



University of the  
Highlands and Islands  
Centre for History

Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd  
agus nan Eilean  
Ionad Eachdraidh

## Centre for History Newsletter—September 2015



**We're ten years old!** This May, the Centre for History team gathered in Dornoch along with friends and colleagues, current and former, to celebrate. We had a great turnout (see photo above). There were presentations by Head of the Centre, David Worthington, and our former director, Jim Hunter, on the Centre's present and past, a reception, and a fantastic meal at the Dornoch Castle Hotel. There are more pictures, and loads of other gems, on the Centre's [Flickr](#) page.

### **Communities, the public and the Centre for History**

Who's in charge of history and who's it for? The Centre for History has no ambition to stake a claim for sole 'ownership' or to limit the subject's audience. Instead, we believe that, as a university department founded, built up and developed in the Highlands and Islands and as an ambitious team of scholars with a steadily growing, international reputation, we need to ensure, first, that we provide attractive and inspiring courses and research possibilities for students. However, we can also have a key part to play, in collaboration with others, in impacting on the development and influence of our subject and passion. One area of the Centre's activity that can go 'under the radar' is the complex intersection between public engagement, community liaison, knowledge exchange and 'Impact'. It might be too ambitious to try to define these terms precisely here.

But, given the increasing assessment of universities in terms of both research and teaching, and of the strategic aim to the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) of having a 'transformative impact' on its communities, it will not be a surprise to read that the Centre seeks to prioritise this kind of work. There's more to it than that. Ultimately, UHI aims to improve prospects across the region: economically, socially, and culturally. As a small-ish university department based in a part of Scotland much more barely populated than it once was, we need to be a part of that. It feels right to us to seek to work with those around us towards that, within the university and beyond. Irrespective of external assessments, crucial though they are, engaging with our student and broader communities is at the heart of what we do.



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With this in mind, last year, Elizabeth Ritchie began, in 2013, to compile an annual report aimed at collating this detail. This year's document confirms that all of the full-time Centre lecturers are active in giving public lectures across the region, averaging around one per month currently, for example. In addition, Elizabeth continues her editing of a popular, collaborative local history [blog](#) along with HistoryLinks museum, here in Dornoch. She has contributed to three oral history workshops in far north communities for the MacKay Country project, organised by Dr Issie MacPhail. Here is Dr Ritchie on a recent field outing with students in East Sutherland.



#### **New Reader at Centre for History – Dr Iain Robertson**

Some big news. Dr Iain Robertson arrived from the University of Gloucestershire to commence work as Reader at the Centre on 1 September 2015! Working alongside David Worthington, and line-managed by our Dean of Faculty, Dr Neil Simco, Iain has been given the task of developing further the centre's research culture, as well as teaching. His principal areas of research are heritage studies and exploration of the social and cultural history of local community and landscape change with a particular emphasis on historical and cultural processes that shaped nineteenth and early twentieth-century Highland Scotland. The focus of this is popular protest and sense of place, personal and local identity visible in the oral tradition of particular places and events. Iain has an impressive range of publications on these themes both in print and forthcoming. His recent monograph was shortlisted for the research book of the year in the Saltire.

It has been a great pleasure welcoming him to Dornoch and we at the Centre, and the university more widely, will be continuing that welcome over coming weeks and months. We have been inspired by initial discussions with Iain, and are excited as this new chapter for the Centre commences!



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Also in the timeframe of this newsletter, [Jim MacPherson](#) (above) has given an invited [lecture](#) at the United Nations in New York! This was part of an event on ‘Women and Diaspora’, which was organised by the Armenian and Cypriot Permanent Missions to the UN. Speaking about his research on Irish women abroad, Jim’s presentation focused on how policy-makers could learn from the past, and, in particular, from historians working within this thematic area. In summing up proceedings, the Armenian Ambassador to the UN, Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, stated that the discussions would be a ‘springboard’ to future policy discussions about women, migration and diaspora. Jim has also been active in terms of the new UHI [Hub for the Study of British Identities](#), in collaboration with various partners in the region’s heritage sector and local groups in Rogart, Helmsdale and Fearn.



