

ELPHINSTONE INSTITUTE

studying culture in context

Hame Festival

From 7 to 10 July 2022, the University will be running a new festival called 'Hame'. Part of a new UNI-versal series of mini-weekender festivals, Hame will explore North-East culture in its myriad forms. We're delighted to be leading on the programming and will be working together with local partners to create events and activities exploring local musical traditions both new and long-established, oral storytelling, slam poetry, local history and heritage, community activism, and more. Through guided walks round Old Aberdeen, talks, concerts, gatherings, exhibitions, and displays,

the festival will spotlight some of the diverse expressions of local vernacular culture, offering a contemporary story of the region in all its complexity.

The UNI-versal series was designed to coincide with major dates in the campus calendar. In our case, the festival will complement the University's summer graduation ceremonies when thousands of people travel to the city. Our goal is to co-design a programme that will be of interest to visitors and North-East residents alike. Follow us on social media or join our mailing list to keep informed about the development of Hame.

Simon Gall

Launch of the Toulmin Prize 2022



We are pleased to announce that the Toulmin Prize 2022 has opened for submissions. The competition has inspired a wide range of creative writing in a mixture of Doric and English since its inception in 2008. It is sponsored by grandsons of David Toulmin (AKA John Reid), Steven and Martin Reid.

John Reid (1913–1998) was an Aberdeenshire farm labourer from Rathen, near Fraserburgh. In spare moments he jotted down short stories, character studies, and both tales. Eventually, as David Toulmin, he had some articles printed in local newspapers. The first of his ten books was published when he was fifty-nine years old. They consist of short stories and reminiscences, with his one novel, *Blown Seed*, painting a harsh picture of farm life. He was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Aberdeen in 1986 (pictured left).

The Toulmin Prize is open to all amateur writers over the age of sixteen. The story should be concerned with some aspect of life in North-East Scotland and may be written in Scots, including Doric, or English, or a mixture of the two. The short story of up to 4,000 words in length should be submitted along with an entry form by the deadline, Monday 6, June 2022.

The winner will receive a £500 prize, and the story will be read aloud by well-known North-East writer, Sheena Blackhall, at the University's Hame Festival in July. Entry forms are available on our website www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/public-engagement/toulmin.

Alison Sharman

Scots Language Projects

Our Scots language team have been busy working on various projects across the North-East and beyond.

Dawn Leslie's hugely popular Doric course for undergraduate students is well underway. Any Aberdeen University undergraduate student can apply; the course numbers are limited and spaces are in high demand.

Due to the keen interest in Dawn's undergraduate course and the success of the informal Doric courses run by Jackie Ross and me via Claire Needler's Home Hame Дом Дом project over lockdown, we offered an online evening course available to everyone. All twenty places were snapped up within a few days, with Dawn leading, and Jackie and me supporting the delivery of a ten-week Doric course.

We have fluent Doric speakers, learners with some knowledge, and beginners. It's a mix of abilities which works well in the group tasks and activities. Our Doric students are from all over Scotland, England, and two join in from Canada. We hope to run the course again soon.

We have also been working with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire schools on a pilot project. The Doric Menagerie is a set of resources for primary schools that teachers can use to teach Doric. Jackie and Sylvia Gregorin developed the materials and several schools were interested in participating in a trial.

Jackie will take her storytelling into Scotstoun and Airyhall Primaries, with plans to work with Aberdeenshire schools. I will deliver poetry workshops related to the material. We are excited to see what the schools have been up to. The findings from the pilot will inform how the materials are developed, and we hope to roll these out to schools later in the year.

Jackie and Jo are continuing to deliver Doric input, resources, and workshops to teacher training students at the University through storytelling and poetry. Jackie also runs a network and newsletter where teachers and those in training can receive the latest news and Scots resources. If you would like to receive these updates, email elphinstone@abdn.ac.uk.

Jo Gilbert



From the Director

This spring sees the welcome return to more in-person events. We're continuing to offer our public events online, where possible, which is hugely increasing our reach. It is gratifying to have participants from around the world, in addition to our local enthusiasts, especially in light of current geopolitical events when we need to keep lines of communication open.

The Institute is organizing the Hame Festival, a weekend showcase of North-East culture, 7–10 July 2022, an initiative being led by Simon Gall, our Community Engagement Officer. Featuring a range of art forms, we aim to bring together cultural performances from many walks of life to explore creative responses to the world around us, from traditional to contemporary, from bothy songs to a spoken word poetry slam. We hope that Hame will become a fixture in the calendar, growing and developing into a significant showcase for North-East vernacular culture.

As our MLitt students approach dissertation time, it is good to see them internalizing and running with the ideas and methodologies we've been talking about over the year and I am, as ever, excited by the diversity of topics that are being considered.

