



'World-Leading and Internationally Excellent': Celebrating Twenty Years of Research in Ethnology, Folklore, and Ethnomusicology

This year, the Institute celebrates twenty years since our founding as part of the University's quinqucentenary commemorations. There will be special events throughout the year, culminating in the launch of the David Buchan Lecture in memory of the influential ballad and contemporary legend scholar who was also the Institute's first appointed director. This annual event will place Ethnology and Folklore firmly in the university calendar and appeal to a wide audience across the university as well as to the general public.

The inaugural Buchan Lecture will be given by distinguished folklorist, Professor Diane Goldstein, director of the Folklore Institute and chair of the department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology, Indiana University, the leading institution in the field. Goldstein, who specializes in medical folklore and belief, will offer a talk on medical epidemic legends and their significance to modern healthcare practice. Goldstein has served as president of the American Folklore Society and the Society for Contemporary Legend Research. We are greatly honoured that she will be joining us for the launching of the series, as well as taking part in seminars for our own students, and staff in other departments.

In the Institute's first twenty years, we have launched the Taught MLitt in Ethnology and Folklore, worked in partnership with numerous regional and national cultural organizations, run international conferences and festivals, and released eleven volumes in our Occasional Publications series, including *Taking Part in Music*, the first volume from the relaunched Aberdeen University Press. Our research has been called 'world-leading and internationally excellent' by the 2014 Research Excellence Framework assessors, and we aim to build on these successes as we head into the next score of years.

Our anniversary year will see the Public Lecture and the Ethnographic Film Series continuing, we are co-hosting an international study day with the British Forum for Ethnomusicology, and programming a series of seminars by high profile visiting ethnologists and folklorists. In February, we had a presentation by Dr Nancy Groce of the Library of Congress about her work on the Library's Occupational Folklife Project, as well as on the 'Scotland at the Smithsonian' festival of 2003 for which she was coordinator. In June, we will host Professor Dorothy Noyes from Ohio State University for a two-week residency.

Finally, we are working on an illustrated twentieth-anniversary publication, which will reflect on these first two decades and outline our vision for the future.

Thomas A. McKean



Thomas A. McKean at Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan.



Shane McLeod, Frances Wilkins, and Carlos Galán-Díaz at the Funeralscapes exhibition in Eigg.

Dorothy Noyes Visit

We are honoured to be welcoming Prof. Dorothy Noyes from Ohio State University for a two-week residency at the beginning of June. She joins us from a conference in Switzerland and will take part in our regular activities and lead a seminar, as well as consult with our MLitt and PhD students as they shape their dissertations.



Noyes's own research focuses on the tensions between heritage and contemporary practice, between political authority and lay experience. She is a professor of English and Comparative Studies and research associate at the Mershon Center for International Security Studies. Her book, *Fire in the Plaça: Catalan Festival Politics After Franco*, won the Fellows of the American Folklore Society Prize, the same year she was elected a Fellow.

Thomas A. McKean

Join us for the inaugural
DAVID BUCHAN LECTURE
**Recycled Stories:
Health Legends, Epidemics
and the Politics of Risk**
Professor Diane E. Goldstein
Thursday, 19 November 2015, 6:30pm
King's College Conference Centre
followed by a reception
for booking please contact the Institute



From the Director

This year, we have been restructuring the Taught MLitt programme to build in more practical classes on fieldwork methodology. The students have been working on radio and video packages, an ethnographic field report, more interviewing and cataloguing practice, and a more structured approach to creating conference presentations. In April and May, the MLitt students themselves have been delivering some training to a group of Scots Language students at Banff Academy, hopefully the start of a multi-dimensional cultural partnership with the school.

Our PhD students continue to make a name for themselves. Carley Williams gave a keynote presentation on Intangible Cultural Heritage at 'Making it Ours: Intangible Cultural Heritage in Scotland', organized by TRACS in partnership with the Traditional Music Forum, which is run by MLitt student David Francis. Carley will be a delegate at the 'ICH NGO Forum' in Barcelona this June.

Nick Le Bigre has a book chapter on the way, a conference presentation at the Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore (SIEF) meeting in Zagreb, participation in the Folklore Fellows Summer School in Turku, Finland, spiritual home of Folklore studies, and is working on the publication of W. F. H. Nicolaisen's folklore papers with University Press of Mississippi.

