

# ELPHINSTONE INSTITUTE

*studying culture in context*

## W. F. H. Nicolaisen, 1927–2016

Just a few weeks ago, we lost Bill Nicolaisen, a fixture at the Institute since its inception, and before. He was a giant in the fields of Folklore and Onomastics, and former president of both the Folklore Society and the American Folklore Society, among many other offices held. Full appreciations of his scholarly legacy can be found on our website and we will be celebrating his work and lifetime interests with a symposium next year. But Bill was much more than a scholar and meant so much more to the Institute than his academic achievements.

Nicolas Le Bigre describes Bill's impact: "The first time I met him, on the day of my MLitt induction, a fellow student quickly introduced him by saying "This is Bill — he's interested in place names". Somehow, from that introduction, I got it in my head that Bill was also a student and we spoke in earnest about our interests. It wasn't until a few weeks later that I realised that he was Professor Emeritus, and that those "interests" of his had resulted in hundreds of articles in academic journals around the world. But Bill, who could have easily clarified his international renown, was like that. Of course, his mischievous side is the stuff of legend, and I can imagine that he jovially played along with this new student, happily pretending to be an amateur with interests that would develop over the course of the academic year.

In the years following, I spent a great deal of time by his side, taking copious notes and discussing his upcoming book of selected Folklore

essays. And though I miss his sense of humour and his subtle words of wisdom, not a day goes by as I work on the book that his writing doesn't make me smile and realise how lucky I was to have known him.'

Alison Sharman sums up Bill's daily impact. 'I miss his sense of fun and off-the-cuff quips. If you didn't get his humour, then you didn't

get Bill. From his tall stories, real stories, and bad jokes, he said himself that his sense of humour wasn't that bad for a German! Over the years, I built up a good friendship with him, with many discussions around the lunch table, sometimes on our own, mostly with others, some light-hearted and some vigorous, but always ending amicably, and usually with cake and biscuits. He was a great listener, too, and would pick you up on down days, and offer welcome advice reflecting from his own life experiences.

'A true gentlemen, Bill had that rare quality of being able to relate to anyone, and treat everyone the same; he made many friends and gained their respect easily.

'Over the years, he never complained at all about his health problems, but just got on with life, always jovial and treating everyone the same open way. He would say that Wednesday was the best day of the week,

"Not too far from last weekend, so as not to forget it, and not too far from next weekend, to start looking forward to it", with a twinkle in his eye.'

He will be truly missed here and our thoughts are with May and their family.

*Thomas A. McKean, Nicolas Le Bigre, and Alison Sharman*



## May Festival at the Institute

The Elphinstone Institute is excited to be part of the May Festival once again, 27–29 May, building on twenty years of promoting Community Partnerships and Public Engagement. In celebration, we to invite you to a special showcase event featuring Paul Anderson, Shona Donaldson, and international music, storytelling, and song, with guests from some of our project partnerships. The event will be followed by a reception and the launch of our twentieth-anniversary publication, an illustrated book featuring contributions from partners, staff, and students from the past twenty years.

This year, our line-up includes some returning favourites such as innovative artist Elaine Lindsay with her straw work, storyteller Tony Robertson, and the Institute's Polish-Scottish Song and Story Group. We'll also be hosting the annual celebration of North-East writer David Toulmin, where the prize-winning short story will be performed by Sheena Blackhall.

New for this year will be Banff Academy's student boatbuilders, who will join us on the Sunday for demonstrations and a display of their current project.

The Institute's presentations for the May Festival give us an opportunity to showcase some of the cultural traditions of North-East Scotland, as well as the privilege we enjoy as folklorists, ethnologists, and ethnomusicologists to listen to, learn from, and

share the broadest range of community voices. We are proud to play a part in connecting the university to its community and to be part of this festival of exploration, engagement, and education. We hope to see you there.

