

Island Cultural Archives: knowledge transfer opportunities in the Hebrides 2007-2008 *An Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Funded Project*



Dr Kathryn A Burnett,  
School of Media, Language and Music  
University of the West of Scotland



## Workshop 1: Oral Tradition Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2007

- 1.1 Welcome and Introductions
- 1.2 **Island Cultural Archives: Overview: Presenter: Kathryn A Burnett**, University of the West of Scotland, (formerly University of Paisley).
- 1.3 **Morning Session: Oral Tradition as Local Resource and Knowledge**
- 1.3.1 **Oral Tradition: Digital Archive Presenter:** Mairead MacDonald, Director, *Tobar an Dualchais*
- 1.3.2 **Oral Tradition: Local History Knowledge Presenter:** Donald MacNeil, on behalf of Effie MacMillan, *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas, (CEUD)*
- 1.3.3 **Oral Tradition as Local Resource and Knowledge Group Discussion**
- 1.3.4 **Oral Resources of the Community: Music and Song**
- 1.3.5 **Oral Resources of the Community: Bardachd Presenter:** Bill Innes
- 1.3.6 **Oral Resources of the Community: People and Place (Disc 2: cue 32 mins)**  
**Presenter:** Catriona Muir, *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla*
- 1.3.7 Cultural Archives: as resource, research and revival? **Group Discussion:**  
**Chaired by Mairead MacDonald**
- 1.4 **Afternoon session: Exploring Synergies: Knowledge Transfer of Cultural Resource**
- 1.4.1 Knowledge Transfer: an Overview from the Arts and Humanities Presenter: Kathryn A. Burnett, University of the West of Scotland, (formerly University of Paisley).
- 1.4.2 **Knowledge Transfer of Cultural Resource** Contribution by Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, Research Officer, Carmichael Watson Project, University of Edinburgh
- 1.5. **Tangible and Intangible Heritage: Island Cultural Resources**
- 1.5.1 Group Activity exploring *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas's* Kildonan Museum Collection Facilitator: Dana MacPhee, *Museum nan Eilean*
- 1.5.2 **Group Activity exploring *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas's* Kildonan Museum Collection Facilitator: Dana MacPhee, *Museum nan Eilean***
- 1.6. **Custodial Positions on Cultural Resource: Ownership, Stewardship & Management**  
**Group Discussion**
- 1.7 Close and Thanks

## 1.1 Welcome and Introductions

The first of the workshops was dedicated to the theme of ‘oral tradition’ and a number of participants were contacted in addition to those approached in the bid writing stages and invited to attend and provide presentations relating to their own expertise. Those who kindly agreed to provide a session presentation included representatives from the community history, archive and museum associations. From the South Uist local historical society (*Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas*) and the associated Kildonan Museum, were Donald MacNeil (Dòmhnall Nellie) who as Chair of CEUD delivered an informal presentation on behalf of Effie MacMillan (Secretary of CEUD) who was unfortunately unable to attend due to a close family relative’s funeral<sup>i</sup>. In addition to Donald, Gilbert MacLennan (*Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas*) also participated in the day’s discussions and activities. From Benbecula, South Uist’s neighbouring island, Catriona Muir, Secretary of the Benbecula Historical Society, (*Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla*) attended but other colleagues from the society due to participate were unable to attend due to a local funeral. Catriona provided a detailed presentation on behalf of her association and some of the key issues Catriona explores are noted below (1.3.6).

From South Uist originally, and having a long and distinguished career in the global business of aviation, and now once again a ‘semi-local resident’, the workshop welcomed Mr Bill Innes. Bill’s longstanding interest and expertise in South Uist history and the wider Gaelic culture is well known. His own research and writing has made a key contribution to continuing to celebrate and record for posterity the rich cultural tradition of South Uist. In 2001, for example, Birlinn published *Chi Mi: The Gaelic Poetry of Donald John Macdonald*. Bill introduced, edited and translated this volume of his neighbour and friend Domhnall Iain MacDhomhnaill’s poetry. Bill has formed a particularly strong relationship with *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas* and following the publication by Stenlake of his visual essay *Old South Uist*, (2006), a book that documents his own very personal view of South Uist but also Eriskay and Benbecula. The photographs were exhibited in the Kildonan Museum in late summer and this coincided with the first of the workshops. Bill’s presentation to the ‘Oral Tradition’ workshop detailing just some of his expertise on South Uist *bardachd* is detailed below (1.3.5).

