Title: Archaeological Approaches to Landscapes of Conflict in 17th and 18th Century Scotland*  
 Speaker: Dr Tony Pollard  
 Institution: University of Glasgow
- 26th February 2008**  
*Title: Scots, Language of Kings*  
 Speaker: Dr Caroline Macafee  
 Institution: Honorary Research Fellow, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen
- 25th March 2008**  
*Title: Mrs Anna Brown of Falkland: Ballads and Biography*  
 Speaker: Professor Ruth Perry  
 Institution: Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- 29th April 2008**  
*Title: Robert the Bruce as Mythic Hero*  
 Speaker: Professor Robert Segal  
 Institution: University of Aberdeen
- 27th May 2008**  
*Title: The Old Ship Zion: Using the Trawler Radio Band to Transmit Gospel Songs among North-East Scottish Fishermen*  
 Speaker: Frances Wilkins  
 Institution: PhD Researcher, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen

# ELPHINSTONE INSTITUTE

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

AUTUMN 2007

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

## Hosting the 37th International Ballad Conference

In August, sixty-five scholars from twenty-four countries – Romania to Canada, Lithuania to the USA – joined us for the 37th International Ballad Conference of the Kommission für Volksdichtung (KfV) at Balmacara, Lochalsh, overlooking the Isle of Skye.

Forty creative and inspiring papers explored the conference themes: songs of people on the move, such as itinerant workers, preachers, salespeople, and Gypsy-Travellers, and the travels of songs themselves as they are transmitted from place to place, and sometimes culture to culture. Several papers also paid tribute to the work of the late Reimund Kvideland, a Norwegian folklorist whose influence continues to be felt across many genres of folklore study.

The conference excursion took us through the Isle of Skye, where delegates were treated to the full range of Scottish weather – from misty sunshine to sunny mists – on our route from Kyle of Lochalsh to Talisker, Dùn Beag Broch, north around Trotternish to the Skye Museum of Island Life and Duntulm, before heading back to Balmacara via the Kilt Rock and the Old Man of Storr. The weather allowed us some spectacular views on the way, from Waternish and the Ascribs, to Fladda Chùain, the Shiants, the mountains of Harris and, on our return, over Rona, Raasay and the Torridon hills.

One of the highlights of any conference on song is the musical entertainment and KfV 2007 was no exception. We were treated to a learned demonstration of cauld wind, reel and Highland bagpipes by Dougie Pincock (Director of Sgoil Chiùil na Gàidhealtachd – the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music at Plockton), a concert by Gaelic singer Rona Lightfoot, who gave us a unique insight into her upbringing at the heart of South Uist tradition, and a lively concert by five students from Plockton. From ancient Gaelic waulking songs, to contemporary Scottish songs, tunes and step dancing, the concert showcased three generations of living and vibrant Scottish tradition.

Many delegates have since commented on the combination of theme and location, which was most serendipitously manifest in the fact that three of the hotel staff sang traditional songs to us as well. A book on songs of people on the move and in the margins, based on selected conference papers, will be published in 2009.



Delegates Sabine Wienker-Piepho (Germany – President KfV), Alexander Morozov and Tatyana Morozova (Belarus), Marija Klobčar (Slovenia), and Katalin Juhász (Hungary) in Duntulm, Isle of Skye.



Tom McKean (Convener) addresses delegates at Carbost on the Isle of Skye

## 'Crossing Over' NAFCo at St John's, Newfoundland *From Anna Kearney Guigné*

Fiddlers, folklorists, and friends of traditional music are collaborating with the Elphinstone Institute to bring the third biennial North Atlantic Fiddle Convention (NAFCo) to St John's, Newfoundland in the summer of 2008. At the heart of the NAFCo idea is the synergy created by the combination of a performance celebration and an international academic symposium. The event will consist of a six-day festival, 3-8 August, that will showcase traditional artists from countries around the North Atlantic rim, each representing distinct fiddle and dance traditions. Highlights will include concerts, solo recitals, workshops (fiddle and dance), demonstrations, free performances and scheduled sessions in various locations throughout the city and its environs. The 2008 convention will provide an electric atmosphere with a variety of music styles, among them Celtic fusion, Texas Swing, bluegrass, gypsy jazz, trad-rock, along with the traditional fiddle music of North Atlantic communities. The convention will also provide a forum for experiencing the links between fiddle, dance, song, mouth music, accordion, piping and other complementary traditions.

