

British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship

I was delighted to be awarded a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship, which will enable me to take twelve months' research leave from January–December 2022 to focus on my work exploring the sacred singing traditions of the West Highlands and Western Isles, and the role of the singing within the communities. I gave two seminars earlier in the year for the Department of Music at the University of Aberdeen and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig which explored the role of sacred singing as a reflection of cultural and occupational landscape, and will be presenting my work in various ways throughout the project.



Joey MacLeod, *Psalm Boat Singers, Isle of Lewis, February 2020*

During the fellowship I will be continuing fieldwork in Skye and the Western Isles and working towards the publication of the material in both book form and as a public website and exhibition. A short article based on some of these thoughts and ideas, titled 'Gaelic's haunting psalmody was a soundscape to a way of life', was written for *Tobar an Dualchais*, and published last year in the *West Highland Free Press*. If you know of any historical societies or groups that might be interested in a talk on the subject, please do get in touch.



Frances Wilkins

Toulmin Prize Publication

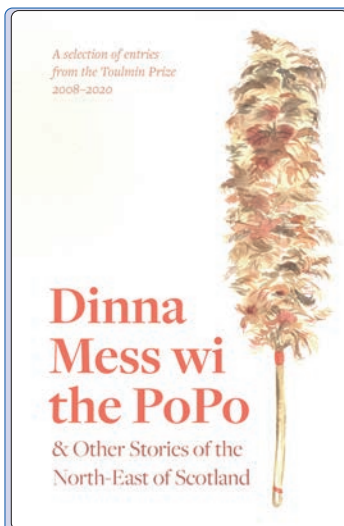
The Toulmin Prize, established in 2008 and awarded annually, is a short story prize commemorating the work of one of North-East Scotland's finest exponents of written Doric, David Toulmin (John Reid).

The Reid family, in conjunction with the Elphinstone Institute, launched the Toulmin Prize to honour the achievement of David Toulmin and to encourage the writing of fiction with a North-East focus. The book is dedicated to the late Professor Emeritus Paul Dukes who sadly passed away before the publication was printed. Dukes was instrumental in getting the prize started in 2008, along with Professor Emeritus Ian Russell.

The Elphinstone Institute has brought together all the winning stories since inception together with selected others in the anthology *Dinna Mess wi the Popo & other Stories of the North-East of Scotland*, with support from The Doric Board. The publication is a celebration of twenty-five years of the Elphinstone Institute.

Order your copy via the University online store at www.store.abdn.ac.uk

Alison Sharman



Stanley Robertson Resource Pack

We are delighted to announce that the Stanley Robertson Resource Pack has been uploaded and is now available for use by primary schools. This project began in 2019 when the Institute received funding from Aberdeen City Council to create free teaching resources that focused on Stanley's life and art.

The 'Stanley Robertson: Education from the Heart of Scottish Traveller Culture' resources were designed and developed by retired teacher and storyteller Jackie Ross and Scottish Traveller activist Davie Donaldson with support from Stanley's son Tony Robertson, storyteller Grace Banks, and PhD student Lauren Hossack.

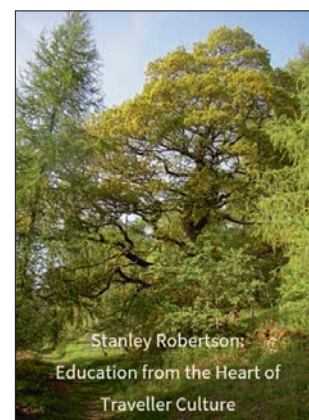
The pack was intended to be published as a hard copy. However, given the experience of online teaching during the COVID pandemic it was decided to transfer the resource online. This will make it more accessible to teachers and also easier to update and extend should the need arise.

