

Honorary Degree Award for Sheena Blackhall

Sheena Blackhall is the vyce o North-East Scotland, a makar fa wyves intriguin tales, poems, an sangs about the deepest walls o experience.

We were fair trickit tae hae Sheena wirkin wi us at the Institute for mair nor five year, side-bi-side wi the late Stanley Robertson. We aught tae hae been recordin ilka day, for there wis aa o North-East culture – the tongue, sang, story, an music, aul

an new – in ae office, siccan proof o the value an relevance o deep tradition an present-day creativity tae this nation.

Lang flauchtit wi Buddhist teachins, Sheena's wark is deeply human an represents a by-ordinar range o achievement. She can scrieve a bonnie love poem, spik o the hertache o parentin, sing a centuries-aul ballat, or mak an inspirin sang for bairns about the technicalities o Doric in saiven wee verses. Sheena can reach onybdy, wi a pitch-pairfect instinct o fit wey tae mak sense tae a pre-schooler or a pensioner, incomer or local, aa wi the greatest o ease.

North-East an Scots-tongue writers are aye pigeonholed, bit Sheena, as makar Joy Hendry scrievit, 'knows unerringly how to send that couthy, earthy tongue to the furthest of stars.' Fyles influenced bi great figures the like o Dickens an Saki, Calvino, Hughes an Heaney, Sheena his vrocht her ain vyce,



mixin classic influences wi Scots balladry an a tradition that she cries 'that fey an ither-worldly zone o the weird an the supernaitural'.

Sheena has streikit the mairches o Doric, as weel, expandin its literary range fae poetry an song intae novels an short stories, an brocht it, alangside Les Wheeler, intae the digital age wi the Elphinstone Kist, a wab-based resource for

teachers an pupils. (Amon her recent owresettins are *The Fey Case o Dr Jekyll an Mr Hyde*, *O Mice an Men*, *The Winnerfu Warlock o Oz*, an *Jean Eyre*.)

Fit wey dis this maitter? For mony, Doric is the tongue o hame an hearth, or of humour, an it's affa gweed at that. Bit Sheena shows us that it can dae onythin, an she's taen it tae skweels, varsities, theatres, television studios, an even untae the hert o Washington, D.C., wi absolute conviction an thravn assurance. Sheena his a cultural confidence an self-esteem tae gie vyce tae thoosans o North-East fowk fa lang tae hear their ain vyces refleckit back tae them in aa waks o life. Fit Sheena dis, fyles it's gey important tae literature, is thus o far wider significance nor that. She represents the best o North-East identity an dis it wi style, confidence, perception, an grace.

Thomas A. McKean



Well done to PhD student Claire Needler and Dr Jamie Fairbairn, of Banff Academy, who together secured a British Curriculum Forum, Curriculum Investigation Grant from the British Educational Research Association to support a research project entitled 'Local Language, School and Community:

Curricular Innovation towards Closing the Attainment Gap'.

Working with the wider community the project will help to build intergenerational links and show similarities and differences between how young and old use Scots. The pair will create a film, an exhibition, and a public-facing report to share their findings.

The David Buchan Lecture 2018

MEMORIAL INTERVENTIONS NEGOTIATING PATHS THROUGH COMPLICATED PASTS

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From the Director

The Summer School of the Société Internationale d’Ethnologie et de Folklore, which we hosted in June, was a huge success, with more than twenty PhD students from across Europe and around the world, along with our own postgraduate students. Portsoy proved to be the ideal place to encounter rooted culture being used as a platform for community regeneration. Thanks to Lorna Summers and Roger Goodyear for their input and help. Many members of the Summer School will be meeting up at SIEF’s biannual congress in Santiago de Compostela next year, followed by a four-day walk to the coast, the final leg of the ancient pilgrims’ way.

The North-East Scots Language Board held a productive meeting of its Advisory Group where three main themes were workshopped: how to move forward with preschool education to get Doric/North-East Scots firmly embedded in curricula across the region; with a North-East Film Festival; and an international festival celebrating North-East culture, drawing connections with related traditions around the world. We’re working on a NESLB response to the Scottish Affairs Committee’s call for input on the new BBC channel.