The theme 'Crossing Over' has been chosen for the 2008 event, symbolizing the first time the convention has been held in North America. The concept also points to Newfoundland's distinct geographical and cultural position in the global community. Situated at the most easterly point of Canada between the old world and the new, historically our province has long been an important cross over point for both First Nations and European cultures. Since the late eighteenth century it has provided a new home for settlers mainly of Irish, Scottish, English, Portuguese, and French origin who made their way across to the new world transporting their music and dance traditions with them. Two legendary Newfoundland players who embodied this melting pot of cultures were Rufus Guinchart (1899-1990) and Emile Benoit (1913-1992).

A warm invitation is extended to all players and scholars from Aberdeen, Scotland, and the UK to join us for this historic event. You can keep in touch by looking up our website: <http://www.mun.ca/nafco2008/about/>



Rufus Guinchart (left) and Emile Benoit (right)  
Credit: Queen Elizabeth Library, Memorial University of Newfoundland

## From the Director



We are pleased to welcome two new PhD students who have moved from our MLitt programme – Jennifer Fagan, who is researching the landscape of the Garioch, and Irene Watt, who is researching lullabies. Other students who have joined the MLitt programme include Christine Kydd, Anne Lamb, Dan Melnick, and Jay Winogron. We wish them every success with their studies.

One of the largest international academic conferences devoted to folklore is the annual meeting of the American Folklore Society, to be held this year in Québec City, 17-21 October – a joint meeting with the Folklore Studies Association of Canada. This year's theme is the 'Politics and Practices of Intangible Cultural Heritage'. Although members of the Institute have presented papers over the past ten years, this meeting will be a milestone for us with nine presentations – four from the Carpenter team, three from our PhD students, and one each from Tom McKean and myself. In addition, we will be hosting an exhibition about the Institute's work and publications, with a view to increasing the profile of the University and publicising opportunities for study at the Institute.

We very much hope that you will support our Public Lecture programme and other events, especially 'Button Boxes and Moothies', our Free Reed Convention on the weekend of 26-28 October, and our Open Evening on Thursday 8 November, 5.00-9.00 pm, when there will be musical entertainment (7.00-8.00 pm) and refreshments.

And finally, our congratulations to our research fellow, Paul Anderson, who is to marry Shona Donaldson at Fyvie Castle on Saturday 20 October.

## From our PhD Research Students

### Jennifer Fagan

Craigshannoch, Oxen Craig, Mither Tap, these names are an inspiration to many, a trigger for memories of berry picking, picnicking, and playing on Bennachie with family and friends. My research interest is to understand the layers of meaning that underlie Bennachie, how the mountain reaches out and becomes a source of inspiration, love, and pride of identity in the North-East. I am looking to interview people both in terms of an oral history of those involved in its development and management but also artists, writers, and walkers, people who return to Bennachie again and again. A broader element investigates how the landscape of the Garioch is closely intertwined with the folk who live and practise their livelihoods there. If you have strong connections to the Garioch landscape through family history, childhood, farming or work experiences, and are interested in being involved in an oral history project, please contact me through the Institute.



Jen on Clochnaben

### Sara Reith

In early July, I participated in 'The International Conference on Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations' held in Amsterdam. Papers and discussion groups included reports on new research, and community projects aimed at giving voice to culturally marginalised groups, particularly immigrant, migrant or ethnic communities, and indigenous or First Nation peoples. Of particular interest was a project, 'Sharing the Story', in which shared knowledge between Irish Travellers and First Nation Canadians has produced a renewed sense of cultural worth and social empowerment. These issues tied in well with my own presentation, 'Diversity and Belonging in Scotland', which discussed how Scottish Travellers use their lore and musical traditions in performance to create a positive and more realistic image of Traveller identity, and to heighten awareness of the value of their cultural inheritance to Scotland. This paper will be published in the forthcoming issue of the *International Journal of Diversity*.