The local authority’s museum service (*Comhairle nan Eilean Siar*) was represented by the local museums’ officer Dana MacPhee. Dana has extensive experience throughout the Outer Hebrides dealing with historical societies, facilitating workshops, schools activities and has mounted many exhibitions in the usual spaces of community schools, halls and museums throughout the islands but she has also facilitated more unusual opportunities for staging and interacting with island cultural heritage including the recent exhibition on the now deserted island group of Haisgair. Dana provided considerable input and expertise to this first workshop including facilitating the hands on sessions with Kildonan Museum artefacts detailed later (1.5.1).

Representing the South Uist and Barra Archive Trust (SUBAT), Ray Burnett (seen on the far left here and talking with James Oliver, University of Edinburgh) attended and took part in the discussions throughout the day and would provide a presentation on the archive in the second workshop on ‘Deserted Settlement’. As well as being a considerable source of support and advice to the principle researcher, Ray, himself a historian and researcher, was one of the key local contacts for the bringing together of Uist representatives with other key archive organisations and individuals most notably the committee of *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas*, Mr Bill Innes, and Mairead MacDonald, *Tobar an Dualchais*.



Mairead is the Director of *Tobar an Dualchais*. Further details on the project are documented in section (1.3.1) below and Mairead has brought considerable expertise to the project and offers long-term synergy potential for the community. Dr James Oliver, University of Edinburgh, attended the workshop in his capacity as a Leverhulme researcher on Gaelic culture and community identity. James a Sgitheanach, a native islander from Skye, with personal and professional experience of island community and cultural policy and resource debates was a welcome addition to both this first and subsequent workshops. Tony Grace from the School of Media, Language and Music, has provided considerable support and guidance for the research study and his commitment to undertake to film the entire workshops' proceedings is not only immensely useful but has contributed considerable 'added value' to the original remit of the project. Tony is an accomplished lecturer and documentary film maker. He has worked with Kathryn Burnett (PI) on a number of previous and current research collaborations.

## **1.2 Island Cultural Archives: Overview: Presenter: Kathryn A Burnett, University of the West of Scotland, (formerly University of Paisley).**

Following the introductions the principle investor Kathryn Burnett set out a short account of the background to the research project in total including the underlying ethos for the research and some detail on the process of the bid application and the particular frames of reference of the funders the *Arts and Humanities Research Council* (AHRC). Whilst the title of the project states the Hebrides as the geographical focus for the workshops it was made clear that the specific goal was to examine and explore the nature of cultural archive resource in South Uist, Benbecula and, to some extent, Eriskay. As detailed in the bid application the researcher explained how the nature of the project was to take account of changing socio-political circumstances within Uist with the new community ownership status of the island following the successful community buyout in 2006. There has been much talk of the opportunity to capitalise on the 'new era'. The project was designed to be a small scale development whereby a structured forum for discussion could take place relating to the current and future potential for the area's archival resource.

The presentation detailed that core to the workshops was an emphasis on how identity and community values inform the nature of archival resources, but also how the archive informs identity and discourse in return. Of particular note to the workshops was the understanding that although the events were taking place in a location that has deep historical legacies, not least the Gaelic tradition, the research events were designed to highlight and celebrate a 'living tradition'.

Kathryn detailed the broad aims of the research project as (see above) but sought to offer a more accessible summary of what was intended, namely that the workshops were being held with a view to explore the particular and nuanced way in which people share knowledge and exchange ideas. Core to this knowledge exchange was the common theme of recognising the range of archives and historical resource such as artefact, experience and memory that are held in trust. In keeping with the language of the research funding application Kathryn explained how a core theme for the workshops was to build on the exchange of ideas and identify areas of common interest and goal. The possibility for synergy whereby interests could be articulated with a view to a new and different outcome; that is with a view to suggestions for future activity and focus on the islands' cultural archive resource was to be a particular goal for the workshops both today and in the later events. In this respect a key objective to 'add value' through an 'exploration' of exchange of ideas and experiences in a focused workshop setting was noted.