[David Worthington](#) is organising the ‘Firths and Fjords’ coastal history project, which includes a conference and associated community activities in Dornoch from 30 March–2 April 2016. Its aim is to explore and interrogate, alongside local community groups and a prestigious range of speakers from across the globe, the past of the littoral settlements and ‘firthlands’ of the Moray Firth within a broader coastal context of communities situated around adjacent or near-adjacent coastlines.



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David is also continuing to work with the Polish community in the Highlands as part of a range of activities relating to Scottish-Polish historical relations. Through his position on the Scottish Parliament's cross-party group on Poland, he and fellow members aim to effect policy by working with the Polish community, promoting cultural and social events.



Photo courtesy of Tomasz Duda @ freshmintstudio.com



Kathrin Zickermann is active in this area too. She gave a talk on early modern Scottish-German connections in May at the German Lutheran Church in Glasgow and has established close links with Marine Lives, a collaborative public history project that aims to digitise, transcribe and annotate the manuscript records of the English High Court of Admiralty. Kathrin has also joined the board of the Economic and Social History Society of Scotland, a body which, as is known, focuses on new historical research and seeks to stimulate public interest in Scottish history.



Iain MacInnes has been developing new collaborative public engagement ideas following his presentations at no less than five international conferences since the start of this year, with interests extending to pilgrimage, medieval battlefield injuries, Game of Thrones and medievalism, more broadly.

### **New Students; new academic year**

Reflecting on our tenth year of existence, it seems reasonable to assume that, back in 2005, few would have predicted we would have as many students as we have today. Currently, Centre staff, not least our administrative officer, Alison MacWilliam, are busy dealing with new enrolments across all our programmes in the knowledge that 2015-16 is set to continue our year-on-year growth in student numbers since 2007. The BA (Hons) History and BA (Hons) History and Politics are, once again, proving especially popular amongst first-year entrants, but we have experienced increases across all levels, including our masters' degrees. This latter group of programmes have attracted their largest intake of students ever this year, the USA, Australia, Canada and Norway being to the fore in the [cohort](#) as well as growing numbers from within Scotland and the rest of the UK.



### Am Fasgadh Away Day

Left to right: Jim MacPherson, Kathrin Zickermann, William Hepburn, Marie-Louise Leonard, Elizabeth Ritchie, Iain MacInnes and David Worthington – Alison MacWilliam took the photograph.

We had our latest staff 'Away Day' at Am Fasgadh in Newtonmore in early August. It proved to be a timely chance to discuss curriculum development. Iain MacInnes has led on the team now offering eleven undergraduate programmes involving Scottish History or History. At the workshop, Iain presented his already well-developed ideas on this, with other staff inputting significantly,

while we also talked through, in outline, the revalidation of our entire suite of undergraduate programmes, which will take place in 2017. The day proved an opportunity, furthermore, to welcome our new teaching assistant, Marie-Louise Leonard (fourth from left) to the team. Thanks for coming along and for your many and insightful contributions, Marie-Louise. The kind staff at Am Fasgadh gave us a whistlestop tour of their outstanding material culture collections, circa 10,000 artefacts (we didn't see quite all of them). It's a resource which the late Isobel F. Grant was responsible for instigating, in what led to the creation of the first open air museum in the UK and which is, today, a major repository for Highland history. And we almost forget to mention the delicious porridge ice cream! Many thanks to the staff there for helping ensure what was an excellent day.



### Graham Hannaford and Clan Sutherland Society in Australia

In September 2015, we will be proud to celebrate the graduation of our third batch of alumni at MLitt level. One of them will be Graham Hannaford from Australia (a keen piper – see below) who will travel over to Inverness for the ceremony. Incidentally, Graham is in the middle of publishing a three part article in the [Clan Sutherland Society in Australia](#) newsletter, in which he goes into some detail about his experiences with us: We're thrilled that, as he tells us, he has 'been inspired by the course to want to continue studying towards researching and writing a PhD.' Good luck with the next stage, Graham!