### Frances Wilkins

In July, I travelled to the University of York to present a paper at the 'Fifth Biennial International Conference on Music Since 1900'. This was quite different to the folklore / ethnomusicology gatherings I was becoming acquainted with, as the majority of presenters were classical musicologists and composers. However, it was fascinating to hear a different perspective on music studies and learn more about the specific styles of, and influences on, various composers' work. The paper I presented dealt with 'The Use of the Trawler Radio Band to Transmit Gospel Singing among North-East Scottish Fishermen' during the 1950s and 1960s, and discussed the willingness of evangelical Christians to embrace technological advancement as a means of promoting themselves, their music and their beliefs. The response to the paper was very positive and the feedback of great benefit. Special thanks to the ICMSN, who provided me with a bursary to help cover the cost of attending the conference. *Thanks also to those who pointed out the error in my piece on trawler band singing in the spring newsletter; Dod Stone was leader of the Buckie Fishermen's Choir, not Peterhead as was stated.*



Irene Watt with Clàrsach

### Irene Watt

Are lullabies just for babies? My PhD research project is exploring the role of lullabies in a modern world. The research has three distinct areas: collecting lullabies and examining their content; interviewing people who use lullabies; and examining the psychological effect of the lullaby on both singer and subject. My research methodology is based on a combination of archive research, questionnaires and interviews. I have begun to collect lullabies both by interviewing professional singers and attending folk festivals to meet some of the tradition bearers to find lullabies that are perhaps less well known. Some of these have surprisingly dark content with a diverse range of subject matter including warnings, fears and anxieties, and portents of danger. I began the research with professional singers as I believed that they would be a rich source of previously untapped material. The field is exciting and rewarding, raising new and unexpected questions from a seemingly simple subject.

## Button Box and Moothie Magic

The Elphinstone Institute is hosting Button Boxes and Moothies (26-28 October 2007), a unique celebration of small free-reed instruments, including mouth organs, concertinas, melodeons, diatonic button accordions, and Jews harps. The Free Reed Convention will be the place to enjoy the appealing music of these delightful instruments played by some of the very best talents around, both local to Scotland and from further afield, and it will be a great opportunity to find out more about these less well known instruments and their music.

Among the guests are legendary Irish box players Jackie Daly and Conor Keane from Miltown Malbay, Anglo concertina virtuoso Mary MacNamara from East Clare, mouth organ maestro Pip Murphy from Wexford, English concertina virtuosos Simon Thoumire from Edinburgh and Robert Harbron from Wiltshire, melodeon greats Fred Davidson from Banchory and Katie Howson from Suffolk, mouth harp blues king Spider Mackenzie from Aberdeen, Jews harp expert Michael Wright from Oxford; plus other free reed stars: on moothie – George Current, Doddie Murray, Bob Hay, and Gordon Easton; on button box – Tom Roche; on Breton melodeon – Régis Lechatellier; on English concertina – Frances Wilkins; and giving talks – Stuart Eydman and Vic Gammon.

During the weekend event you can try a taster session, join an elementary workshop, or, if suitably experienced, learn about style and repertoire at a players' workshop. You don't have to be a free reed player to join in; other instruments are welcome at several of the workshops or you can just sit and listen, 'meet the artist', or try a stepdance. There will also be talks on Friday afternoon and several opportunities for informal sessions in local music-friendly pubs. Full programme details are available at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone> or telephone 01224 272996. The Convention is supported by Aberdeen City Council, the Blue Lamp, the Friends of the Elphinstone Institute, the Globe Inn, the Scottish Arts Council, SC&T, the Wood Group, TMSA (Aberdeen Branch), and Celtic Chords music shop, Stonehaven.



Fred Davidson (melodeon) from Banchory

## Singing Success at Cullerlie

The 2007 Traditional Singing Weekend at Tracey and Eric Walker's farm at Cullerlie, held on 20-22 July, proved to be a great success despite dreich and caul conditions. It was a great tribute to Tracey's mother, the late Anne Reid and husband Tom, the Bothy Ballad King, in whose memory the festival was held, that the event was so well supported and all the tickets were sold.

