



The British Forum for Ethnomusicology

It was with great pleasure that we hosted, for the second time, the British Forum for Ethnomusicology annual conference from 11–14 April, at which over 100 delegates from across the globe gathered together.

The theme of the conference was ‘Collaborative Ethnomusicology’, and this proved to be a great starting point for many interesting and varied conversations between ethnomusicologists working across a number of different regions and traditions. Professor Mellonee Burnim (Indiana University) gave a moving and timely keynote lecture with the title ‘Hidden Musical Transcripts in National Rituals of Mourning and Marriage: A British Royal Wedding, an (African) American Funeral.’

This was followed by the Society for Ethnomusicology-sponsored Ice Cream Social, provided by Portsoy Ice Cream, which was a great success, especially the Irn Bru flavour!

Other events were the Taylor & Francis wine reception, during which there was a concert programme from members of the Conference Team including MLitt students Wenqiu Chen and Mara Shea alongside Pat Ballantyne and Iain Richardson, Chris Wright, and Shannon Le Ying Stevenson.



Professor Mellonee Burnim

The conference gave another opportunity to see the exhibition, *Nimitaau | Let's Dance: Fiddle-Dancing through Scots and Eeyou Cultures*, which was on display on the ground floor of the MacRobert Building. In connection with this exhibition, we were pleased to welcome Thelma Cheechoo and her son Michael Etherington, both from Moose Factory, Canada, to give a presentation during the conference. Thelma also performed at the Friday night concert in the Blue Lamp, which showcased a variety of excellent performers in the North-East Scottish tradition.

In many ways the highlight of the conference was the coach trip and dinner/ceilidh on the Saturday afternoon and evening, which gave a valuable opportunity for delegates to get to know one another more whilst enjoying the Aberdeenshire countryside and hospitality.

Many thanks to all who were involved in a superb conference, especially the Conference Team who worked tirelessly with myself and Ian Russell to ensure that the event ran

seamlessly: Alison Sharman, Norma Russell, Mara Barnum, Eleanor Telfer, Rebecca Palomino, Wenqiu Chen, Jim Brown, Shannon Le Ying Stevenson, Eilidh Whiteford, Chris Wright, Pat Ballantyne, and Iain Richardson.

Frances Wilkins

Institute Secures European LEADER Funding

Home - Hame - Dom - Дом is the first of our European-funded projects, and the Institute, with two partners, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and Modo, will deliver a project in five of Aberdeenshire's northern towns: Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Turriff, Banff, and Macduff, focusing on creativity and cultural exchange between residents of different backgrounds. Co-ordinated by PhD student Claire Needler the project will run for eighteen months from April 2019, and will create regular social and creative learning opportunities such as language cafés, music groups and circus groups, as well as staging a series of large-scale performances and community training events where participants will meet to share their work with each other and local communities. The project aims to use creative activity to foster better cultural understanding between the diverse groups in each area and to contribute to the strengthening of community cohesion through breaking down barriers to participation in civic and social life. The project, which was commissioned by the North Aberdeenshire Local Action Group (NALAG) and is funded by the European Union via the Scottish Government, builds on previous research by the University of Glasgow and Swansea University on Social Support and Migration in Scotland (SSAMIS).

The second project, also funded by the NALAG LEADER group with funds from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, involves working with community groups and schools to collect and compile stories, songs, customs, and other intangible cultural heritage of the North-East. In the final phase of the project, our project partner, Visit Scotland, will bring together organisations in the tourism sector to explore the collated material and commission the creation of copyright-free marketing assets for use by organisations in the region to promote tourism in Aberdeenshire in the year of Scotland's Coasts and Waters (2020) and again in the Year of Scotland's Stories (2022). This project will run from July to March 2020.

Simon Gall



From the Director

This past season has seen a lot of exciting new developments along with keeping up with other projects. Our May Festival contributions were wide ranging, with North-East Scots/Doric programming including a drop-in session, films, and the popular Toulmin Prize event, hosted this year by our own Alison Sharman. Tobar an Keir, Scottish Travellers at Home and on the Road, provided a focus for our long-standing and developing partnership with the Scottish Traveller community. An important element was an exploration, led by David Donaldson, of the transmission of trauma through generations, highlighting issues such as the removal of children from their homes and ghetto-ized schooling for Travellers. On a positive note, we'll be co-producing a series of workshops on cultural confidence run by and for Travellers.

Claire Needler has been appointed as Project Co-ordinator on a European LEADER-funded project *Home, Hame, Dom, Дом* to explore cross-community interactions, aiming to use creative learning to increase understanding and communication, building confidence and parity of esteem across northern Aberdeenshire.