*Maia Daniel*



**DAVID BUCHAN LECTURE 2016**  
**Copyrighting Tradition in the Internet Age:**  
**Creativity, Authorship, and Folklore**

**Professor Valdimar Tr. Hafstein**  
**Thursday, 10 November 2016, 6:30pm**

**King's College Conference Centre**

*followed by a reception*

*for booking please contact the Institute*



## From the Director

This term we're looking forward to our spring Public Engagement programme, from our regular Public Lectures and Ethnographic Film Series, to our growing partnership with Banff Academy, a new initiative in partnership with Fraserburgh Lighthouse Museum, and May Festival events.

At Banff, our MLitt students will meet with pupils on the Scots Language and Scottish Studies programmes, introduce their work, and help the students plan their own fieldwork projects. Fraserburgh will give the students an in-depth insight into museum work, from collections management and cataloguing to Public Engagement. Both initiatives represent great opportunities for hands-on learning about Public Folklore. The May Festival features a dedicated event showcasing our community partnerships as well as a range of craft and oral traditions. MLitt student Maia Daniel has taken on coordination of our events (see p. 1), from press releases to artist liaison.

In March and May, we welcome visiting scholars Petr Janeček and Luisa del Giudice, each of whom will lead a seminar and work with our students. Input from such distinguished guests continues to enrich the Institute and it is thanks to generous benefactors like Margaret Jones that we are able to bring them here.

July sees the 2016 Folklore, Ethnology, and Ethnomusicology Conference Aberdeen (FEECA), co-hosted with the Folklore Society, bringing together graduate, postgraduate students, and early-career researchers in these fields to strengthen links between scholars and institutions in the UK and worldwide.

Since the hugely successful launch of the David Buchan Lecture last November, we've had a busy time. The Button Boxes and Moothies weekend went very well, as did a Funeralscapes fieldwork trip to Whithorn led by Frances Wilkins (see articles on pp. 3, 4). In January, we hosted the Annual Conference of the Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore Ritual Year Working Group; two days of conference were slotted in between the gales and floods of January with delegates from fifteen countries making the journey to Findhorn, where we met for conference sessions.

We're currently bringing papers together, on the theme of 'Regulating Tradition', for publication next year. Following the conference, we took delegates on an excursion to Elgin Cathedral, Glen Moray distillery, and Pluscarden Abbey, with the highlight event of the Burning of the Clavie at Burghhead, where we were warmly welcomed by Dan Ralph, the Clavie King. Returning to Findhorn, we stopped at the magnificent Sueno's Stone, floodlit within its glass monolith.

In February, we visited the Borders to introduce the students to another of Scotland's great traditions, the Borders Ba Games. Beginning with a stop at Melrose Abbey, we moved on to the village green in Denholm to watch the ba. The men played long into the night, while we froze our feet before repairing for dinner to the Cross Keys Inn. Next day, we visited Chainbridge Honey Farm, whose proprietor, Stephen Robson, knows more about honeybees than just about anyone. Next stop was a visit to a farmhouse baker, Matthew Rawlings, in Edal, Cornhill-on-Tweed, of the Great Northumberland Baking Co., where we learned the ins and outs not only of baking, but of making a living in a most difficult trade.

Next, we made our annual visit to the Archives of the School of Scottish Studies, where archivist Cathlin Macaulay told us about the history of the School and set us loose searching among the fascinating and practically endless archive materials.

Finally, for all of its twenty years, indeed as a campaigner even before its founding, Bill Nicolaisen has been part of the Elphinstone Institute. He had an unbridled intellectual curiosity that drove him to achieve not for status or reward, but simply because human creativity is so interesting and intriguing. Even on a mundane commute back to Bridge of Don, as I drove him home through Aberdonian traffic, he would talk about narrative, or ballads, or he would note how folklorists are 'inveterate pattern seekers' as we looked for a logical system underlying car number plates. He was, of course, an outstanding academic, and a wise counsellor, but most of all we will miss his unfailingly cheerful presence, his witty and observant worldview, and the relish with which he would ask whether it's lunchtime yet.

*Thomas A. McKean*

## Banff Academy Partnership

Last year, we launched a community partnership with Banff Academy to introduce pupils to Ethnology and Folklore. We gave a presentation on the work of the Institute to students on the Academy's Scots Language programme and the MLitt students ran workshops on interviewing, recording, ethics, and reflexivity, putting into practice their own learning. This year, we're expanding the partnership, adding Scottish Studies students and reaching out to their boatbuilding participants as well (see our May Festival offerings), and facilitating a locally-grounded ethnographic research project with Academy pupils.

