

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

## Remembering Harlaw



The scene of Reid Harlaw, with the 1911 monument between Harlaw House and Balhalgardy. Photo by Thomas A. McKean

*As I cam by the Garioch land an doun by Netherha, there were fifty thoozan Hielan men a-marching tae Harlaw  
And sing diddy-aye-o, sing fal-the-doh, sing diddy-aye-o-aye-ay*

*Jeannie Robertson*

To mark the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Harlaw of 1411, one of the bloodiest battles of the medieval period in Scotland, a conference is being organised by the Elphinstone Institute in association with the Seven Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen at their headquarters, Trinity Hall on Holburn Street, on Thursday 9 June 2011. The venue is particularly appropriate as it displays the only two known artefacts of the battle – the Weavers’ banner and Provost Davidson’s sword.

The Deacon Convenor of the Trades, J. George Ross, will provide the welcome and Lord Provost Peter Stephen will formally open the day. Speakers will cover a wide variety of topics, including the historical background, the Lordship of the Isles, archival evidence, battlefield archaeology, military strategy, heraldry, genealogy, and the cultural legacy.

They include Professor Richard Oram of the University of Stirling, Dr Iain MacDonald of the University of Glasgow, the Lord Lyon (David Sellar), Phil Astley of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives, David Irvine of Drum, Dr Tony Pollard, Director of the Centre for Battlefield Archaeology at the University of Glasgow, and Dr John Purser, musicologist and music historian.

A Lord Provost’s Reception in the evening will be followed by a concert of music, song, and the spoken word featuring Paul Anderson (fiddle), Duncan MacGillivray (pipes), Elizabeth Stewart (ballad and story), and Sheena Blackhall (poetry).

To book for the event, go to our website [www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/) or request a form from the Institute.

*Ian Russell and Gordon Casely*

*The MacDonald army under the command of Domhnall MacDonald, the Lord of the Isles, was advancing on Aberdeen to defend his control over the Earldom of Ross. The Earl of Mar, Alexander Stewart, was sent by his uncle, the governor Duke of Albany, to stop them. The battle was fought on 24 July on a high plateau above the River Urie probably near where the village of Balhalgardy now stands. The outcome of the battle was militarily inconclusive, both sides claimed victory despite each having suffered heavy losses. The consequence of the battle was to halt MacDonald’s advance towards Aberdeen and bring his campaign to an end.*

*excerpted from Historic Scotland’s  
‘Battlefield Inventory’*

## Taking Part

Following the introduction of the first ethnomusicology course to the University’s BMus, taught by Dr Frances Wilkins, an Elphinstone graduate, it is most appropriate that the twenty-seventh European Seminar in Ethnomusicology (ESEM) will be held at the University of Aberdeen, 15 to 19 September 2011, hosted by the Institute.

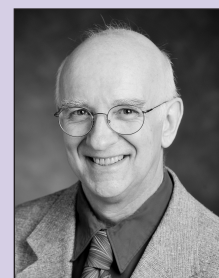
The John Blacking Memorial Lecture – a regular feature of ESEM meetings – will be presented by Professor Anthony Seeger, University of California at Los Angeles, who is a world authority on the subject. In his lecture, ‘Taking a Part: Song Sequences and Sound Sentiments’, he addresses the significance of the sequencing of songs and the importance of the mix of shared repertory with newly introduced material among three groups: the Suyá-Kisêdjê Indians of Brazil, group sings at a summer camp for children, and singing at Seeger family reunions.

The 2011 Conference theme, ‘Taking Part’, is an aspect of music making in most cultures and will focus on participation. The plan is to investigate performance from many different perspectives – ethnological, sociological, psychological, cosmological, as well as musical – and to consider communities, groups, families, and individuals in their roles as music makers. An obvious case study in the UK might be the growing phenomenon of community/folk choirs. In this way, the researcher comes to understand their role and performance milieu, how the music is made, what characterises it, and how individuals express their identity through the choirs.

The sessions will be built around themes, such as: organisational structures; inclusivity, exclusivity, and elitism; tradition, heritage, revitalisation, and innovation; place, landscape, and soundscape; authenticity and conventions; local, regional, and national

identities; musical interaction; and the experience of participation.

The European Seminar in Ethnomusicology is a platform for professional scholars and advanced students in ethnomusicology. Founded in 1981 in Belfast by the late Professor John Blacking (1928-1990) as a European network for ethnomusicologists, ESEM welcomes scholars, practitioners and enthusiasts. ESEM also functions as a place for exchanging news



on recent events and publications. There are currently 250 researchers from all over the world registered.