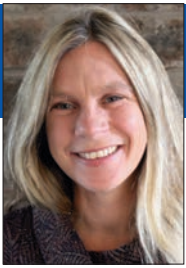
The design of the pack allows for flexibility and ease

of use, spanning Early, First and Second Level Curriculum for Excellence education. Through engagement with Scottish Traveller culture and history, children's folklore (song, games, dance, rhymes etc.), religion, young people's rights, and traditional songs and stories, these resources will help teachers and educators satisfy Curriculum for Excellence Outcomes and Experiences pertaining to Expressive Arts, Literacy, Social Subjects, Religious and Moral Education, and Health and Wellbeing. You can access a copy of the resource on the Elphinstone Institute website :

<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/resources/stanley-robertson-teaching-resources-491.php>

Jackie Ross





From the Acting Director

After an uncertain eighteen months, it has been a truly welcome relief to be back on the University campus, meeting with students and teaching in-person classes again. We have all missed the energy and enthusiasm which can only really be experienced when we are all together in the same place. I would like to extend a warm welcome to our new MLitt co-hort, Sydney Hubbel, Janice Reavell, Kate Cowe, Kayleigh Mair, Megan Vanderhoef, and Michelle Soto and our new PhD students starting this semester, Mollie Carlyle, Tolheishel Khaling, and Robert Milne.

Most of our events continue to be held online, and we are all learning to adjust to new ways of working in a virtual environment. While it hasn't been quite the same as meeting in person, there have been some very positive outcomes of presenting our events to an online audience – audience numbers have increased significantly now that our events are more accessible, and I was delighted with the turn-out to the Ethnographic Film Series events which began again earlier in the year, with over eighty people attending each of the first two events, *Fraserburgh on Film* with Andrew Davidson and *Solas* with Fiona J. Mackenzie. Simon Gall has also been working on a number of excellent online projects, including the Elphinstone Sessions and the Culture in Everyday Life podcasts. Please look out for news of these on our social media platforms as they develop.

Tom McKean is currently on study leave until January 2022, working on a number of writing projects, and has been prolific in his publications of some timely articles and book chapters including his chapter, 'Advocating for a Region' in the new IUP book, *What Folklorists Do*, and his article on dementia, language loss, and silence in the journal *Cultural Analysis*. Tom has not been alone in publishing some significant pieces

in the last few months. Fiona-Jane Brown, one of our former PhD students, recently had her article, 'The Fishermen's Luck: The Maritime Clavie and Its Variants', published in the prestigious journal *Folklore*, and PhD student and MLitt tutor, Claire Needler, with Jamie Fairbairn, had their book chapter, 'How Do You Feel about the Language That You Use?' based on her PhD work at Banff Academy published. However, perhaps the most exciting publication we can report is the wonderfully named *Dinna Mess wi the PoPo*, the collection of Toulmin prize-winning stories from North-East Scotland, edited by Richard Bennett, with David Northcroft and Alison Sharman.

In January 2022, on Tom's return, I will be embarking on a twelve-month research fellowship, funded by the British Academy, to continue to work on my project *Seinn Coisrigte anns a' Ghàidhealtachd an Iar agus 'sna h-Eileanan Siar – Sacred Singing in the West Highlands and Western Isles*, which was initially funded by a Carnegie Trust Research Incentive Grant.

Our continued involvement with SIEF was significant this summer and I'd like to extend congratulations to all of our students and staff who attended and presented at the conference, held online 'in Helsinki'. Our biggest congratulations must be reserved for our director, Tom McKean, who is now Vice-President of SIEF, also to Carley Williams, who is now co-chair and secretary of the SIEF Working Group on Cultural Heritage, and Nicolas Le Bigre, who is now on the board of the SIEF Working Group on Archives.

We were saddened by the loss of four long-standing associates and friends of the Institute – Colin Milton, who was our associate director for many years, Paul Dukes, Les Donaldson, and Leonard Primiano. All have contributed greatly to the work of the Elphinstone Institute over the years.

Frances Wilkins



MLitt Graduate, Anne Greig
November 2019

Postcard from Inverurie

I graduated with a MLitt in November 2019. I had been a psychiatric nurse for over thirty years and began the course following my retiral. My main interest was in the songs of North-East Scotland and my dissertation was on the ballad 'Mill of Tifty's Annie' and how it is used and sung today. I enjoyed almost all aspects of the course and highlights for me include a fieldtrip to the small community at Scoraig and attending the Ancrum Ba Game while staying at Sir Walter Scott's Abbotsford.