My article, ‘Willie Mathieson and the Primary Audience for Traditional Song,’ was published in *Folklore Studies*, 55. It discusses Mathieson’s lifelong practice of keeping notebooks of traditional songs he encountered wherever he lived and worked in the North-East, long before he became a subject of interest to collectors and folklorists, from James Madison Carpenter to Hamish Henderson. I’m grateful to Mathieson’s grand-daughter, Matilda Duke, for her help over the years. Another paper, ‘Hip-Hop Ballads Made Anew on the Streets of Aberdeen,’ about local rap artist and friend of the Institute, Jack Hughes, will appear in a collection of papers about street song, edited by Luisa Del Giudice and me, with an introduction by Sergio Bonanzinga, on behalf of the Kommission für Volksdichtung.

In October, I attended the American Folklore Society Annual Meeting in Buffalo, NY, and was part of a panel on ideas of ‘bromance,’ from the Middle Ages to the present day, presenting on male bonding in the context of the Men’s Shed

Movement. My thanks to the Inverurie and Westhill Men’s Sheds for their kindness.

Welcome to our new MLitt students, Wenqiu Chen, Mara Shea, Eleanor Telfer, Amy Brown, Margaret Bradley, Jan Tavendale, Rebecca Palomino, and PhD student Mary Cane. Rebecca took our undergraduate course a couple of years ago and has already begun the huge task of cataloguing the Nicolaisen Library, a remarkable bequest of Folklore and Onomastics books from our late friend and colleague, Bill Nicolaisen.

The Field School took us to Easter Aquhorthies, then, via Portsoy and Nairn, to Newtonmore Highland Folk Park, where we met with curator Rachel Chisholm. We then headed down Loch Ness-side, on to Ullapool, and finally to Geàrrannan on the west side of Lewis, where we explored the Arnol Black House, the Callanish stones, Rodel Church, visited the impressive Comunn Eachdraidh Nis, and enjoyed a wonderful evening with the Ness Melodeon Band.

On 8 December, Irene Watt’s Harps of Gold tenth anniversary concert is at the King’s College Chapel, a perfect way to start the run-up to Christmas. On 23 March 2019, our Doric Messiah, with Prof. Paul Mealor and Gordon Hay, will be at St Margaret’s Church, Braemar.

In April, we host the annual conference of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology, organised by Frances Wilkins, featuring nearly a hundred presentations on music and culture from around the world (see p. 4 for more details).

Congratulations to Christine Kydd, MLitt graduate, on being inducted into the Scottish Traditional Music Hall of Fame, along with Joe Aitken, Alison McMorland, and J. Scott Skinner. Congratulations also to Dr Sheila Young, joint winner of the 2018 Michaelis-Jena Ratcliffe Folklore Prize for her dissertation on women’s prenuptial rituals.

Finally, our warm congratulations to Sheena Blackhall on being given an honorary degree by this University for her long service to North-East culture, and Doric/North-East Scots. Curiously, she and I were both asked not to use too much Doric in our speeches. Clearly, there is still work to be done.

Thomas A. McKean

Letter from Japan

Hello from Kyoto! Since completing my MLitt degree, I have continued researching the oral traditions and writings of Scottish Travelling people. My dissertation was on Stanley Robertson’s *Fish-Hooses* series, and I have just published a revised version in the journal of the Japan Caledonia Society.

I am currently working on my next project, which focuses on Stanley’s book, *Exodus to Alford*, and how he represents his folk in it. I had an opportunity to give a presentation on this subject at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka on 9 November. I was awarded best presentation, and received the National Museum of Ethnology Young Researchers Award. The panel of judges commented that Scottish Travellers are a highly significant contemporary topic both socially and academically and further development is anticipated in Traveller studies.

There have been a few ups and downs since I left Aberdeen but I am pleased to report that I am still pursuing an academic career here in Kyoto!



Ryo Yamasaki, MLitt Graduate of 2017

A Feast of Fiddle and Dance!

In July this year, we welcomed musicians, dancers, and academics from across the world as the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention returned home to Aberdeen for the first time since 2010.

Over five days, NAFCo 2018 showcased more than 125 professional and amateur guest artists from 15 countries, 67 young Fiddle Camp participants, 200+ fiddle and dance club members, 65 symposium delegates, 83 volunteers, and an estimated 18,375 visitors to more than 150 workshops, concerts, dances, film screenings, coach tours, pop-up performances, talks, sessions and so much more, at more than twenty venues across the North-East.