Finally, by way of a last comment on the introduction to the project in general as well as an introduction to all three of the workshop events, Kathryn thanked all the workshop contributors for their time and commitment to the research study. It was noted that each of the participants at all three workshops were experts in their own field and the bringing together of this knowledge

offered a rich seam to mine but it also was a comment on the ongoing enthusiasm and immense commitment within the communities, as well as beyond, to both protect as well as enhance and enjoy the ‘immeasurable richness’ of the islands’ cultural heritage. The support given to and the presence of each participant at this first, and the subsequent workshops, was testimony to this continued commitment.

### 1.3 Morning Session: Oral Tradition as Local Resource and Knowledge

#### 1.3.1 Oral Tradition: Digital Archive Presenter: Mairead MacDonald, Director, *Tobar an Dualchais*

Mairead MacDonald, seen here on the left of the picture that also shows South Uist residents Gilbert MacLennan (centre) and Bill Innes (right), travelled from the Isle of Skye to participate in the workshop. As the Director of the *Tobar an Dualchais* project, a large-scale research projects seeking to digitize cultural archive collections largely relating to the Gaelic and Scots oral tradition, and much of this Gaelic material emanating from the islands of South Uist, Benbecula, and Eriskay, Mairead expressed her enthusiasm to be able to participate in the workshop and in doing so to share in some of the detail of the *Tobar an Dualchais* project and its intensions. A summary and some comments are noted here on Mairead’s presentation and discussion points that followed.



Mairead began by stating that it was good to get the opportunity to talk about the *Tobar an Dualchais* project (2006-2010)<sup>ii</sup>, in such a setting, and this kind of event, and therefore to be able in turn to find out about other people’s projects and “how we can fit in with one and other”. She set about providing us with a quick overview of the project including how the project was funded, what its objectives are, as well as detailing the nature of the archive resource itself, what challenges the project has already thrown up as well as some comment on thoughts of the future and next stage project development. The core aims of the project are to conserve material, digitise it and disseminate it. Mairead’s opening statement was to offer us a three language quote, in English, Scots and Gaelic the project could be described in Scots, for example, as “*The speik o a bygone age ... gien new virr wi fantoosh technology*”. And whilst a project on digital archives is certainly about the past it is very much a project concerned with the future and the role of technology is particularly important in this regard. A key concern of the project is how over its 5 years it can improve the accessibility of archive materials to not just scholars and academics that are a key user group but also people in general who may wish to learn more about the material; or indeed fin ways to bring this material to wider audiences. The development of schools specific packages is just one example that is being explored in the project. The project is a prime example of collaboration and partnership throughout Scotland and includes both academic partners such as the University of Edinburgh (School of Scottish Studies) and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, (UHI/MI) but also BBC Scotland, the National Trust for Scotland and the Heritage Lottery Fund who are funding half of the overall costs. The projects main objective is to source and digitise just over 12 thousands hours of archive already held in trust and this varied material includes Scots, English, much dialect, ‘Highland English, as well as a sizeable proportion of Gaelic. Some of the material of particular relevance to the islands includes the John Lorne Campbell Canna Collection, dating back to the 1930s where not only is the material’s content of great value but the range of actual recording technologies employed present a rich history of recording technology, although the fragility of media such as wax and wire are reason enough for the project and its intention to transform all material into once single common format. The other key resource relevant to the

Gaidhealtachd and the Hebrides includes the BBC's archive of Gaelic material which dates as far back as the 1950s but include more recent material. Mairead spoke of this material in a little detail and made the important point that collecting recent material such is in effect an archiving for the social history of the future.

The material is varied and dates back to the 1930s and much of this early material relates to Uist where it was recorded as well as recordings of islanders who had emigrated to Canada, so called 'exiled Gaels' in Nova Scotia, for example. Mairead played a range of archival recordings from the collections of the school of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, the Canna Collection, and the BBC Scotland material. This provided an opportunity to listen first hand to the materials she had described and we were, as a group, reminded afresh of the complexity, as well as the 'raw' simplicity of these early recordings from across Scotland.