*Ian Russell*

**Tony Seeger.**  
*Photo by Todd Cheney*

This year is already proving to be a busy one with several initiatives and events, not least of which is our conference on 9 June 2011 to commemorate the 600th year anniversary of the Battle of Harlaw, and the hosting of the European Seminar in Ethnomusicology in September.

One proposal we are developing involves a series of workshops to connect Polish people in the city with the songs and ballads of North-East Scotland and to share their song culture. Currently the largest single minority ethnic group in the city, many are young, educated adults, who bring vital skills, expertise, and entrepreneurial talents to the region. Moreover, many of them have made their home here and plan to stay. Over the past five years I have interviewed several members of the community and, in cultural terms, two concerns stand out. The first is a feeling of regret that they are not getting to know the culture and traditions of their new homeland – the North-East. The second is that, outside of the church, their Polish identity is being lost and they rarely have an opportunity to express or celebrate it.

The North-East of Scotland has a rich and varied tradition of songs that stretches back over many centuries, from contemporary song writing, to the bothy ballads of agricultural workers and the classic ballads that inspired Sir Walter Scott. To be part of this rich culture is to have an understanding of the joys, concerns, hopes, beliefs and values of the people who nurtured the songs. The Institute has considerable expertise and experience in this field and in consultation with SC&T and the local branch of the TMSA has identified inspirational singers and tutors who can deliver through interactive

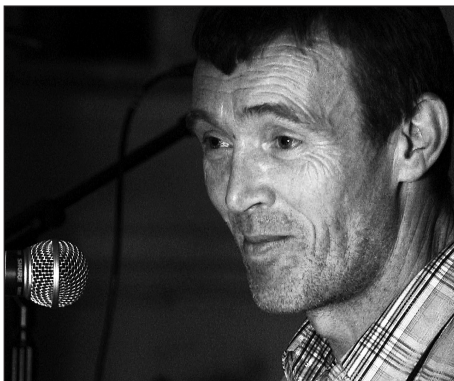


## From the Director

workshops this brief and share the song culture of the participants. There is no question – many Polish people love to sing. We plan to work towards a small-scale festival, in the form of a ceilidh concert including a dance, in which the songs are performed and friends and family are invited to join the celebration.

We also hope to host a third 'Button Boxes and Moothie Free Reed Convention', to celebrate the important part that small free-reed instruments, such as mouth organs, concertinas, Jew's harps, and button accordions play in the cultural life of Scotland and beyond. The provisional dates are 11-13 November 2011. The weekend will feature twelve exemplary players from Scotland, Ireland, and England, all of whom are recognised as outstanding exponents of their art, such as Mary Mac Namara and Jackie Daly who were guests in 2007. They will be supported by local players and enthusiasts. The festival will give the participants a rare chance to experience one of the less familiar musical traditions of Scotland and elsewhere. Four young instrumentalists will be offered bursaries to attend. The aim is to create an atmosphere of international cultural exchange, with very high standards of performance. This is the only event of its kind in Scotland.

# Cullerlie Traditional Singing Weekend



Thomas McCarthy

The Traditional Singing Weekend at Cullerlie, 22-24 July 2011, in memory of Tom and Anne Reid, will once again be a very special celebration in a wonderful location in rural Aberdeenshire in the company of some great singers.

This year our Irish contingent includes two fine stylists with highly distinctive voices – one from Derry City and the other from a Traveller background in County Offaly. Jim Mac Farland was an 'All Ireland' singing champion in the early eighties and is a member of the prestigious Góilín Singers' Club in Dublin; he has been a staunch collector of traditional song for the past forty years. Thomas McCarthy grew up surrounded by the singing of his late mother and her father, as well as that of his aunts and uncles. With a distinctive and embellished style, he sings rare and ancient songs, songs of Traveller life composed by his grandfather, along with a variety of his own songs.

Our guests from England include two fine singers from the Yorkshire Pennines. Gordon Hoyland was born and bred in the village of Oughtibridge northwest of Sheffield where there is a strong local carol singing tradition. He sings the songs from his district and further afield. Fay Hield is a singer and academic living in Storrs near Sheffield. She has sung from an early age as a floor singer at her local folk club, progressing to form the a cappella band the Witches of Elswick during her university days. Her research is concerned with the social aspect of English folk singing and to promote this she organises two clubs in the Sheffield area.