The academic symposium explored the cultural impact of fiddle and dance traditions around the world, with forty-five presentations, including keynote talks by Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje (Emeritus Professor, UCLA), Mark Slobin (Emeritus Professor, Wesleyan University), Maurice Henderson (Shetland Islands), and Heather Sparling (Cape Breton University).

Once again, this unique Convention had a global perspective, welcoming musicians and delegates from around the world, including Ireland, Canada, USA, Australia, Scandinavia, Spain, South America, Lithuania, Mexico, and India. We were also pleased to extend our events into the Shire with concerts and workshops at wonderful venues in Fraserburgh, Banff, Macduff, Arbuthnott, Banchory, Methlick, Huntly, Glenbuchat, and Braemar, bringing a world of music and dance traditions to wider audiences.

Some programme highlights included a full-length live BBC Radio Scotland 'Travelling Folk', with host Anna Massie,

a Galician invasion, the Scottish premiere of Ian Fraser's 'Koterana', performed by community musicians and Scottish Culture & Tradition participants at Haddo House, pop-up stealth performances of music and dance in public spaces around Aberdeen city centre, and our first ever Youth Fiddle Camp,

which culminated in an awe-inspiring world premiere of Patsy Reid's specially-commissioned piece at our closing event.

The Gala Concert at His Majesty's Theatre brought things to a dramatic finale, featuring just a small sample of the NAFCo 2018 line-up, including Paul Anderson, Aberdeen Strathspey and Reel Society, Indian Carnatic violinist Jyotsna Srikanth, Alasdair Fraser and Natalie Haas, among many others, and included a surprise performance by renowned academics Heather Sparling, Mark Slobin, and Colin Quigley, alongside internationally acclaimed artists like Nic Gareiss, Laura Risk, Adam Sutherland, Brittany Haas, and Su-a Lee in a #PerformingResearch piece that drew together the numerous strands of NAFCo.

Over the years, NAFCo has built a wonderful community of like-minded musicians, academics, and audiences around the North Atlantic; it was wonderful to see so many familiar faces back in NAFCo's hometown. Even more inspiring was to see the support of our local communities for this multi-faceted event and we thank our partners, SC&T and the Friends of the Elphinstone, all of the NAFCo sponsors, supporters, funders, venues, audiences, participants, the amazing team of volunteers, and the NAFCo 2018 steering committee.

Carley Williams, Festival Director



Exciting Public Engagement Plans Ahead

The Public Engagement team have been formulating plans and fundraising to bring our ideas to life, establishing a range of initiatives in addition to the existing public lecture and film series. Aberdeenshire Council is supporting a project, 'Celebratin Sheena', with new commissions, schools workshops, and a high-profile performance at the Barn in March 2019, which will showcase Sheena's work, highlighting her important contribution to the region's cultural heritage.

We've also secured funds from the Shire Council's capacity grant scheme to produce three short educational films on the past, present, and future of North-East Scots, with production company Pict Digital. Featuring interviews with academics and Doric Scots speakers, it will be a valuable resource for schools and the wider North-East.

We have established a class in North East Scots, in partnership with Scottish Culture and Traditions (SC&T), and a second class will be launched in January. See the SC&T website (scottishculture.org) for more information.

Aberdeenshire Council has awarded us two Youth Music Initiative schools contracts: a songwriting project looking at legends of the North-East, both old and new, and a rap project exploring storytelling in the twenty-first century. This will enable development of new delivery models which can be used in other settings in the future.

We are increasing our online presence with a new series of HD videos showcasing North-East culture, featuring a range of practitioners from artisan makers, crafts folk, singers, musicians, poets, writers, storytellers, and chefs, ensuring that the region's unique, rich cultural heritage finds its place online.

In September we welcomed visitors to the Institute for Doors Open Day; visitors browsed our publications, took part in a singaround, and searched some of our archives. A great day was had by all.