For the purposes of a wider reference to the theme of cultural archives and the issues of partnership and adding value it should be noted that the *Tobar an Dualchais* project has sought to deliver on a number of fronts. Firstly it has over 20 funding partners and ranging from charities to universities. It has set about to provide employment from within the communities where much of the material derived. In South Uist there are already 5 people employed locally as part of the project and more employed within the islands working flexibly, at home, in keeping with more contemporary demands for work-life balance. The project is intent on delivering on this first stage priority of conserving, digitising and dissemination the 12 thousands hours of material already identified but by its nature it has revealed how much more exist 'out there' and as such the project is already being viewed as a staged process. A second stage whereby much more material could be sourced and managed in the same way is clearly on the cards but the complications are already arising as to where the boundaries are drawn in respect of what merits priority.

A question by Ray Burnett opened up the issue as to how priority decisions were being taken for what and when material was being digitised. Ray asked if the BBC Scotland Gaelic material, for example, had its own public search archive such that material could be sourced by community groups and agencies interested in their own cultural archive heritage, and that this material could then be moved forward for digitization to meet the needs of an appropriate community project. Mairead explained that this was interesting. The BBC has no public access archive search facility but what was being prioritised by the project was that material that was not yet digitized by the BBC.

One of the current challenges for a contemporary digitization project is the issue of copyright. The demands on project workers to source and gain appropriate copyright clearance long after the works had been 'gifted' are considerable, although the process lends itself to 'adding value' through deeper social contact in the community. Public funded projects such as *Tobar an Dualchais* are bound by strict codes of research ethics, conventions and the law. These requirements arguably place these projects in a different position from 'volunteer' activity of local historical societies for example. Although Mairead did not expand much more on these matters it does raise an interesting area for further discussion in terms of how community resources are managed in keeping with research ethics and legalities. [Communication from RB developed this point further: "It does - but it shouldn't. The Oral History website, for example, shows the sort of permission form a collector should get an informant to sign up to before beginning recording. The School of Scottish Studies ethnology course make their undergraduates aware of this ethical necessity and it is a big issue elsewhere e.g. in the Arctic and Canadian North. While recognising the ethical principles, however, many oral historians in Scotland recognise that such formalities can have a detrimental inhibiting effect."]

A second challenge Mairead raised with the workshop audience was the issue of complexity. The project has developed its own categorization tool and each item is categorised using 30 fields. The potential of the data, and that not least in a convergence media age we are now increasingly aware of how such material can be endlessly cross-referenced, is immense. Nonetheless the point is again well-made that the range of end-users may seek different interactions with the material and for some audiences there is work to be done with packaging the material in user-friendly formats. Furthermore, there has been some attempt to avoid having cataloguers getting 'bogged down; with the archive's coding complexity and the need to reassert the value of the material in terms of its wider socio-historical context is important and it is ultimately a project that seeks to build up a picture of the lives of the kind of people the archives derive from.

A series of visual archival material recordings were shown by Mairead as representative of the visual materials being currently processed and these ranged from pictures of the women waulking tweed (a traditional movement of hand softening the tweed by pounding it on a hard surface usually in time to songs and Gaelic mouth music), in the Uists, to images of travelling folk. Bill Innes asked if the project had any plans to deal with written material, for example, Gaelic poetry. Mairead said that not at this stage although it was conceivable that a next phase would examine this possibility.

Finally, Mairead played a number sound recordings that included Stanley Robertson of the Scotland's travelling folk talking about 'telling stories' and in this wonderful extract the nuanced richness of people's own account of their heritage was brought alive for the group. Furthermore, the reference by Stanley to the fact that he may well change the names of people in his story but he would never change the names of places was the epitome of how real accounts may sit quite differently to perceptions of oral tradition, where there is an expectation that the material is handed on in a 'sanctified form' but actually it is in "the telling and retelling" that the oral tradition heritage is made. On listening to a Gaelic recording from Tiree the discussion moved to consider how the Gaelic language itself was shifting to a more 'standardised' form and there was a palpable sense of dialect and regionality being lost over time.

This led to Bill Innes raising the valid and welcomed comment that it is in the recording of today that we hold the history of tomorrow and that it is the capturing of the local nuances that the language's richness is experienced. Bill suggested that there was a need to record as much of the regional accents of Gaelic today, the distinctive idiomatic *bardachd* (poetry) of the discrete districts of South Uist, for example. The extent to which the island communities are experiencing any change in the regionalism of Gaelic was mused upon and these comments invite further reflection.

