

Haste Ye Back! SAFHS Annual Conference

We were thrilled to partner up with the Scottish Association of Family History Societies (SAFHS) for their annual conference, this year entitled 'Haste Ye Back!', on the theme of settlement and migration. The online conference was wonderfully co-ordinated by our friends at the Aberdeen and North-East Scotland Family History Society, with hundreds of local and international participants tuning in from around the world. Representing the Institute were Thomas McKean, and the author of this piece. Tom discussed the concepts of Truth, Experience, and Knowledge, with relation to contrasting family recollections and also formal recorded accounts. I spoke on multi-layered concepts of Home, as interpreted by



people who have moved to the North-East of Scotland. As an interlude during the proceedings, the organisers also played *A Fiddle in the House*, a film made for our MLitt course by former students Mara Barnum and Jim Brown. Going by the Zoom chat, the film was popular across continents! More generally, the University was very well represented, with excellent talks from Marjory Harper and Jackson Armstrong, colleagues in the School of Divinity, History, Philosophy, and History of Art. Congratulations to the SAFHS and to the Aberdeen and North-East Scotland Family History Society on a fantastic conference.

Nicolas Le Bigre



North-East Scots Evening Class



In its second outing, the Elphinstone Institute's 'Introduction to North-East Scots (Doric)' public evening course ran successfully from January to March this year. The online course, led by myself, and supported by local creatives Jackie Ross and Jo Gilbert, ran for nine weeks and was attended by learners from a range of different backgrounds and abilities. This included: participants from the North-East, the rest of Scotland and elsewhere in the UK; several international learners looking to learn the local lingo having made Scotland their home; and even some who negotiated the time differences and 'Zoomed' in from as far afield as Spain and Canada.

During the course, participants learned about the history and changing status of Scots, the connections between different dialects of the language, its links with other Germanic languages, and – for the most part – the functional components of the variety needed to understand and communicate in Doric. Having watched the weekly mini-lecture videos on the various features of North-East Scots,

learners were then encouraged during the weekly Zoom sessions to put their learning into practice through a series of interactive tasks. Several members of the course also enjoyed a 'real life' get-together in the form of a fieldtrip to the *Tales Fae the Doric Side* anthology launch event at The Blue Lamp: a companion Zoom lesson based around pieces performed at the event was provided later in the week for anyone who couldn't make it to Aberdeen

Watch this space for a possible follow-up to the course.

Dawn Leslie



From the Acting Director

I am writing at the end of a busy semester at the Institute, culminating in a wonderful open evening on 17th May, our first since 2020, with speaking and music from members and associates of the Institute including Jo Gilbert, Dawn Leslie and the Polish Scottish Song Group. With Tom McKean on research leave I have been standing in as Acting Director. Having completed fieldwork for my British Academy/Carnegie Trust-funded Seinn Spioradail project, I am now working on various outputs from the research. These include a 12-month touring exhibition of the Hebrides starting in January 2024 at Museum nan Eilean in Stornoway which will incorporate a virtual sound archive in the form of a 'Digital Exhibition System,' currently being co-created with Alan Miller and his team at St Andrews University, a CD/book publication on the EVA (European Voices) series, and a website. Many thanks to MLitt students David Fayle, Andrada Maries, and Mary Stratman for their assistance in sound editing and cataloguing material for the project.

Congratulations to Edda Starck who was successful in securing an AHRC funded PhD studentship and will be joining us in October to start her studies under the supervision of myself and Jo Vergunst in the Department of Anthropology.

We have had some exciting projects, including Jo Gilbert's Doric Anthology which was published in March, and the Doric Teacher's Companion which is now online. On 19 April we successfully re-launched the Friends of the Elphinstone Institute where long-standing office-bearers Jenny Shirreffs and John Ledger stood down as Chair and Treasurer and we welcomed Dave Francis and Jim Brown to take their places along with

new committee members Eilidh Whiteford and Alison Sharman. We are looking forward to a programme of events over the next year to raise funds and raise the profile of the Friends including a Ballad Bus outing, a Friends' lunch, and a ceilidh in early 2024. If you would like to join the Friends of the Institute or hear more about their work, please get in touch.