Simon Gall

What's On: Lectures, Film Series, and Other Events

We were honoured to host Professor Ruth Finnegan from The Open University, who delivered this year's Royal Anthropological Institute Blacking Lecture before a packed audience at the Sir Duncan Rice Library. The title of her fascinating talk was 'Where Does Music Come From?', a topic which she examined with enthusiasm, deep intellectual rigour, and an emphasis on the importance of constant fieldwork. She demonstrated this ethnographic aspect by quoting various people she had met on her travels to Aberdeen, including a fellow passenger on her train journey north, a waiter, and a taxi driver, all of whom gave varying answers to her titular question.

In the morning she spoke with our students about their fieldwork experiences, kindly sharing sage advice with them about fieldwork practice, scholarly references, and life in general.

Nicolas Le Bigre



Who's Who at the Institute

Staff

Dr Thomas A. McKean, Director, *Ethnology and Folklore, ballads, custom and belief, Gaelic tradition, J. M. Carpenter Project*

Dr Frances Wilkins, Lecturer, *Ethnomusicology and Ethnology, 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, especially of the North-East*

Nicolas Le Bigre, Teaching Fellow, *archives*

Carley Williams, NAFCo Festival Director

Simon Gall, Public Engagement Officer

Dr Irene Watt, Public Engagement Officer

Alistair Heather, Community Engagement Officer

Alison Sharman, Administrator

Patron

Very Rev. Prof. Sir Iain Torrance, Pro-Chancellor

Honorary Research Fellows

Dr David Atkinson, *J. M. Carpenter Project*

Dr Julia C. Bishop, *J. M. Carpenter Project*

Research Students

Athanasios (Sakis) Barmpalexis, PhD student, *contemporary shamanism in Scotland*

Kristin Borgehed, PhD student, *North Studentship, an ethnographic study of northern cultural performance*

Les Donaldson, PhD student, *The Seven Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen*

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

Nicolas Le Bigre, PhD student, *narratives of immigrant experience*

Hazel Macfarlane, PhD student, *retirement and volunteering in museum contexts*

Claire Needler, PhD student, *Elphinstone Scholarship, bilingualism in North-East schools.*

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

Erika Sidorenko, PhD student, *traditional remedies and cultural change in the Hebrides*

Lorna Summers, PhD student, *community boatbuilding on the Moray coast*

Carley Williams, PhD student, *safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Scotland*

Chris Wright, PhD student, *Elphinstone Scholarship, the role of traditional arts in place-based education*

Research Associates

Paul Anderson, *North-East fiddle styles and repertoires*

Dr Pat Ballantyne, *Scottish step-dance traditions*

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, *maritime musical traditions, J. M. Carpenter Project*

Les Wheeler, *Scots language, education*

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

Polish-Scottish Song Group

For the workshop, performance, and practice schedule see: www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/public-engagement/polish-scottish-schedule

Public Lecture Series & Ethnographic Film Series

Check for full details of all events on our website:
www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone

13 September 2018 *Ethnographic Film Series*
The Flight of the Condor, and Elphinstone Institute Student Films

27 September 2018 *Public Lecture Series*
Something Corny: A Life Working with Straw

11 October 2018 *Ethnographic Film Series*
Alive Inside

18 October 2018 *Public Lecture Series*
Testimonies of Transition: Voices from the Scottish Diaspora

25 October 2018 *Scottish International Storytelling Festival*
Castle of Stone and Sea: The Life, Songs, and Stories of a 19th-Century Breton Woman

1 November 2018 *Royal Anthropological Institute Blacking Lecture*
Where Does Music Come From?

8 November 2018 *Ethnographic Film Series*
A Sense of Identity

29 November 2018 *The David Buchan Lecture*
Memorial Interventions: Negotiating Paths through Complicated Pasts

17 January 2019 *Public Lecture Series*
The Venison Haggis Makers of Glenesk

14 February 2019 *Ethnographic Film Series*
Janeu: Bhojpuri Initiation Rites and Folk Songs and the Voice of Tradition

21 February 2019 *Public Lecture Series*
Granite, Caul Winds, and Wildly Conspicuous Consumption: A Love Affair with Serious Reservations

14 March 2019 *Ethnographic Film Series*
Makin and Brakin

21 March 2019 *Public Lecture Series*
Fitlike Records: A North-East Music Label

11–15 April 2019
British Forum for Ethnomusicology, Annual Conference.

25 April 2019 *Public Lecture Series*
'A Blond Wig for Maid Marion': Aberdeen and Scotland's Folk Dramas

Postscript

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.