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#### **Elizabeth receives student-led teaching award**

The Centre's Dr Elizabeth Ritchie has been named as the University of the Highlands and Islands' 'Best Dissertation Supervisor'. She was praised for going the extra mile to support her students; providing encouragement, constructive feedback and extra opportunities to help them develop their skills and experience. One student explained:

"I have been impressed by Dr Ritchie's approach. From the time I first expressed interest in a subject, she helped me refine my thinking, made suggestions for reading, identified material in archives which might have been of help and continuously encouraged me. The feedback on the submitted dissertation (both her detailed comments on the text and overall summary comments) has encouraged me to continue with further studies. I would add that Dr Ritchie's coordination of the Historylinks Dornoch blog has given me opportunities for contribution. On each occasion I received extensive help on getting the focus correct, the editing tight and the text accurate. Her coordination of the 'Land and People' conference in Strathnaver gave many students the chance to attend and an opportunity for meeting students or alumni from Canada, Romania, Kenya and Australia as well as elsewhere in the UK."



Elizabeth will be presented with a trophy and certificate. Speaking about her role as a dissertation supervisor she said: "In the final year of their degree students get to choose a subject that interests them and get their first real taste of doing what historians do. My job is to help them locate original documents, work with them to construct a question that it is possible to answer with the fragments of evidence we have and to assist them in framing their research into a final report. I have been fortunate with having very enthusiastic students who actually listen to my advice! It is a real privilege to work with them all year as they wrestle with this immense project. And I learn such a lot: I know a lot more about the construction of the Poor Law in the Victorian Highlands, the intricacies of church-community relations in late eighteenth century Paisley and the women's suffrage movement in Inverness than I did this time last year!"

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#### **Theresa MacKay and proposed Scottish Cultural Centre in western Canada**

On the subject of our MLitt students, we loved the story from a recent issue of [Celtic Connection](#) magazine. It's about Theresa MacKay, distance-learning MLitt student of ours in Victoria, BC, and the ambitious and hugely impressive proposals she and colleagues have been developing in western Canada over the last couple of years. Theresa is on the board of the Victoria Highland Games Association and is a key member of the team responsible for the association's successful acquisition of a long-term lease of an historic property, Craigflower Manor and Lands. A major, exciting, long-term goal is to develop a Scottish Cultural Centre there.

#### **Article on Clan Donald**

It was fantastic to see this [article](#) in the journal, *Historical Research*, by James Petre. James is a former distance-learning student of ours on the MLitt History of the Highlands and Islands. The article seeks to reappraise Clan Donald's relations with the Scottish and English monarchies from 1461–3. Congratulations James!



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#### **Marjory Harper appointed to honorary professorship at UHI**

We were delighted to announce earlier this summer that [Professor Marjory Harper](#) of the University of Aberdeen had been awarded an honorary professorship at the Centre. As well as being an outstanding, internationally-renowned historian, Professor Harper has been a tireless supporter and advocate of UHI and, in particular, of the Centre. Seconded to the Centre on a one-day per week basis for several years until 2011, she developed and taught new courses as well as encouraging, mentoring and inspiring younger staff and undergraduate students. It is a source of great pride to the Centre and esteem to UHI that she continues to play a major part in the university today through being a member of the supervisory team for our research students as well as through her sterling work as regards *Northern Scotland*, as co-editor, along with James Hunter and David Worthington, until 2014, and, as an ongoing member of the editorial board. In November 2012, she collaborated with Elizabeth Ritchie in organising a weekend field trip of UHI and Aberdeen University students to Helmsdale and the Strath of Kildonan, an excursion which was repeated, with great success, in 2014-15. Professor Harper spoke at the Centre's Strathnaver Conference in September 2014, in addition, and gave a UHI public lecture in March 2015, the latter of which was attended by our staff and students and will be used as a teaching resource in future years. We look forward to linking up with her again soon.

#### **Fourth annual 'PhD Day'**



We had another successful 'PhD Day' gathering back in May. Here we see Graham Hannaford presenting by video conference from Australia on the 1845 Poor Law in the Highlands. The event was organised, as every year since 2012, by Jim MacPherson. Many thanks to all the students who presented, for a great day of discussion and debate.



**RCAHMS studentship**

On 1 October, Linda Ross will take up a position as the postholder of a Centre for History / Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) led AHRC [PhD studentship](#). She will research the impact of the Dounreay Nuclear Reactor on the Northern Highlands, working closely with local community groups, such as Dounreay Site Restoration Limited and Caithness Horizons. Jim MacPherson of the Centre will be the Director of Studies within the supervisory team.