'Banff Academy provided the perfect opportunity to put our Scots language studies into context', according to MLitt student Catriona Moore. 'When speaking with the pupils, not only did we learn from their use of Scots, but also about the school's approach to fostering regional language. I particularly appreciated hearing how a school integrates local culture into the curriculum. The headmaster, Andrew Ritchie, is inspiring in his commitment not only to academic learning, but to local culture, which in turn fosters a strong regional pride in the students.'

Jamie Fairbairn, director of the Academy's Scottish Studies and Scots Language streams, has been

delighted with pupils' growing understanding of the importance of Scots and described how our visit to the class — and the subjects we study — helped their confidence by 'normalising' both the use of Scots and an interest in regional culture.

They say that the best way to learn is to teach and our MLitts benefit from passing on some of their newly-acquired fieldwork skills. Last year, Casey Rennie enjoyed the practical experience: 'Speaking with the students highlighted the importance of how we phrase open-ended interview questions and the advantages of practising them beforehand! It allowed me to apply the skills we learned in the classroom. And though it was a bit nerve-wracking facing a class of students, they were just as nervous as we were.'

'The Partnership is a wonderful chance to engage with the community', writes Catriona, 'and we look forward to supporting them, 'facilitating their work and helping build their confidence in their own local culture.' Casey adds, 'It was an opportunity for us to see how Scottish culture is being explored and expressed in the present day, and it stimulated reflections on how Folklore studies can be conducted in a variety of different environments.'

*Thomas A. McKean, with Catriona Moore and Casey Rennie*

# Cullerlie Sings!

BCScotland's Young Traditional Musician 2014, Robyn Stapleton, will be one of the guests at the 2016 Traditional Singing Weekend at Cullerlie, which takes place on 22–24 July, held in memory of Tom and Anne Reid. Robyn has quickly become one of the country's most sought-after folk singers; her performance highlights include singing with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra at the Proms in the Park and on Radio 4's 'Desert Island Discs'.

Irish singing is also well represented, particularly the traditions of Ulster. Jane Cassidy has toured extensively in Europe and released two albums with Claddagh Records, and an album with husband Maurice Leyden telling the story of Mary Ann McCracken, 1770–1866. Leyden is a singer, collector, and broadcaster living in Belfast who has published two collections of traditional songs, *Belfast, City of Song* and *Boys and Girls Come Out to Play*, and his latest, a social history of the Ulster linen industry through folk song, is nearing completion.

Our two English singers are both legends. Johnny Handle from Tyneside is steeped in the local traditions and as singer, songwriter, composer, musician, and entertainer he has been a leading performer in the British folk scene for over fifty years. Jim Radford has been

singing for longer than most of us have been alive – first at sea, from 1944–1954, and then for forty and more years as an anti-nuclear campaigner and community organiser. Jim came to national prominence when he sang his autobiographical song, 'The Shores of Normandy', at the Royal Albert Hall in 2014.

Scottish singing is also strongly featured through Shona Donaldson from Huntly, the reigning Champion of Champions Bothy Ballad Singer, Aberdonian Janice Clark, Ewan McVicar (originally Inverness, now Linlithgow), Chris Hendry (originally Fife, now Newcastle), and John Dickson (originally Midlothian, now Tarves).

There will be opportunities to take part in workshops on traditional crafts, including sporran making, basket making, whittling, and farmhouse cooking, along with two other workshops relating to singing traditions from industrial contexts – 'Songs from the Ulster Linen Industry' with Maurice Leyden, and 'Coal Mining Songs from Tyneside and Scotland' with Johnny Handle and Ewan McVicar. There will also be a talk on 'The Unknown Story of the Rescue Tugs in World War II' by Jim Radford, illustrated with songs.

*Ian Russell*



## Visiting Scholars from Prague and Los Angeles

In March and May, we welcome two visiting scholars to the Institute for seminars and student consultations.