The singing was exceptional, helped by the fact that several of the festival goers are fine singers in their own right. Sadly, due to a family bereavement, Grace Toland of Inishowen was not able to be with us. However, the Irish tradition was masterfully represented by Jerry O'Reilly, who also gave a fine presentation on Irish song traditions. We had two other talks, one an interview of Janet Weatherston by Alan Prior on the subject of her family's song tradition, which came largely from Angus. The second, by Brian Dawson, was on folksong collecting in Lincolnshire by Percy Grainger before World War I, which gave a fascinating insight into the way Grainger worked with his singers, recording many of their songs on the phonograph. We were especially pleased to welcome our guest singer from Orkney, Billy Jolly, who was recovering from an operation. Other guest singers were all in excellent form and included Graham White and Grace Banks from Aberdeen, Geordie Murison from Netherley near Stonehaven, Edinburgh emigrants Carole and Alan Prior from London, and Bella Hardy from Edale in Derbyshire. The concerts were hosted by Ian Russell and Jim Taylor (Tom's nephew).

The crafts on display proved to be a great attraction, with farmhouse cooking from Shirley Fowkes, fisher knitting from Edith Rattray, New Pitsligo lace from Annie McWilliam, and blacksmithing from John Findlater, who certainly made the sparks fly. There was also a museum quiz organised by Eric Walker.

Eric and Tracey Walker, together with Tracey's sisters Isla and Wendy, Anne's sister Shirley, and other members of the family gave everyone a really warm welcome and looked after us over the weekend. This, along with the improved facilities, was very much appreciated. The festival closed with Anne's grand-daughter, Sarah Walker, supported by all the guests, leading the company in one of Anne's favourite songs – 'Busk, Busk, Bonnie Lassie'. The date for next year's festival is 25-27 July 2008.



Sarah Walker Leads the Guests in the Last Song. Credit: Photograph by Ellice Milton

## Boaties Craft Workshop Continues

Despite the loss of our leading craftsman, the Boatie building project at Peterhead Maritime Heritage Centre went ahead in 2007 as planned, although the number of apprentices was kept to four. The workshop, co-ordinated by Stephen Ritchie, ran through the school summer holidays with two highly skilled craftsmen, Alex James Stephen and Sandy Forbes, supported by master model boat builder, Ali Law. The four young apprentices – Chris Forbes, Michael Thain, Bruce Buchan and Sean Rennie – all completed their models, which are fully rigged, trimmed, and fit to sail. Next year the plan is to focus on training adult apprentices.



Jim Reid explains the aerodynamics of a sail to Philip Stephen and Peter Fowlie, October 2004. Credit: Stephen Ritchie

## Jim Reid (1929-2007)

Sadly, our leading craftworker for the Boaties Project, Jim 'Sodjer' Reid, died on 11 April 2007. He was an outstanding model boatbuilder and several of his models grace the Arbutnot Museum, including the Fifie Blue Mogganer.

It was, of course, the Fifie design or east coast herring lugger that Jim loved to build, and these he made in a variety of sizes from 18-inch up to four feet. The beauty of these models is that they sail without remote control or a motor, relying solely on the skill of the maker and owner. Jim learnt his skills from older men, notably Robert Park, and especially those from Boddam, where his grandmother lived. Jim loved the sea and everything to do with it, but after three spells at the herring fishery had to give it up through ill health. He fell back on his trade as a painter and decorator, though compensated for this by becoming a member of the Peterhead lifeboat crew, later the launcher, and finally the shed keeper.

When I first met Jim in 2001 he told me that no-one was interested in building boaties, especially the young. When we started the project in May 2004, with Scottish Arts Council and Aberdeenshire support, there were an amazing 36 applicants for the two places. In this and the two subsequent workshops, Jim trained nineteen young people to build boaties as well as the equivalent number of senior apprentices. His skills, his dry sense of humour, and his lively banter are sorely missed.