I was glad to graduate not that long before Lockdown began. After a quiet nine months at home, I joined the large workforce of vaccinators and support staff administering injections to the population of Scotland. I was based at a large warehouse used as a vaccination centre in Inverurie. Initially it was challenging for people to attend as we had many days of heavy snow and many were travelling from Alford and other rural areas. However the programme has worked well and it

has been good to be part of something that has allowed us to see our families and friends again and helped to restore some of the cultural activities that we have missed so much. I was able to attend the Cullerlie Traditional Singing 'Super Saturday' in July and look forward to taking part in the Greig Duncan Singing Competition at the Portsoy Haal. I am sure that the new group of students who have started this Autumn will have a very rewarding experience at the Elphinstone.

Anne Greig

Elphinstone Tribute

Dr Colin Milton, 21 August 1943–5 May 2021

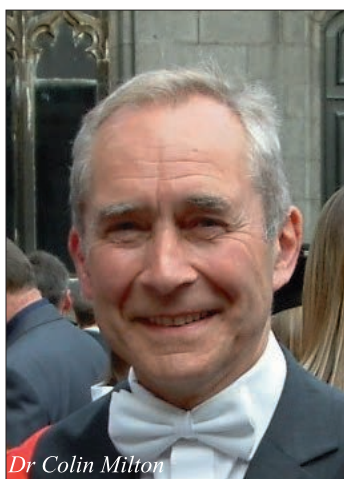
We are sad to report that Colin Milton, the Associate Director of the Elphinstone Institute and former Senior Lecturer in the English Department, has died. An Aberdonian, a pupil of Robert Gordon's College, and an alumnus with a first-class degree, Colin was a gifted teacher, a governor at St Margaret's School, and an elder at Rubislaw Church. Among his research specialisms were D. H. Lawrence and Friedrich Nietzsche (his monograph published by AUP in 1987). He edited the seminal study of James Joyce published by Routledge in 2012. He studied Scots war poets from the First World War and was an expert on several Scottish writers, notably Charles Murray. He took a keen interest in the use of Scots in education, supporting the appointment and residency of Sheena Blackhall as Writer in Residence at the Institute. He had a strong sense of humour and put together the dual language text of Pauline Mackay's classic *Macnessie an the Tartan Sprackles*, a children's book.

Professor David Hewitt reflects: Colin's was an Aberdeen career. His schooling was in Aberdeen; he took a first in English from Aberdeen in 1965; he was awarded his PhD by Aberdeen. He was appointed a lecturer in English in Aberdeen and spent his whole working life in the service of the University of Aberdeen. He did this right through an era when University bosses opposed 'parochialism', and proclaimed they were looking for the 'world's best minds'. As we now recognise the 'world's best minds' often had no interest in our University and knew nothing about the city and its hinterland. But Colin belonged here; he had loyalty, and he developed a deep knowledge of the North-East.

His PhD on Lawrence was effectively a study in Modernism, the literary and artistic movement that most loudly proclaimed internationalism. It was probably the way in which the University began to construct its research profile that made him move away from Modernism, and towards the literature of North-East Scotland. He became secretary of the Charles Murray Memorial Fund, and edited the only complete edition of Murray's poems. He edited *Aberdeen University Review* for many years, and he saw it as a vehicle for exploring the life of a university rooted in a locality.

Almost paradoxically Colin was committed to school liaison not as a recruitment process but as a means of persuading young people of the value of higher education. He was always deeply engaged with those whom he taught, and wanted them to broaden horizons. He was a wonderful lecturer. He treated students well, seeing them as serious people with something to say.

Colin may have been an Aberdonian through and through, but he was also extraordinarily curious about



Dr Colin Milton

the world. He assiduously read heavyweight newspapers such as *The Financial Times*, and many political weeklies, not forgetting *Private Eye*. He was by far the best informed member of the English Department. He proved that to be a local man did not compromise a world-outlook.

Robbie Shepherd remembers: I first got to know Colin as a fellow trustee of the Charles Murray Memorial Fund and later at the Elphinstone Institute where I was to become Honorary President of the Friends of the Institute. Colin was a real expert on Scottish writers, notably

Charles Murray and he was to bring out a valued book called *Hamewith – Charles Murray: Collected Poems* for the Fund in 2008, combining five of the Alford poet's published works including *A Handful o Heather* (1893) which had only hitherto been published privately. The *Collected Poems* are a must for any student interested in their mither tongue and the poems supplemented by a comprehensive introduction, typically Colin, telling the whole Murray story and insight into the poems. I was privileged to witness the funeral service on-line and it was so fitting that the service started with the voice of Jeannie Robertson singing the 'Gypsy Laddie' and ended with 'McGinty's Meal and Ale' which Colin would sing with gusto at the Cullerlie Singing Weekends.