Petr Janeček, Assistant Professor at the Institute of Ethnology at Charles University in Prague, arrives in March to talk about contemporary legends, including their transmission across languages and borders, based on his forthcoming book on the 'spring-heeled Jack' legend which has made its way from the UK to the Czech Republic. He'll also introduce our students to the history of Folklore and Ethnology in his homeland.

Luisa del Giudice, joining us in May, is a fellow of the American Folklore Society, and is internationally known for her work on Italian, Italian-American, and Italian-Canadian Folklife, Ethnology, and Oral History. While in Aberdeen, she'll offer a public seminar – promoted jointly with History of Art – on the multiple resonances of the Watts Towers, a U.S. National Historic Landmark built by a visionary Italian immigrant labourer over a span of three decades (1921–1954). The talk will explore the importance of the buildings within local cartographies and global migrations, contested social and urban spaces, and the relationship between art and economic development.

*Thomas A. McKean*



## Funeralscapes at Whithorn



In late October 2015, the Funeralscapes project reached a new phase by staging a second re-enactment at the early medieval priory site of Whithorn Priory in Galloway, the site of

the earliest documented church in Scotland. Now based at the Elphinstone Institute, the aim of Funeralscapes is to investigate how early medieval funeral music and movement (such as processions) worked in their immediate environments, and what emotional responses people may have had to the landscape and music.

The fieldwork at Whithorn, conducted by PhD and MLitt students from the Institute and led by Frances Wilkins, was done in collaboration with the Whithorn Trust (Julia Muir-Watt) and Whithorn Primary School (Evelyn Hood). The re-enactors consisted of a choir of 50 schoolchildren from Whithorn Primary School who dressed in medieval costume and sang 'Altus Prosator', a piece of Latin plainchant, whilst processing through the priory re-enacting a funerary procession to the accompaniment of bell ringing. The event was recorded by the Funeralscapes team and data is currently being uploaded to an online repository.

*Frances Wilkins*

*Sabato Rodia's Towers (Los Angeles):  
Art, Migrations, and the Watts Towers  
Common Ground Initiative*

**Dr Luisa del Giudice**  
**Thursday, 5 May 2016, 6:00pm**  
**King's College Chapel**



# What's On – Public Lectures, Ethnographic Film Series, and Other Events

Events start at 7:30, unless otherwise noted.

- 29 March 2016 • **TALK** (MacRobert 051)  
*Art in the Aberdeenshire Environment Database*  
David Watson Hood
- 26 April 2016 • **TALK** (MacRobert 051)  
*Shetland Boats, Fishing, and the Sea*  
Marc Chivers
- 3 May 2016 • **FILM** (MacRobert 051)  
*Hanoi Eclipse (2010)*  
with film-maker Barley Norton
- 5 May 2016 • **TALK** (6:00pm, King's College Chapel)  
*Sabato Rodià's Towers (Los Angeles): Art, Migration, and the Watts Towers Common Ground Initiative*  
Luisa del Giudice
- 27–29 May 2016  
May Festival, with Institute guests and Toulmin Prize Celebration
- 31 May 2016 • **TALK** (MacRobert 051)  
*Digging for Wishes: The Ardmaddy Wishing-Tree Project*  
Ceri Houlbrook
- 1–3 July 2016  
Folklore, Ethnology, and Ethnomusicology Conference Aberdeen (FEECA)
- 22–24 July 2016  
Cullerlie Traditional Singing Weekend
- 27 September 2016 • **TALK** (MacRobert 051)  
*Bairns, Scweel, and Local Learning: Scots Language and Scottish Studies at Banff Academy*  
Jamie Fairbairn
- 4 October 2016 • **FILM** (MacRobert 051)  
*St Kilda: The Edge of the World, and Return to the Edge of the World*
- 25 October 2016 • **TALK** (MacRobert 051)  
*Witch Belief in Scottish Coastal Communities*  
Lizanne Henderson
- 1 November 2016 • **FILM** (MacRobert 051)  
*Brink of Survival*
- 10 November 2016 • **TALK**  
*The David Buchan Lecture*  
King's College Conference Centre, 6:30pm  
*Copyrighting Tradition in the Internet Age: Creativity, Authorship and Folklore sector*  
Valdimar Tr. Hafstein  
University of Iceland, President of the Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore
- 22 November 2016 • **FILM** (MacRobert 051)  
*Collective Compositions*  
with Simon Gall
- 29 November 2016 • **TALK** (MacRobert 051)  
*#10AberdeenStories: The Role of Narratives in Third-Sector Knowledge Sharing*  
Simon Burnett
- 31 January 2017 • **TALK** (MacRobert 051)  
*Tide TBC*  
Robert Lovie
- 7 February 2017 • **FILM** (MacRobert 051)  
*Indian Ocean Memories: African Migrants*  
with film-maker Dr Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya
- 28 February 2017 • **TALK** (MacRobert 051)  
*Tradition and Innovation at Cambus o' May Cheesemaker*  
James Reid
- 7 March 2017 • **FILM** (MacRobert 051)  
*A Kabul Music Diary*  
with film-maker John Bailly
- 28 March 2017 • **TALK** (MacRobert 051)  
*From Production to Marketing: Community and Culture in the Post-War Whisky Industry*  
Richard Bennett