### **1.3.2 Oral Tradition: Local History Knowledge Presenter:** Donald MacNeil, on behalf of Effie MacMillan, *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas, (CEUD)*

Effie MacMillan, Secretary of the Kildonan Museum<sup>iii</sup> who had kindly agreed to deliver a presentation on behalf of the society and museum was unable to attend. Donald MacNeil, Chair of *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas (CEUD)*, and as such the chair of the committee, presented on behalf of Effie and *(CEUD)*. Donald provided the group with an informal but most useful summary of the Kildonan Museum collection's history. The museum collection, Donald explained, is the legacy of the actions and early foresight by the local priest Father, later Canon, Morrison in the 1950s. The museum collection began its life, as it were, housed in a thatched cottage in lochdar, a township at the north end of South Uist. As the way of life in the islands was subject to increasing change, Father John Morrison made a decision to protect and conserve elements of the cultural and social heritage of South Uist in the face of modern pressures, not least the coming of the RA Range Hebrides to Uist in the 1950s.

When the thatched cottage building in Iochdar that had up to then housed the collection was no longer fit for the purpose of storing the items, the decision was taken to offer the collection to *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas, CEID*, the South Uist Historical Society. Led by key individuals such as Effie MacMillan, the committee worked hard to both conserve Canon Morrison's collection and to create an appropriate space for the archive to be displayed alongside the considerable collection of artefacts and materials already held in trust for the community by the *Comunn* itself. On the closure of Kildonan School as an actual working school the building was leased to the *Comunn* and the museum materials were moved from a small 'portacabin' nearby into the main school building. The museum forms part of a partnership agreement for the use of the buildings as the Kildonan centre which includes a Feis room, a café, and an arts and crafts shop. The museum itself has full accreditation by the *Scottish Museums Council*.

In 2004 the museum space was developed, leading not least to the creation of new space. This research room is where photographic archives and documents relating to the island's social history and materials useful to genealogical research are stored. The space also provides a further exhibition area. Because Mrs Effie MacMillan had been unable to attend the event due to a family funeral, Dana MacPhee, who would also facilitate later sessions, kindly delivered some of the material that Effie has hoped to share with the workshop. The material was an example of the many sound recordings held by the *Comunn*. Dana played us the tape, and in this very act of sharing a lively conversation sprung up around who was on the tape, and here there were some memory 'corrections' and cross-checks! The tape itself presented a perfect example again of the highly raw nature of oral tradition in practice.

### **1.3.3 Oral Tradition as Local Resource and Knowledge Group Discussion**

The tape Dana played from the CEUD collection demonstrated to the workshop how oral tradition archiving is a challenging but rewarding business. Each of the participants in the workshop had first had experience of oral recording but the playing of the tape was a useful reminder of what is involved, and was a 'tool' for the group discussion that ensued. A number of points are noted here. Dana MacPhee noted how the taped recording presents a tangible example of the complexity of oral record; the tape content reveals how the exchange is less of an 'oral history' interview and how it is much more of a conversation, - as Dana puts it an 'undisciplined chat'.

The tape represented an example of the two things that had already been highlighted in the morning's session that is that whilst it is clear that any recording of oral tradition is an act to 'capture recollections', it is also an opportunity for a 'social get together'. There was something very agreeable about listening to the raw conversation; aspects of the tape. Several voices are held at once, people stop and start conversations, the older interviewees have voices that are often 'worn' and the dialogue is often indistinct. Also, there is much laughter, social interactions and non-verbal cues that can be assumed from the tape and yet how far any interpretation of the record as a text can go is limited by the media format of an oral record. It reinforces how the record of oral tradition may require to be documented by more than one means, however.

Bill Innes agreed that the recording did indeed demonstrate how complex the oral tradition record as text can be. He returned the group discussion to a focus on how important the issue is as to "what purpose archives serve"? As Bill notes "for the ordinary layman or laywoman ... that ... is not terribly useful" given that most archive recordings tend to be of older people whose own voices have physically deteriorated and each has developed particular nuanced speech, there is a problem with the quality of such an account for the purposes of 'record'.

Bill makes the suggestion to the group that such recordings as held by CEUD could be processed for wider use, using professional people to re-record the material and have it cleaned up'. This returned the discussion to an earlier exchange that Bill and Mairead had shared where the point had been raised about how to deliver the *Tobar an Dualchais* material; the key point being raised was that much of it may need to be 're-packaged' for audiences. It was suggested that certain audiences may we have a 'low boredom threshold' and to give the material back to the community, never mind a wider public, in any 'useful' fashion, the material may need to be 'edited, cleaned up and even re-recorded for it to be useful to certain listeners. How this might develop, not least through the *Tobar an Dualchais* project presents a focused concern that could be detailed over time. It presents as a broader theme for oral tradition archives in the community generally, but more particularly for the islands.