A lovely, kindly man with time for aabody and aye willing to impart his knowledge to others.

An honest cheil has left this warld,

Tae wirk wi him wis pleisur:

Tae student, dominie alike

The lear he shared, pure treisur.

From an Epitaph for Dr Colin Milton – Sheena Blackhall

Colin's family describe him as a brilliant man. He was interested in everything and scrupulous about trying to see other points of view.

He always said he felt lucky because his job as a lecturer allowed him to pursue his favourite pastimes – reading, writing, and talking about books. As a teacher, he had a natural gift for bringing the many subjects he taught over the years to life and he was kind, patient, and encouraging to students.

He was a great enthusiast for language and a man who wrote warm and funny letters. He loved music, especially classical and traditional Scottish music. His family will also remember and cherish his instinctive kindness and his great stoicism and good humour.

Our thoughts are with his wife, Ailsa, and their five children, Victoria, Emma, Ursula, Myfanwy, and Joseph.

*Ian Russell, David Hewitt, Robbie Shepherd,
and the Milton Family*

Elphinstone Updates

Cullerlie's Super Saturday

After a year of Covid-abeyance, 2021's Cullerlie Traditional Singing Weekend returned as a downsized Super Saturday – but the songs and camaraderie were as mighty as ever. A bigger marquee was our principal venue and it rang to the sound of some of Britain and Ireland's finest singers. Top of the bill was Kirriemuir's own Joe Aitken, a guest at the very first singing weekend in 2000 and a great pal of our founders Tom and Anne Reid. Forbye his excellent songs, Nick Dow led an oversubscribed and well-received Gypsy caravan painting workshop.



Photo by Mary Masson

There was a strong Irish line-up with Áine Larkin, Thomas McCarthy and Sean Mone. Thomas also presented a workshop/talk about his family singing traditions, and Sean guided us through some of his comic song catalogue. The Cullerlie Hour (our regular lunchtime talk) was ably presented by Tom Spiers, about his friend and fellow Gauger, Peter Hall. Also on the guest list were Tripple (Jill Andrews, Cait and Annie Lennox) with a range of songs and harmonies, and Grace Donaldson led a papercrafting workshop.

There were singarounds throughout the day, and a big thanks to the Walkers of Cullerlie (Tracey, Eric, Sarah, and Paul) for their excellent hosting, and to Ian and Norma Russell for keeping us right.

Scott Gardiner

Field School 2021 – Students and Staff

The annual field school for our new cohort of MLitt and PhD students was held in and around Aberdeen during the last week of October.

There were interesting visits locally plus a visit to Stonehaven.

The field school immerses the students in local culture, with interactions with local community groups, and people.



Field School 2021, Tolbooth Museum, Stonehaven

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, Acting Director (until January 2022), Senior 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

Nicolas Le Bigre, Teaching Fellow, Ethnology and Folklore, archives

Simon Gall, Public Engagement Officer

Alison Sharman, Administrator

Research Students

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

Mary Cane, the grandmother experience in family life today

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

Lauren Hossack, Elphinstone Scholarship, literature, heritage, and the making of Scottish communities

Nicolas Le Bigre, narratives of immigrant experience

Claire Needler, Elphinstone Scholarship, bilingualism in North-East schools

Máire Ní Bhaoill, traditional singing among children in Ireland

Lorna Summers, community boatbuilding on the Moray coast

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

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

Honorary Research Fellows

Paul Anderson, North-East fiddle styles and repertoires

Dr David Atkinson, J. M. Carpenter Project

Dr Pat Ballantyne, Scottish step-dance traditions

Dr Athanasios Barmapalexis, contemporary shamanic healing in Scotland

Dr Julia Bishop, J. M. Carpenter Project

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, J. M. Carpenter Project

Les Wheeler, Scots Language, education

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

What's On

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

Support the Institute

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, a.sharman@abdn.ac.uk

*Edited by
Alison Sharman*