The North-East Scots Language Board has been campaigning behind the scenes for greater recognition for the language. I took part in a Scottish Government Census meeting where we discussed the questions relating to Scots in the upcoming Census. 2011 showed us that our North-East is a heartland of Scots, with around 50 percent of the population speaking it. Our goals include a broadcast fund for Scots and a Scots Language Act, which would support promotion of the language across the country.

The NESLB is also working on getting more Scots into young people's lives, from pre-school to university education and beyond. We're working with the Shire Council to pilot language programmes in key primary schools which feed into secondaries already offering the SQA Scots Language Awards, aiming to normalise the use of Scots not just as a language, but also as a medium for teaching other subjects. Studies in a number of countries have shown that educating children in the language of the home can increase attainment in other

areas. We're working on new materials for schools, including a detailed teaching pack written by Sandra Nicol to accompany Sheena Blackhall's *Doric Gruffalo*, and a planned anthology of North-East Scots short stories for young adult readers.

NESLB continues to work on increasing the presence of North-East Scots in the media, and we've partnered with Scots Radio to launch the Doric Film Festival. Frieda Morrison, head of Scots Radio, is driving the Festival forward with support from NESLB members. It is shaping up to be a great event and the beginning of a significant contribution to North-East culture.

In February, we had a successful MLitt field trip to the Borders for the annual Shrovetide ba games, taking in a range of interesting cultural sites along the way. We had pleasure in hosting Marion Bowman, an expert on pilgrimage who was our external examiner for many years, along with her husband Leslie.

In March, we co-produced a Doric Messiah with St Margaret's, Braemar, with the inimitable contributions of Paul Mealor and Gordon Hay. A BBC team from Northern Ireland recorded the event for a two-episode programme on an Ulster Scots Messiah, planned for December this year.

We had a successful Institute deputation to the Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore Congress in Santiago de Compostela, in April. Claire Needler, Lauren Hossack, Mary Cane, Carley Williams, Nick Le Bigre, and I attended. Nick and I gave papers, while Claire and Lauren presented posters on their work – Scots language use among young people, and walking tours of Aberdeen, respectively. It was good to see a number of our SIEF Portsoy Summer School alumnae there, too. They contributed to a pair of posters on the Summer School and joined us on the 90km walk to Fisterra, the end of the world, after the conference.

Congratulations to our PhD graduate, Erika Sidorenko, and our MLitt graduates David Francis, Lauren Hossack, Eilidh Whiteford, Emma Barclay, Wirujana Prasansaph, and Anna Joy Thigpen Hunt. Well done to all!

And finally, congratulations to Frances Wilkins on the birth of a son, Magnus; we wish the whole family well and look forward to Frances's return at the end of the summer.

Thomas A. McKean

Letter from Russia

Since completing my MLitt degree, I have been working in the St Petersburg State Library for the Blind. It's a nonprofit organisation, so we are quite dependent on government funding. It's a good job, and I like the staff, who allow me to give presentations on folklore from time to time. I passed my exams in August and have just started a course at St Petersburg University, more specifically Literary Studies Division, Folklore Programme. For now, the PhD thesis is titled 'The Day of Family, Love, and Devotion: The Invention of Tradition'. It is a festival that was invented in Murom City and based on the sixteenth-century legend about two saints Piotr and Fevronia. They were married and died together and so on. So, it would be interesting to look at the meanings that people, not the government, produce when celebrating it (if they do). There is certainly a cult of saints but it would be interesting to see how it correlates with this government invention.



Vera Nikitina, MLitt Graduate of 2017

New Life at the Elphinstone Institute

At the age of 72, then retired for four years, having spent some forty years in the agricultural grain and seed merchanting trade, I decided to return to University to study for an MLitt. My involvement with Highland Games and the Grassic Gibbon Centre had impressed in me the importance of people, tradition, and community life. Two friends who had completed the MLitt course persuaded me to apply for entry.

With some trepidation I called at the Institute and met Alison Sharman, a wonderfully encouraging first contact. However, I really left thinking it was a step too far, but Nicolas Le Bigre, teaching fellow, and Dr Tom McKean, the Director, contacted me and invited me for a chat. They gave their assurances that my life's experiences and interests were sufficient qualifications. With few IT skills, an online application was difficult but again Alison got me through it.