Ray Burnett followed on from the point of material being available to the community already by cross-referencing with what we had just heard from CEUD's collection to that which may be held by the BBC and developed his earlier point regarding the nature of how the BBC's material was made accessible to organisations; in short it would be incredibly useful for organisations such as local historical societies like the *Comunn Eachdraidh* to know what the BBC hold such that they could then make a request to either access this material or have it reformatted for a wider consumption, not least through the *Tobar an Dualchais* project, for example. Mairead was hopeful that some of the South Uist material that Ray referred to may well be contained in the 4000 hours that the project was accessing from the BBC. Of course what was useful about this material is that it "will be of broadcast quality" which was to be welcomed given the previous discussion points regarding quality and audience just raised. This issue of how larger public funded institutions such as the BBC make material available to a wider public presents an interesting avenue for possible further research at a local level but one that also invites collaboration with HEI partners with a media focus, for example.

The discussion moved from issues of the quality of the material to then examining the management and institutional support for local archives in the community. Bill Innes made the point that the South Uist collection in Kildonan was without question the best in the Western Isles and yet there remained the thorny issue of staffing such a building and having dedicated museum expertise on site: "what's the chance of there being a museum office being based here all the time'?



Donald MacNeil responded that the issue is one of funding and the museum's committee, CEUD, had tried repeatedly to get staff funded but it had proved very difficult. Whilst there was less problem get capital funds for buildings, for example, there was a real difficulty in securing money to pay staff. Bill spoke for several in the room when he raised the issue of required staff dedicated to the annotation of the catalogue, not least the photographic collection, for example. Such material need to have dedicated staff working with it to capture the knowledge before it disappears. Catriona Muir from *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla* made the point that there is often money for an initial start up but the pressure on a voluntary organisation to sustain a job is difficult. One issue then examined by the group was the nature of the status of 'heritage and culture', with the perception being examined that there appears to be funding provided more readily for arts but not for museums and 'heritage'.

Funding was a core theme throughout the day's sessions.

It is a difficult area for no two cultural resource organisations are the same and there is a degree of tension between the community organisations, the local authority but also the perceived lack of support from local enterprise agencies. By way of illustration, there was a particular set of comparisons made between the Kildonan museum situation, itself a clear success, and the often more publicly profiled success of the arts and museum centre enterprise Taigh Chearsabhagh, in North Uist. Furthermore, whilst the Kildonan Museum is run and staffed entirely on a voluntary basis, although it has had support and commitment from the local museums officer over the years, Taigh Chearsabhagh are able to employ a number of people and operate in as a employer on quite a different scale. But it was countered by several in the group that there are differences in terms of the institution and its remit. Catriona Muir noted this was perhaps cause for celebration and that “long live the difference” for the Comunn Eachdraidh are by their nature particular entities that should be valued in their own right. Care should be taken that the distinction is retained as to what constitutes a Comunn Eachdraidh and what constitutes ‘a museum’. Nonetheless in a local small community context these differences create some difficulty in terms of a unified policy to both manage and direct cultural policy and need in a wider socio-economic and political context.

Ray Burnett expressed the view that funding is indeed a core issue but it is perhaps less the failure of the Museum nan Eilean service than a wider concern with how local authorities’ services are handled in general. In short, the power for much of the decision relating to funding lies with the elected representatives themselves. Furthermore despite considerable ‘lip service’ paid to the issue of culture and heritage in the islands; the local authority *Comhairle nan Eilean Siar* is the only Scottish Local authority without a dedicated archivist, for example. Why is this so? History has shown that it is clear that the arts and culture are deemed soft targets for funding cuts. Given, as Bill Innes interjected, that the local authority has a major stated commitment to tourism as a mainstay for development, it was discussed in the session that it was problematic in the least that *Comhairle nan Eilean Siar* appears so unwilling to consistently deliver on cultural heritage funding at a grass roots level.