## Polish-Scottish Song and Story Group

For the workshop, performance, and practice schedule see:

[www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/public-engagement/polish-scottish-schedule](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/public-engagement/polish-scottish-schedule)



Tuesday 3 May 2016  
7:30pm, MacRobert Building 051  
Discussion afterwards with film-maker Barley Norton

## 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*
- Alison Sharman**, Administrator

### Patron

**Very Rev. Iain Torrance**, Pro-Chancellor

### Honorary Research Fellows

- Dr David Atkinson**, J. M. Carpenter Project  
**Dr Julia C. Bishop**, J. M. Carpenter Project  
**Dr Irene Watt**, lullabies and project work

### Research Students

- Pat Ballantyne**, PhD student, *Scottish step-dance traditions*
- Athanasios (Sakis) Barmapalexis**, PhD student, *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, *the relationships between contemporary and eighteenth-century fiddle traditions*

- Bee Kerr**, PhD student, *women's domestic work in the twentieth century*
- Nicolas Le Bigre**, PhD student, *Margaret Jones Studentship, narratives of immigrant experience, archives*
- Hazel Macfarlane**, PhD student, *retirement and volunteering in museum contexts*
- Máire Ní Bhaoill**, PhD student, *traditional singing among children in Ireland*
- Roderick Nicol**, PhD student, *legends and mythology of Piper Alpha*
- Lorna Summers**, PhD student, *boatbuilding on the Moray coast*
- Carley Williams**, PhD student, *safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Scotland*
- 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*

## 'A Fieldworker's Vision: Researching the Present'

The Elphinstone Institute and the Folklore Society co-host the 2016 Folklore, Ethnology, and Ethnomusicology Conference Aberdeen (FEECA), 1–3 July 2016. FEECA brings together graduate, postgraduate students, and early-career researchers to strengthen relations between scholars and institutions in the UK and around the world. The theme draws on W. F. H. Nicolaisen's, 'A Gleaner's Vision', an article in which he takes issue with the limited scope and approach of early scholars of Folklore, and argues for a broader purview, encouraging folklorists to seek out what surrounds them.

Further details can be found on the conference website:

<http://abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/research-projects/feeca2016>

## Button Boxes and Moothies

On 6–8 November 2015, we held the fourth Button Boxes and Moothies festival, attracting musicians and enthusiasts from the UK, Ireland, France, and the United States. A unique event for musicians who play mouth organs, concertinas, melodeons, Jew's harps, and diatonic button accordions, it provides a platform for performing and appreciating the unique styles of individual players. Highlights included an impromptu trio of musicians who accompanied Jerry O'Reilly's Irish set dancing group. Concerts gave a rare opportunity to hear the moothie-playing guests together—with Noel Battle's emblematic Irish tunes, and beautiful slow airs from Murray Douglas. Plans are already afoot for the next festival in late 2019.

*Frances Wilkins*



*Róisín Broderick and Noel Battle*

### Postscript

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, volunteer, or have suggestions, please contact the Administrator.