During my study leave last autumn, I worked on a number of projects, old and new, from articles about the Robertson family and Traveller Cant, to continued work on my theme of knowing by doing, I visited Rocking the Boat in the Bronx, New York, an inspiring parallel to projects I've worked with here, in Portsoy, Banff, and Glasgow, which use boatbuilding as a vehicle for learning, engaging teenagers with a huge range of practical, personal, and civic skills through somatic learning.

In September, I took part as discussant and board member for Singing, Song and Sound: European Voices VI, International Symposium and Concerts, in partnership with the University of Vienna. Through the

Autumn, I did public talks here in the North-East, on our Doric/North-East Scots work, and life in the bothy, featuring a live interview with former bothy loon, Brian Paterson, and songs from Hector Riddell. Huge thanks to Douglas Riach of the Aboyne Heritage Society for stepping in to host when I was in quarantine. In October, I teamed up with Iona Fyfe and Aberdeenshire Council on a series of three online Ballad Schuils for young people, focusing on ballads, bothy songs, and protest songs. The participants' enthusiasm and engagement were gratifying and I hope we'll get to continue the partnership.

My grateful thanks to Frances, Nick, Alison, and Simon, for running the show so capably and with such care in the autumn.

I have been working with two groups of graduate students – alumnae/i of the Summer Schools of the Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore (SIEF) – to reach out to colleagues in Ukraine, connecting them with people who can help. I have been humbled and moved by their engagement, humanity, and devotion to each other, a camaraderie borne out of our intense Summer School work together. Some are 'on the ground' at the borders driving refugees to safety, while others are connecting individuals with help, working as translators, and fact checking rumours about, for example, which crossings are open. I salute them. In my capacity as Vice President of SIEF, I've been working closely with the Board and various subgroups to respond to the tragedy, too. Though small and distant from the daily realities of those under siege and attack, we are trying to use our disciplinary skills at listening to contribute at least something to creating dialogues.

Finally, a warm welcome to our two new Honorary Fellows, Katherine Campbell, who will be working on a manuscript by Alexander Robb, a contributor to the Greig-Duncan Collection, and Nataliya Bezborodova, a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta and an alumna of our 2018 SIEF Summer School in Portsoy, working on custom and belief.

Thomas A. McKean

Postcard from England



Time has flown since graduating from the MLitt course in November 2019 – with the help of the pandemic! I started the Masters programme with a music degree and a love of folk music. What I did not expect to get out of the course was how it made me see the world with a fresh perspective. I had come in thinking there was no culture where I was from and was shown how wrong I was. I learnt that culture exists everywhere and people are innately creative – from sharing memes to the jokes we tell. I loved the course and also enjoyed being involved in the many events that coincided with the programme – from playing in the Festival of Village Carols, helping organise the British Forum for Ethnomusicology conference, and being involved in May Festival.

After graduating, I came back to Gloucestershire with a new outlook on people and culture and have since been involved in a project transcribing old locally recorded songs, attended folk sessions, and have now watched my first mummings play. I started working for English Heritage in February 2020 and in November 2020 I joined the board of directors at EFDSS (English Folk Dance and Song Society). Being a trustee has been an eye-opening experience as I am learning the inner workings of a folk arts charity as well as understanding the concerns and exciting areas of folk in England. As a trustee, I have been involved in numerous committees and recently compered their Folk Education Development Day.

Eleanor Telfer

Elphinstone Tributes

David Northcroft, North-East Scholar

David Northcroft was a prominent figure in the world of Scottish education. He started as a lecturer in English at Aberdeen College of Education in the 1970s and became Head of an English Department that provided research and support for the major curricular changes at the time. Following the merging of Aberdeen and Dundee Colleges in 1987, he was appointed Assistant Principal and, later, Vice-Principal of the Northern College of Education – a post he held until the merger with the University School of Education offered the opportunity for early retirement in 1998.



Dr David Northcroft

One of his early contributions to the work of the Elphinstone Institute was to help develop a conference in 2000 on 'Local Schools and National Schooling'. David produced an edited version of the papers presented at the conference, *North-East Identities and Scottish Schooling* (2005), published by the Institute. In *Scots at School: An Anthology* (2003), he explores and questions some of the long-held beliefs about Scots education in written accounts over 250 years. He supported the Institute as Honorary Research Fellow, student-mentor, and Friend of the Elphinstone. His final task was to jointly edit the publication, *Dinna Mess wi the PoPo* (2021).

In 1956, David was in a boys' grammar school in Lewes, near Brighton, when the family moved 600 miles to the distillery of Cragganmore, Ballindalloch, where his father had been appointed Excise Officer. The school he attended in Aberlour had one 'Senior Secondary' class of ten pupils, who remained together for five years, with the same teacher for each subject in every year. David came to respect, admire, to love the people, the

culture, the landscape – and the cityscape – of the North-East. He graduated from the University of Aberdeen with First Class Honours in English in 1964 and, after completing an MLitt at Cambridge, returned to undertake teacher training, and a post at Aberdeen Grammar School. In 1966, David and Kathleen married and, in 1968, they settled in Muchalls.