Institute staff have been to a number of conferences in recent months. I attended ESEM in Graz in September 2022 and recently returned from the BFE annual conference hosted by the University of Edinburgh. Nick Le Bigre will be presenting at the ICA conference in Dublin, before going to SIEF in the Czech Republic, along with Tom McKean, PhD student Carley Williams, and Honorary Research Fellows Sheila Young, Pat Ballantyne, and Nataliya Bezborodova.

We have exciting events planned for the coming year including FEECA, organised by Lauren Hossack, Mary Cane and Claire Needler in Aberdeen from 30 June–2 July. The Buchan Lecture is on Thursday, 16 November (more details to follow) and we are planning the Alec Green whistle festival to take place in February 2024, co-organised with Sara Reith. We will again be core partners on Aberdeen's Mela this year, and Simon Gall and Nick Le Bigre continue excellent work with the Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC). And there are plans afoot for a NAFCo in 2026 to celebrate the convention's 25-year anniversary.

Many thanks to Alison Sharman for her work in organising the Toulmin Prize for 2023. Entries are now in and they will be judged over the summer with winners announced in the autumn, and a prizegiving event at the WayWord Festival in September.

Frances Wilkins



Athanasios Barmpalexis

Postcard from Athens

At the age of 33, after a series of professional missteps in Greece, I moved to Scotland in September 2013 for a fresh start. I always wanted to study culture and traditions; the MLitt in Ethnology and Folklore at the Elphinstone Institute made sense as a continuation of my studies. My dissertation on contemporary neo-paganisms, and especially the fieldwork aspect of it, made me fall in love with the discipline of Folklore and ethnographic research. In September 2015 I began my PhD research on contemporary magicoreligious healing traditions in North-East Scotland, which was successfully concluded in July 2020. It was a magical journey of encounters with the supernatural, pilgrimages, rituals, and spiritual experiences that have transformed me as a researcher and a person. These would not have been accomplished without the help and support of all the wonderful people at the Elphinstone Institute: my supervisor and mentor, Dr. Thomas McKean, Dr. Frances Wilkins, our amazing administrator, Alison Sharman, and my best friend in Scotland, Nick Le Bigre. I'd also like to thank Professor Ian Russell for accepting my application for the MLitt – a 'gate-opening' moment for me.

Since graduating, I have relocated to Greece. I am an Honorary Research Fellow at the Elphinstone Institute, giving an annual lecture on 'Vernacular Medicine' to the undergraduate and postgraduate students. I have started postdoctoral research on spiritual leadership of contemporary refugee groups in Greece with the department of Folklore at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. I have had seven articles published in academic journals, covering a wide range of subjects (from neo-paganisms, tarot cards, and folk healing to medieval traditions of resistance in contemporary music and Victorian street literature). I have participated in two conferences in summer and autumn 2022, and I will be on the committee of a Folklore Archives conference in November 2023 in Athens. Finally, I also reimagined the St. Patrick legend, inspired by the posthumous Vitae scripts, for a comic book called 'Lorica Sanctii Patricii: The Deer's Cry', published in April 2022 by the Athenian publishing company red n' noir. I love you all, and I miss you!

Athanasios Barmpalexis

Friends of the Elphinstone Institute Relaunch

End of an Era for the Friends

At the recent much-postponed AGM and relaunch of the Friends of the Elphinstone Institute, on Wednesday, 19 April, 2023, John Ledger, our long-serving treasurer, and I were finally able to retire! Both of us had been involved with the Friends from the start (in 2001) and had served as Secretary and Chairperson (me) and committee member and Treasurer (John).