Sheila Young will give presentations at international conferences in Nottingham and Copenhagen, Athanasios Barmapalexis will talk at Delphi, while Institute graduates Christine Kydd and Fiona-Jane Brown will be presenting at Folklore Society conferences this season.

In March, we made a fieldtrip to the Borders Ba Games, visiting Denholm Ba (see opposite), and seeing Jedburgh Abbey and the last great oak of Jed forest before visiting the School of Scottish Studies Archives in Edinburgh, where we were ably guided by Cathlin Macaulay. After an orientation on the history and evolution of the School, the students spent the afternoon researching their own subject areas and

experiencing the diversity and scale of their wonderful holdings.

Also in March, I gave two lectures on Scottish ballads in Traveller tradition at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan, and at the Ballad Society of Japan in Yokohama. My thanks to Prof. Keiko Wells of Ritsumeikan for making the visit happen, and to Ryo Yamasaki for his diligent translations of ballad Scots into Japanese.

In June, I'll be convening a panel on 'Knowing by Doing: Manual Work and Social Resilience' at SIEF, with papers on a diverse range of topics from boatbuilding to orchard husbandry, and presenters from Denmark to China and points between.

October sees the launch of the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention, hosted this year by Cape Breton University in Nova Scotia, in partnership with the Celtic Colours Festival; NAFCo returns to Aberdeen in 2017.

Alongside our Public Lecture and Ethnographic Film Series, we have run a couple of film-making workshops this term, one with folklorist Teri Brewer and a second with documentarian Oliver Wilkins (see Ethnographic Film Series, p. 3). These sessions have both fed into the short films – on Alternative Medicine and Tweed – that the MLitt students made as part of their training programme.

The Institute will have another strong showing at the university's May Festival where we'll feature singing with the Polish-Scottish group, the Toulmin Prize, step dancing with Pat Ballantyne, and a range of North-East craft traditions.

Finally, we are pulling together our twentieth anniversary celebrations, including a short residency for visiting scholar Dorothy Noyes from Ohio State University, in June, and culminating in the launch of the annual David Buchan Lecture with Professor Diane Goldstein on 19 November.

Thomas A. McKean



Totem Pole, Seaton, Aberdeen, carved by Kenny Grieve with local school children. Grieve will join Institute displays at the May Festival (see p. 1). Photo Brotus Rural Crafts, www.brotus.co.uk.

Button Boxes and Moothies Convention with Alistair Anderson

An evening of unique musical pleasure. This musician, full of vitality, charm and superb musicianship enthralled his audience with a programme of remarkable scope. His love of the instruments and their music was apparent in every note he played.' Hamilton Journal, NZ



Photo by Eamonn McCabe

On 6–8 November, we will once again be hosting the Button Boxes and Moothies convention of free-reed music. The three-day event will include academic talks, concerts, ceilidhs, sessions, workshops, and 'meet the artists' events. This is the fourth convention of its kind to be held in Aberdeen and we are busy working on an exciting programme of artists and events.

This year, we are delighted to welcome, for the first time, Northumbrian concertina virtuoso Alistair Anderson, described by Colin Irwin as one of the 'most majestic and inclusive instrumentalists'. We are pleased, too, to have the Ness Melodeon Band from the Isle of Lewis and Wendy Stewart from Edinburgh.

On Friday, 6 November, prior to the weekend of activities, we will be hosting a themed study day, sponsored by the British Forum for Ethnomusicology, under the banner of free-reed instrumental music and performance. More details will be available later in the spring.

Finally, we are pleased to acknowledge generous financial support from Enterprise Music Scotland and Vibrant Aberdeen in making the convention happen this year.