Our Scottish guests are: Steve Byrne from Angus of Malinky fame; Siobhan Miller from Penicuik, an RSAMD graduate nominated for Scots Singer of the Year in 2010; Tony and Gaby Robertson, son and daughter of the late great Aberdeenshire storyteller and ballad



Steve Byrne

singer, Stanley Robertson, from whom they learned the classic ballads; Allan Taylor from Alford, a finalist in this year's Bothy Ballad Champion of Champions competition at Elgin; and, representing the home team, Sarah Walker from Cullerlie, granddaughter of the late Tom and Anne Reid. Sarah was brought up singing to bus parties in the tea room at Cullerlie Farm Park.

Part of the weekend experience is learning about and enjoying the local craft traditions. This year is no exception and we plan to feature paper flower making, creel making, farmhouse cooking, and other crafts.

If you are planning to join us down on the farm, please book early as we always sell out. Write to The Traditional Singing Weekend, Cullerlie Farm Park, Echt, Skene, Aberdeenshire AB32 6XL or telephone 01224 645486 or 01330 860549.

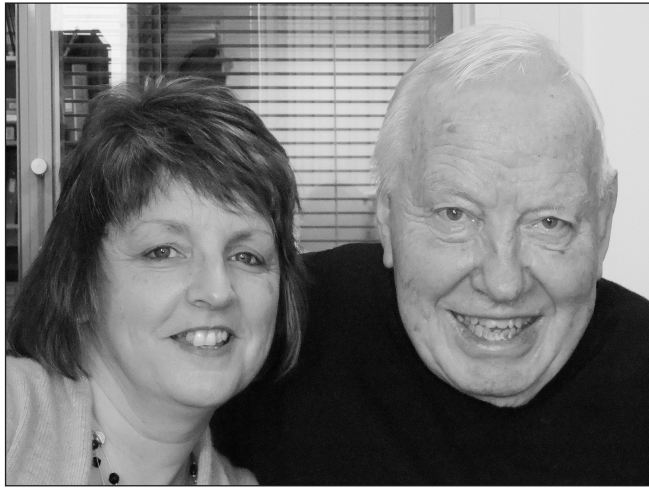
*Ian Russell*



Siobhan Miller

## Inside the Institute: Alison Sharman

Alison Sharman is first point of contact for visitors and callers to the Elphinstone Institute with her trademark courteous greeting of 'Hello, can I help you?'. Now approaching her tenth year as administrator of the Institute, Alison says that she enjoys her job because she feels so involved with every aspect of the work. 'This post is hands-on, and the job I do ties in with my own interest in local and cultural history.' Visits, conferences, seminars and conventions vie with day-to-day work of basic administration, plus the events of every academic year – the influx of new students, exams and graduations. Alison is involved in it all, from sticking on a stamp, to booking a passage to Idaho. Alison started at the Elphinstone when the Institute was headquartered in cramped up-and-down premises at 24 High Street, Old Aberdeen. In 2005, she was involved in the move to the present ground-floor centre in the MacRobert Building.



Alison with Bill Nicolaisen. Photo by Gordon Casely

What attracts her to her job? She reels off a list of words such as 'interest', 'characters' and 'variety'. She gently shepherds University newcomers into their roles as students, pointing out that some of them are not only mature, but may not have studied in any formal sense since youth. 'Some of them are very apprehensive, and a wee bit nervous', she notes, 'but we like to think we're a friendly lot here at the Institute. Once they're settled and get to know us, some students comment that it feels like a family'.

Bonuses for Alison are what she describes as 'the characters I've met', including Robbie Shepherd, Paul Anderson, Sheena Blackhall and the

late Stanley Robertson. Those meeting her find Alison very helpful and friendly. A regular theatre-goer at home, she often travels to London to see family and friends, and take in a show.

Gordon Casely

## 'People Make Places' and 'Folk Song and the Relationships between Nations': Two Upcoming Conferences

This season sees two significant conferences in Portugal. The first is the multi-panel extravaganza of the quadrennial *Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore (SIEF)* conference, this year in Lisbon, 17-21 April. I've put together a panel called, 'Creating worlds: ballad, song and environment', with nine paper proposals from Slovenia, Ireland, Poland, Wales, Italy, Denmark/Switzerland and, of course, Scotland, in the form of Valentina Bold, one of the Institute's inaugural Research Fellows, now senior lecturer at the University of Glasgow. The panel brings together international scholars from a range of disciplines to demonstrate the vitality and necessity of 'singing the land' in negotiating relationships with our surroundings. Topics covered include: how songs encapsulate our knowledge of the environment; how they shape our concepts of landscape and our place in it; how songs are used to make sense of natural disaster; how songs

help us to control our fears; and how songs can be used both as agents of and discouragement to political change.