David's commitment to the North-East is revealed by the major project of oral history that, after retirement, took the best part of twenty years to complete. This involved recording (and transcribing and editing)

some 600 interviews about the lives of individuals from communities across the area. The result is four historically important and beautifully produced volumes – *Grampian Lives 1&2* (2010, 2013) and *Aberdeen Lives 1&2* (2017, 2019).

David, born in 1942, led a rich and full life. Family always came first, but he had strong intellectual passions – for literature, for education, for social history. He was reading Proust, for the third time, in his 70s; he completed his doctorate on *The Teaching of English in Scotland (1940–1990)*, in 1991. He was also hooked on sport – cricket, football, golf, as player and spectator.

What remains for many is the strength of David's personality: the enthusiasm he brought to everything he became involved with, his gentle humour, and the warmth and commitment that he brought to being your friend.

David died on 23 December 2021. He is survived by his wife Kathleen, sons Jonathan and Mat, and five granddaughters.

Richard Bennett

James Cheechoo, Cree Fiddle Player



James Cheechoo

It was with much sadness that we heard of the passing of the renowned Cree fiddle player, James Cheechoo, on 11 February 2022 on Moose Factory Island, at the age of 92. James was a wonderful musician and friend who many will remember from his visit here in 2013 with his wife and drum accompanist, Daisy, and their daughters Rita and Treena. I met James and Daisy in 2011 when I travelled to Moose Factory, northern Ontario, to research the James Bay fiddle tradition and its historic and musical links with Scotland.

James was known to many as the 'Last of the James Bay Fiddlers', as he was one of few musicians in James Bay who continued to play the traditional repertoire of the region. He recorded a number of these tunes on his CD album, *Shay Chee Man* (literally 'Big Ship', after the ships of the Hudson's Bay Company), in 1998. He lived with his wife, Daisy, on Moose Factory Island near the James Bay coast, and they welcomed me into their home during the three weeks I visited in 2011. I spent time recording James's tunes, stories, and recollections of fiddle music and dancing in the past and learning some of the unique James Bay repertoire. I was lucky to perform with them in Moose Factory and later in Scotland. James was generous with his knowledge and always happy to share his music.

In 2013, I secured funding for James, Daisy, and daughters Rita and Treena, to travel to Aberdeen, Skye, and Orkney for a two-week musical tour where they showcased their repertoire. They played to sold-out venues, and their music, stories, and wonderful company will be remembered by many. James will be greatly missed but leaves behind his large family who have been influenced by his love of music and culture.

Frances Wilkins

Elphinstone News and Events

Our events at a glance...

- Thursday, 27 January to Thursday, 23 June 2022**
Polish-Scottish Song Group (Online)
- Thursday, 3 February 2022 *Ethnographic Film Series***
Dán Fianais or Protest Poem (Online)
- Thursday, 17 February 2022 *Public Lecture Series***
The Folk In My Young Life - Isla St Clair (Online)
- Thursday, 17 March 2022 *Public Lecture Series***
New Pitsligo Lacemaking: Stories of a North-East Village - Jan Tavendale (Online)
- Saturday, 19 March 2022 *Organ and Voice Recital***
Organ and Voice: A Spring Celebration with Piotr Rojek and Magdalena Durant
Location: King's College Chapel
- Tuesday, 29 March 2022 *Online Open Evening***
Elphinstone Institute Online Open Evening
- Tuesday, 5 April 2022 *Storytelling***
Tales for the Tower - Legends for the Lodgings
Location: Dunbar Street Hall
- Thursday, 21 April 2022 *Public Lecture Series***
Aberdeen Multicultural Centre: Raising Cultural and Environmental Awareness (Online)
- 7–10 July 2022 *New Festival for 2022***
Hame Festival
Location: King's College campus
- 22–24 July 2022 *Traditional Singing Weekend***
Location: Cullerlie Farm Park
- Sunday, 28 August 2022 *All-Day Festival***
Aberdeen Mela Festival
Location: Westburn Park

Congratulations to Ian Russell, Professor Emeritus, MBE



The investiture was held by Anne, Princess Royal, on the afternoon of Wednesday, 19 January 2022, at the Palace of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh.

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, Senior Lecturer, Ethnomusicology, sacred singing in coastal communities, Scottish fiddle traditions innorthern 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

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 Barmplexis, contemporary shamanic healing in Scotland

Nataliya Bezborodova, custom and belief

Dr Julia Bishop, J. M. Carpenter Project

Sheena Blackhall, creative writing in Scots

Dr Elaine Bradtke, J. M. Carpenter Project

Dr Katherine Campbell, ethnomusicology, music performance

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