Frances Wilkins

'The pleasure comes chiefly from the excellence of the playing; that particular delight which comes from anything superbly done. The concertina emerges as a flexible and sensitive instrument; in the hands of a player of Anderson's quality it is amazing what it can achieve.' The Guardian

Ethnographic Film Series Hosts a Special Visitor

We have been delighted with the success of the Ethnographic Film Series, which has been running on a monthly basis since October. In addition to film showings, we welcomed Dr Teri Brewer to the Institute in February to give a day-long workshop on ethnographic film-making for the MLitt students. In March, we had a special showing of *Pressure Point* (2015), followed by a question and answer session with the director, Oliver Wilkins. The film takes the audience into the lives of individuals struggling against injustice, marginalisation, and inequality around the world, people being excluded from progress and development because of an identity prescribed them at birth, or geographical happenstance. *Pressure Point* was funded by the United Nations' MDG Achieve-



ment fund, an international fund whose aim is to accelerate progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Wilkins ran a workshop in advance of the screening, discussing the challenges of being a solo director producing films in remote communities.

On 5 May, we completed this year's series with a screening of *Two Years at Sea*, an artistic exploration of the world of Jake Williams, a man living in isolation in an Aberdeenshire forest. Using 16mm cameras, film-maker Ben Rivers follows Jake through the seasons of his world. We are delighted that Jake himself was able to be present at the screening, engaging in a lively discussion session afterwards. The next series begins on 6 October with *One Fine Day*, with film-maker Alan Marcus

Frances Wilkins

Denholm Ba Game Fieldtrip

In March, students and staff made the trip down to the Borders to see the Denholm Shrovetide Ba game. We waited beside the Green at the designated time on a very cold day, but there was no sign of any action. Finally, one or two men sauntered up, building to a group of half a dozen and before we realized it, with a call and the casting up of the first ba, the game began. Gradually, the numbers grew until there were more than forty people playing as darkness fell.

Denholm's game is played with a ba little larger than a tennis ball, and much smaller than those found at the Kirkwall Ba. A number of bas are sponsored by members of the community, usually for marriages, christenings, or significant birthdays. There are no uniforms; instead, the village is divided into 'uppies' and 'doonies' and all the men know to which side they belong. Dressed in robust boiler suits and the like, the players try to get the ball to *hails* at either end of the village.

At one point, the moving scrum found itself in the middle of the road where a stalemate continued until a large lorry approached. After about twenty minutes, the game was moved and restarted on the green. Catriona Moore and I had the opportunity to speak with one of the players and his wife and

they assured us that it was very unusual for play to be restarted or moved; the teams usually do not give the traffic any mind.

We also learned about a second option for scoring, called 'smuggling'. If a player is able to hide the ba from detection while piled in the scrum – perhaps concealing it in his boiler-suit or sleeve – he scores a point for his team without having to get it to the hail, which also allows the play to move on to the next ba. We also learned that the younger men tend to stay on the outside of the scrum, since they are the fastest runners.

The game undoubtedly has other rules, strategies, and customs, but they remain undetected by this outsider. For me, the most intriguing aspect of the game was the virtual silence that accompanied the scrum. There was no yelling or taunting, hardly any verbal communication at all. It was also interesting that the younger boys of the village were playing their own version of the game along the outskirts of the scrum, as practice or maybe as a distraction. Play went on well into the night before ba day was celebrated with the prize money won on each ba.

Casey Jacky



WHAT'S ON

Public Lectures, Ethnographic Film Series, and Other Events

Events start at 7:30, unless otherwise noted.