On a slightly smaller scale, the 41st ballad conference of the *Kommission für Volksdichtung (KfV)* will take place on 20-24 June in Faro. Our theme will be 'Folk Song and the Relationships between Nations', focusing on songs and ballads which travel across borders, from nation to nation, or region to region. The conference draws scholars from more than twenty countries, experts well placed to explore the image of one nation or culture in the songs of another, to examine the role of songs and ballads in political and cultural relationships between cultures.

For the SIEF conference, see [www.nomadit.co.uk/sief/sief2011](http://www.nomadit.co.uk/sief/sief2011) and for the KfV conference, see [www.kfvweb.org](http://www.kfvweb.org).

Thomas A. McKean

## The Fourth Toulmin Short Story Competition

The Elphinstone Institute is pleased to announce that the fourth annual Toulmin Short Story Competition, with a prize of £500 to the winner, is open for entries.

The competition commemorates the work of one of the North-East's finest exponents of written Doric, John Reid, who published under the name David Toulmin. John Reid (1913-1998) was an Aberdeenshire farm labourer, who spent most of his life working long hours for very small rewards. In odd moments he jotted down short stories, character studies, and bothy tales, which he drew on in writing articles for local newspapers. He published ten books, consisting mostly of short stories and reminiscences, which paint a harsh picture of farm life.

The competition is run in conjunction with the University's WORD Festival where the winning story will be read. We are proud to be able to honour John and his work in this way. His writing is powerful, evocative and witty. We have had an excellent response in the first three years and we now want to give people with a tale to tell another chance to pick up a pen and stretch their imaginations.



The competition is open to all amateur writers\* over the age of 16 and the story should be concerned with some aspect of life in North-East Scotland. The story may be written in Scots, including Doric, or English or a mixture of the two.

The award for the best entry will be made at the 2011 WORD Festival weekend (May 13-17) at the University of Aberdeen, when the winning story will be read out by Sheena Blackhall. The story will also be published in *Leopard Magazine*.

A short story of up to 4,000 words in length should be submitted by 31 March, 2011 to Dr Ian Russell, Director, The Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, MacRobert Building, King's College, Aberdeen AB24 5UA. Hard copy, size A4, should be sent in addition to an electronic submission in MS Word. For more information contact the Elphinstone Institute 01224-272996 or at [elphinstone@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:elphinstone@abdn.ac.uk).

\*For the purposes of this prize, a professional writer is considered to be one who earns more than 51% of their income through writing, and/or has had a solo work (book) published with a major UK publisher.

## 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, *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**, NEH Research Fellow and team leader, *preparing 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*

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

**Dr Frances Wilkins**, Ethnomusicology, *Sacred Singing in Coastal Communities in North and North-East Scotland and the Northern Isles*

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

**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*

**Adam Grydehøj**, PhD student, *researching tradition and cultural promotion on Shetland*

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

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

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

### 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*

**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.**

## IMPORTANT DATES for your DIARY

### Harlaw Remembered

9 June 2011

### Cullerlie Traditional Singing Weekend

22-24 July 2011

### 27th European Seminar in

#### Ethnomusicology

15-19 September 2011

### Friends of the Elphinstone Institute Ballad Bus

24 September 2011

### Traditional Song Forum Meeting

8 October 2011

[www.tradsong.org/about.htm](http://www.tradsong.org/about.htm)

### Open Evening – All Welcome

10 November 2011

### North Atlantic Fiddle Convention 2012

Derry City

27 June - 1 July 2012

### Public Lectures 2011

*Tuesdays at 7.30-9.00pm Admission £3.00*

*includes refreshments*

Room MR055, MacRobert Building, King's College, University of Aberdeen

### 22 March 2011

*Title: 'The Gaelic Rèiteach Betrothal Custom: Symbol and Practice'*

*Speaker: Neill Martin*

*Institution: University of Edinburgh*

### 26 April 2011

*Title: 'The Killing Stones: Memories from Vanishing Traveller Campsites'*

*Speaker: Jess Smith*

*Institution: Writer, storyteller and singer*

### 31 May 2011

*Title: 'Traditional Medicine and Healthcare in the North-East: The Transition from Simples to Scientific Medicine'*

*Speaker: Alex Sutherland*

*Institution: University of Aberdeen*

### 27 September 2011

*Title: 'What's the War Got to Do with Us?, and Other Stories'*

*Speaker: David Atherton*

*Institution: Aberdeenshire Council*



Post-graduate students Sheila Young, Gordon Casely, Nicolas Le Bigre and Janet Byth with visiting lecturer David Atherton. Photo by Thomas A. McKean

## Elphinstone Institute Publications

Our publications, including books, CDs and DVDs, are now available at the University's on-line store. Point your browser to <http://tinyurl.com/2g8ao9s>, to purchase *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.

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