The early days were very exciting – a brand-new Institute to promote the culture, language and history of the North-east of Scotland – and we were full of enthusiasm. We ran Ballad Buses, and ceilidhs, financed singing weekends at Cullerlie, and Boatie Projects at Peterhead, and the Polish/Scottish Singing Group at the Institute. We raised funds to preserve collections, publish books, make recordings and we were deeply involved with the NAFCo (North Atlantic Fiddle Convention).

Over the years, we met wonderful people – Stanley Robertson, Paul Anderson, Bill Nicolaisen, Sheena Blackhall amongst many others – and had lots of fun, always helping to further the work of the Institute.

Things weren't always easy and there were many

crises – accommodation, staffing, and financial, but we kept on going.

COVID hit us all hard and virtual meetings, while keeping the spirit alive, were not the same as face-to-face get-togethers. Gradually, our enthusiasm was being eroded and so it was decided to reboot the Friends and to let others pick up the reins.

We had a remarkably well-attended and well-motivated AGM and both John and I were able to retire – I'll stay on the Committee – knowing the organisation is in good hands and heart. It's all been great fun and we thank everyone who helped to make it that way. Good

luck to the new office bearers: David Francis (Chair), and Jim Brown (Treasurer), and Barbara-Ann Burnett, who will continue as Secretary.

Jenny Shirreffs

Jenny Shirreffs and John Ledger were presented with gift hampers from the staff to thank them for their roles with the Friends in supporting the work of the

Elphinstone Institute. Jenny and John are pictured here along with Jim Brown, receiving their hampers from Alison Sharman. Thank you Jenny and John for all your efforts over the years.

Elphinstone Institute Staff

Elphinstone Institute Open Evening

The Elphinstone Institute Open Evening was held on Wednesday, 19 May 2023. There was a large turnout at the first in-person open evening since our last celebration in January 2020 to celebrate our 25th anniversary.

We heard from a variety of people working at and involved with the Institute, which gave a great overview of the work that the Institute does, and also some of the local community groups and organisations which we're involved with.

Acting Director, Frances Wilkins was joined by Pete MacCallum for a few tunes on concertina and guitar, and Emeritus Professor Ian Russell sang a ballad to the company. The Polish-Scottish Song Group sang two traditional songs, one in Scots and one in Polish. To round the evening off it was time for wine and nibbles plus some raffle prizes and a session in our Buchan Library.

A special thanks to Lesley Crerar for her BSL interpretation of the evening which was very much appreciated. You can watch a recording of the evening on our website at www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone.



Elphinstone News and Events

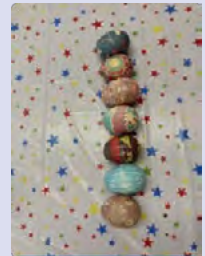
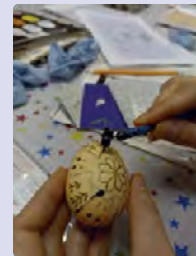
Visitors from USA



We recently hosted American folklorists Peggy Bulger, Maggie Holtzberg plus a group of twenty of their friends in Aberdeen, who were on a tour of Scotland's North-East and Northern Isles. They listened to members of staff talk about the work of the Institute and had a guided tour around Old Aberdeen, ending the day with a ceilidh in the evening.

Pysanka Workshop

Nataliya Bezborodova, Honorary Research Fellow at the Institute, led a pysanka workshop (Ukrainian egg decorating) with staff and students. Using the kistkas, the tools for drawing the lines of melted wax onto the eggs, the finished decorated eggs were beautifully designed.



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 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

Mollie Carlyle, the legacies of Stan Huggill

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

Tolheishel Khaling, Uipo (Khoibu) folk songs

Robert Milne, composition and Doric language texts

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

Maire Ni Bhaoil, 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, marriage ritual during the pandemic

What's On

Keep up to date with all of our events by following us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, or our website: www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone

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