- 28 Apr 2015 • **TALK** (MR 051)
A Short History of the Blackening
 Sheila Young
 PhD Researcher
- 5 May 2015 • **FILM** (MR 051)
Two Years at Sea
 With special guest Jake Williams, star of the film
 Ben Rivers, dir.
- 26 May 2015 • **TALK** (MR 051)
**Banishing the Beastie: Pioneering Haggis
 for Modern Times** (with tasting)
 Jo Macsween
 Macsween of Edinburgh
- 29–31 May 2015
 May Festival, with Institute guests
- 31 May 2015
 Toulmin Prize Celebration at the May Festival
- 24–26 July 2015
 Cullerlie Traditional Singing Weekend
- 29 Sep 2015 • **TALK** (MR 051)
**Mythful Thinking and the Great Sea: Lake and
 Land Dragons**
 Adrian Shine
 Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition
- 6 Oct 2015 • **FILM** (MacRobert Lecture)
One Hot Day, with the film-maker
 Alan Marcus, dir.
- 27 Oct 2015 • **TALK** (MR 051)
**The Celtic Nations and the Open Air Museum
 Movement**
 Jacob O'Sullivan
 Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore
- 29 Oct 2015 (Linklater Room, Elphinstone Hall)
International Storytelling Festival Event
- 3 Nov 2015 • **FILM** (MacRobert Lecture)
Hanoi Eclipse: The Music of Dai Lam Linh,
 with film-maker Barley Norton
- 6 Nov 2015 (MR 028)
 British Forum for Ethnomusicology Study Day
- 6–8 Nov 2015 (venues around Aberdeen)
 Button Boxes & Moothies
 Free-Reed Convention
- 12–22 Nov 2015 (venues around Aberdeen)
 Elphinstone Institute events at the
 Being Human Festival
- 19 Nov 2015 • **TALK**
 King's College Conference Centre, 6:30pm
**Recycled Stories: Health Legends, Epidemics
 and the Politics of Risk**
 The David Buchan Lecture
 Diane Goldstein
 Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology
 and the Folklore Institute, Indiana University
- 24 Nov 2015 • **TALK** (MR 051)
**Timespan – Remote Possibilities in Scotland's
 North: A Cultural Organisation on the Edge**
 Anna Vermehren
 Timespan Museum, Helmsdale
- 1 Dec 2015 • **FILM** (MacRobert Lecture)
**The Fiddlers of James Bay (1980); Scots in the
 Sub-Arctic: Fiddling among the James Bay Cree
 (2015)**
 Bob Rodgers, dir.; Frances Wilkins, dir.



Prestigious Swedish

The Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy in Uppsala, Sweden, has awarded Professor W. F. H. Nicolaisen the Sahlgren Prize, its highest award, as an appreciation of his long and important contributions to a number of fields.

The Academy is made up of leading academics in the field of Swedish vernacular culture and has a wide scope which includes disciplines such as Folklore, Ethnology, Germanic languages, Onomastics, Runology, Scandinavian History and Archaeology.

In 1630, Gustav II Adolf issued a call for an inventory of all that Sweden could offer regarding knowledge of the past, ancient monuments and manuscripts, customs, legends and songs, words and names. It can be said that the Academy represents one of the first programmes of ethnological study in the world and thus links up with the Elphinstone Institute's work in many respects.

During his long career, Professor Nicolaisen has worked closely with Scandinavian onomasticians, helping progress the discipline greatly. In the prize nomination, the Academy notes 'his distinguished authorship within place-name studies and especially his research regarding place names of Scandinavian origin in Great Britain.

Stefan Brink

Academic Prize to Professor W. F. H. Nicolaisen

Who's Who at the Elphinstone

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*
- Alison Sharman**, Secretary

Honorary Research Fellows

- Dr David Atkinson**, *J. M. Carpenter Project*
- Dr Julia C. Bishop**, *J. M. Carpenter Project*
- Professor Bill Nicolaisen**, *Ethnology and Folklore, folk narrative and contemporary legend, name studies, Scottish place names*
- Dr Irene Watt**, *lullabies and project work*

Research Students

- Pat Ballantyne**, PhD student, *Scottish step-dance traditions*
- 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, *the relationships between contemporary and eighteenth-century fiddle traditions*
- Nicolas Le Bigre**, PhD Student, *Margaret Jones Studentship, narratives of immigrant experience, archives*
- Máire Ní Bhaoil**, PhD student, *traditional singing among children in Ireland*
- Sara Reith**, PhD student, *George Reid Studentship, cultural traditions of Scottish Travellers*
- Carley Williams**, PhD student, *the North-East's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in relation to UNESCO policies*
- Sheila Young**, PhD student, *women's pre-nuptial rituals in northern Scotland*

Research Associates

- Paul Anderson**, *North-East fiddle styles and repertoires*
- Sheena Blackhall**, *creative writing in Scots*
- Dr Elaine Bradtke**, *J. M. Carpenter Project*
- 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, J. M. Carpenter Project*
- Les Wheeler**, *Scots language, education*

Postscript

If you would like to volunteer, or have any information, comments or suggestions relevant to the work of the Institute, please 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, or join the Friends of the Elphinstone Institute, please contact the Secretary.