**Northern Studies and Northern Scotland**

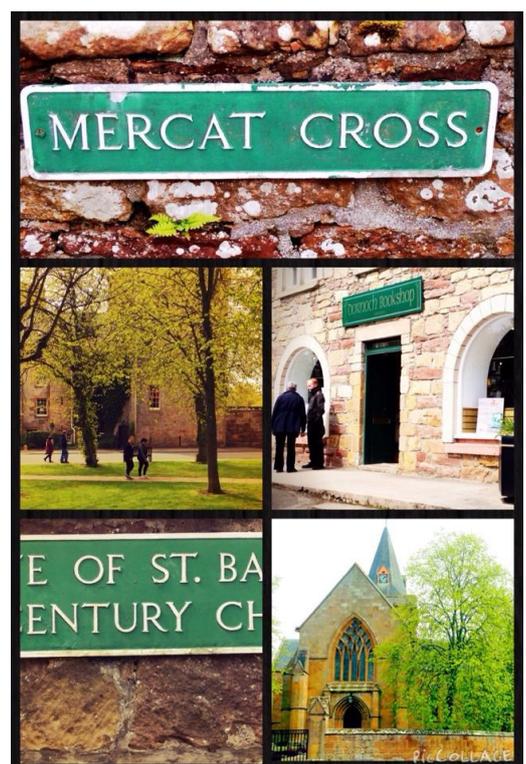
These two are not the same. [Northern Studies](#) is the excellent journal of the cross-disciplinary Scottish Society for Northern Studies, regarding which our own Kathrin Zickermann has recently become the general editor. All volumes up to and including the 2005 issue are available [here](#).

*Northern Studies* is sometimes confused with [Northern Scotland](#), the journal that Centre for History staff co-edit with colleagues at Aberdeen. This journal has had an exciting six months. Following on from the entire run of back issues (1972- ) being digitised and put online by EUP, [Issue Six](#) (2015) is now available electronically to all those with online subscription access. We're very pleased with it and hope you enjoy it. It includes the following articles:

- ◆ Silke Reeploeg, on how mapping and cartography influenced a 're-negotiation' of space and place in the eighteenth century Northern Isles and Norway;
- ◆ David Alston on the children of Highland Scotsmen and enslaved and 'free coloured' women in Guyana;
- ◆ Thomas Brochard on visual culture and the integration of the early modern Northern Highlands within the Scottish state;
- ◆ Not only that, but we also pack in an 'opinion piece' by Sir Crispin Agnew of Lochnew Bt on crofting law, Colin Miller's report on archival sources relating to the Bennachie 'Colony' in Aberdeenshire, as well as the usual, impressive range of book reviews.



Some of the Centre for History team on location in and around Dornoch!





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## Social Networking

The Centre for History is very active in social networking. The following sites are all run by staff:

### [Historylinksdornoch blog](#)

Dedicated to exploring the history and archaeology of Dornoch and its neighbouring parishes. It is a collaboration between Historylinks museum and the Centre, co-ordinated by Dr Elizabeth Ritchie. Posts are written either by Elizabeth or by guest contributors.

### Centre for History

Facebook: [UHI Centre for History community](#) (539 likes)

[UHI Centre for History Group](#) (281 members)

Twitter: [@UHIHistory](#) (1005 followers)

### Northern Scotland

Facebook: [Northern Scotland journal community page](#) (1629 likes)

### Moray Firth History

Facebook: [Moray Firth History](#) (334 likes)

Twitter: [@Moray\\_Firth](#) (279 followers)

Focuses on the Moray Firth (Linne Mhoireibh) region. This new Facebook page and associated Twitter feed explore the coastal history of the 'Fraserburgh-Beaully-Wick indented triangle'. Both are administered by Dr David Worthington.

### Scottish-Polish Historical Links

Facebook: [ScotlandPoland](#) (788 likes)

Twitter: [@Scottish Polish](#) (298 followers)

For those interested in Scots in Poland and Poles in Scotland, from medieval to modern. It is co-ordinated by Dr Worthington and colleagues at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland).



## Contact the Centre for History

For further information about our undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes, or for additional details about any of the above articles, please contact us:

Tel: 01847 889621

Email: [history@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:history@uhi.ac.uk)

Web: [www.history.uhi.ac.uk](http://www.history.uhi.ac.uk)