#### **1.3.4 Oral Resources of the Community: Music and Song**

Ceòlas were due to present to the workshop but unfortunately no one was able to attend on behalf of this organisation.

As we paused a little to take on board some of the general observations of the islands rich legacy well documented elsewhere, Donald MacNeil provided the group with a return to the local nuances of the workshop’s attentions when he detailed his own boyhood memory of helping to push the bike of ‘Professor’ Craig (K.C. Craig) who had frequented South Uist, as so many other scholars had before and would after him, to record the oral tradition of verse and song. The group was given an insight as to how an oral tradition collector, Professor Craig, an academic from a ‘different age’ would go about his business of documenting the islands’ rich oral tradition.

Donald recounted a story about how technology for recording oral tradition was actually managed within the local environment and setting. Using an old wax cylinder recorder, placed in a heavy box, a bike was used to transport this box up and down the townships. The technology was large and cumbersome and its transportation and use required physical assistance. Not easy to be discreet about, for example! As a young man Donald had assisted K.C. Craig in taking one of the sound recorders up by bike to various houses. The physical demand placed on the incoming archivist to seek local help could be said to have framed the nature of the academic practice that took place. Current technologies can be operated by an individual quickly and are of course highly portable as well as less ‘visible’. Investigators can come and go far less conspicuously than in previous decades although, perhaps, not entirely unnoticed.

### 1.3.5 Oral Resources of the Community: Bardachd Presenter: Bill Innes

Bill began his presentation to the group with a reference back to Mairead's talk on the *Tobar an Dualchais* project and how this represented a 'wonder gift' and yet it was arguably 40 years too late and Bill went on to pose the question as to just what is the point of 'keeping Gaelic alive?' If, as Bill suggested, the aim is to have a living, breathing language, then a key objective for the language is to access a people's oral tradition such as Gaelic. It is only by speaking, hearing, singing and reciting Gaelic that the tradition stays alive and without this tradition the language dies because "no-one can appreciate it off the printed page".



Bill offered the group the observation that it was his own impression that universities - academics - may prefer for the language to 'die out' if only because it then offers "a finite resource" for academics to study; the challenge is for the academics researching Gaelic to respond to the changes in the language and the oral culture. Reminding us that the wealth of the islands cultural resource is well known, Bill referred to the widespread belief amongst ethnologists and folk tradition academics of the earlier centuries that South Uist (including Benbecula and Eriskay) was a treasure trove of oral culture: "Despite widespread poverty, there was a vibrant spirit of community cooperation and a richness of Gaelic oral culture which made the island a gold mine for folklore collectors. Irish folklore scholar James Delargy hailed this storehouse as one of the most important in Western Europe." <sup>iv</sup>

But, despite this historical appreciation of Gaelic and its oral legacy, the crux of the current situation appears to be that the people of the islands do not themselves appreciate this wealth as much as they might do. The group considered this point. Bill reiterated the point that it is unfortunate that 'the people of Uist do not always realise what a wonderful store there is in the islands'. This store continues to offer a 'rich wealth' from the position of cultural tradition and symbolic identity but it is also of value even if "it was only to make good on it in economic terms".

Bill then proceeded to provide us with an insight to the local *bardachd* of South Uist and the middle district in particular. Bill explained to the group that Uist and parts of South Uist in particular are rich with the legacy of 'classically trained' Gaelic bards. This legacy is within living memory and in the late twentieth century 'that richness continues' and yet there is a clear change and decline in the nature and practice of *bardachd*. Bill proceeded to show us a number of stills documenting aspects of the *bardachd* tradition in South Uist especially, and the middle districts particularly. Bill was keen to stress that the poetry has a richness and a complexity that is both distinct and wonderful. In the workshop sessions later Bill would return to this theme of *bardachd* possessing this singular feature of complexity delivered through a concentration of thought (24.19).

In Bill's view the idea of 'proper' *bardachd* is that capacity to deliver a 'deep' commentary that was both locally derived and yet clearly international in its resonance. Examples provided by Bill illustrated how the *bardachd* tradition positioned the local, the islands of Eriskay, South Uist, and so on, as being integrated with, and aware of, global events and international agenda. Again by illustration Bill provided us with some brief extracts of poetry and through several examples he

demonstrated to the group how *bardachd* is itself a symbolic motif of the Gaidhealtachd's capacity for global awareness as well as a projecting of a truly internationalist voice. And yet Bill also spoke of the particularities of language and its mapping to cultural, social and geographic specificities. The very nuanced aspect of language as place and people specific was alluded to as he spoke with reference to example of the importance of blás (taste or flavour), where it is this highly localised idiom of either South Uist Gaelic or Ness Gaelic that is so integral to the telling of a poem or story.