I was accepted and joined three other students, Eilidh, Emma, and Lauren from the North-East, all much younger and all with academic qualifications. Their friendship and support throughout my first year were key to my survival. I came with the preconceived idea that Scottish history was all about battles for crowns, political dominance, religion, and land. I slowly realised that when all these events were happening, the ordinary people of Scotland, and indeed the world, had to go about their business of surviving, living, eating, laughing, sheltering, praying, dancing, singing, saying, and even dying. Ordinary people's lives are extraordinary and that is what the course is about.

My early essays might have suited the Scots Magazine but not an Ethnology course. But I slowly began to understand what was required and my marks improved. Our week-long field schools to the Outer Hebrides and the Borders were really memorable experiences turning course subjects into reality. The course is well planned to give students confidence in interviewing, filmmaking, presentations, and research.

In the second year, I was joined by five new bright and lively students: Mara and Rebecca from the States, Wenqiu from China, Eleanor from England, and Mary from the North-East. As someone who was told by my music teacher that music had passed me by, I have always found accomplished musicians fairly intimidating and inaccessible, but the course has given me confidence to approach performers and ask questions. The Institute and its staff give us that confidence and I would say to all potential students: 'Don't hang about the door. Come on in!'

James Brown



Remembering Stanley Roberston

2019 marks the tenth anniversary of the death of one of Scotland's most important cultural figures, Aberdonian and Heritage Lottery Key Worker for the Institute, Stanley Robertson. Storyteller, ballad singer, piper, and author, Stanley was one of the most influential Scottish Traveller voices, and he brought the oral tradition of his ancient culture to audiences around the world. The Institute will mark this occasion by producing a programme of events and archival research from July this year until early 2020, celebrating his life and legacy. To that end, we secured funds from the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Being Human Festival to hold an event at the Lemon Tree in Aberdeen to explore Stanley's work. A cast of storytellers, singers, and academics will remember him and celebrate his contribution to local, national, and international folk culture. We were also funded by Aberdeen City Council, through their Creative Funding programme, to employ recent graduate Lauren Hossack as an Archives Assistant to catalogue and digitise all Stanley-related material in our archives and to develop, with partners, educational materials focusing on his legacy and Traveller culture more generally. For more information on our Stanley programme, please visit our website or social media pages.



Simon Gall



Celebratin Sheena Blackhall

On 23 Mairch 2019, a hunner an fifty fowk pakkit intae The Barn in Banchory tae catch the premiere o oor new show *Celebratin Sheena*, pit thegither tae celebrate the wirk o een o Scotland's maist important an prolific scribes, Sheena Blackhall. Naebdy really kint fit tae expect but aabdy kint that it'd be good gin Sheena wis the nucleus. Fowk were teen throu poems, stories an folk sangs, tae readins, monologues, an a when o some o the rochest sangs o the North-East bawdy tradition. But thon wis only the first airin o it; we're takkin the show tae ither airts so that aabdy maun enjoy the wirk o wir ain Sheena Blackhall. Mony thanks tae Aiberdeenshire Council an The Barn fer supportin the project an special thanks tae performers Kim Templeton, Sheena Blackhall, Rory Comerford, Simon Gall, and Adam Coutts fer makkin the show the success it wis. Visit oor Facebook page tae see video clips o the show.

Simon Gall

May Festival and Other Events

The Institute held twenty-five events at the University of Aberdeen May Festival, from 24–26 May. Here are a few images from some of our events. Clockwise l to r: *The Toulmin Prize Winner Lyly Lepinay and her family*; *Writing Scotland from the Inside: North East Voices*; *Traveller storytelling; Baron o Braikley*; and *Rap in Aberdeen*.



Who's Who at the Institute

Patron

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

Staff

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

Dr Frances Wilkins, Lecturer,
Ethnomusicology, 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, *Ethnology and Folklore, and archives*

Carley Williams, NAFCo Festival Director

Simon Gall, Public Engagement Officer

Claire Needler, Project Co-ordinator

Alison Sharman, Administrator

Honorary Research Fellows

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

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

Research Students

Athanasios (Sakis) Barmplexis, 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*

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*

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.

The 20th Annual Grassic Gibbon Dinner at the Centre at Arbuthnott was held on Saturday, 30 March. Dr McKean (*back 2nd left, with MLitt students*) gave a talk on the work of James Madison Carpenter.



Polish-Scottish Song Group at Portsoy Boat Festival, 22 June 2019



Polish-Scottish Song Group

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

What's On

Look out for our leaflet in September featuring more than twenty events hosted by the Institute.

Keep up-to-date with all of the exciting things that we are up to at the Elphinstone Institute: search for us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.