#### FILM CLIP DISCUSSION POINT (\*)

In terms of how documentary archives tell an important story but a selective or particular one at that was very poignantly revealed in the account Bill gave of the stills relating to the birthplace of Duncan MacDonald (d.1934) himself a well-renowned bard and Duncan's brother Neil, who in Bill's words, 'knew just as much' but was never publicly recognised by the folk collectors or by history. This insight into how a more 'official academic' legacy of oral tradition collecting can be at odds with the local knowledge of a place and its people is an important theme to note and formed the basis for later discussion.

What has changed, according to Bill is the capacity for both new Gaelic poets and importantly their audiences to engage with vocabulary. The language of Gaelic has changed considerably and the rapid constriction of the language's own vocabulary and classic learning capacity is, in his view, is deeply problematic in terms of the future of *bardachd*. Later the discussion would re-examine this issue of what the community can offer now in terms of the Bard tradition. In light to bringing Bill's knowledge to bear on current community concerns, including a focus on the youth and their future, Ray Burnett asked Bill how would school children in Uist today engage with such poetry and in response Bill surmised that, in his view, they would struggle with the nature of poetry's composition; its traditional style would present a challenge to school children now as they are by and large no longer taught this 'classic form'. There was also wider discussion on the internationalism of the poets and their exchange with other Scottish poets through the ages, as well as more recent times. Examples discussed included the cross-referencing of seventeenth century Scots love poetry and how Burns himself was greatly influenced by the Gaelic tradition. Comments on how more recently, twentieth century poets such as Sorley MacLean continue in this tradition of 'internationalism'. Later in workshop three, Professor Murdo Macdonald would detail the historical cross-currents of European visual influences in relation to art of the highlands and islands. Bill's talk in this workshop one was already revealing how broader synergies are at play: cultural resources – archives, tangible and intangible heritage – operate in an imagined and inter-textualised space. This matrix of cultural knowledge and practice again presents challenges even at the small scale end of management. As Mairead had already demonstrated, even a substantially funded and multi-partner research project such as *Tobar an Dualchais*, has had to deal with considerable 'headaches' over its remit and how it might manage and prioritise in face of wider community interests and demands.

Bill finished his talk and exploration of the *bardachd* by referring back once again to local South Uist man Donald MacDonald who died in the year 2000 and whose work he had drawn on to underline his argument as to the rich idiomatic 'voice' of distinct district and township *bardachd*. A couple of still photographs from Bill's own collection provided a basis for wider reflection and comment on Donald MacDonald's own life and contribution to the tradition and the community but his passing also marks a more symbolic shift from one era to another. Bill's research on the *bardachd* tradition is extensive and ongoing and his own local knowledge contextualised as it is by considerable scholarship provides a critical link to this passing tradition and that which is emerging today both in the islands and further a field in Glasgow, Edinburgh and elsewhere.

### 1.3.6 Oral Resources of the Community: People and Place (Disc 2: cue 32 mins)

**Presenter:** Catriona Muir, *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla*

Catriona began her talk by explaining that lots of people get into *Comunn Eachdraidh* (local history societies) for lots of different reasons. Some people are into genealogy or a degree of 'ancestor worship' and, in Catriona's view it is often the case that they are less interested in that that does not have any particular relevance to their own family or history which is unfortunate. Local historical societies or *Comunn Eachdraidh* are about more than just 'ancestor worship' and she explained that her own talk would hopefully give some insight into some of the wider issues that inform or underpin people involved in *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla* (<http://www.benbeculahistorysociety.co.uk/index.htm>). In her own case of being involved in local history, it was one man's story that got her 'into it'. Catriona, herself from Benbecula, understood not least what the story of one man represents in terms of the inherent value of the *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla*, and organisations like it. By investigating and disseminating one man's story as it can be uncovered through the work and activity of a *Comunn Eachdraidh* it is possible to see more clearly what such an organisation can do for its community and what a resource it can create to be shared in a wider quest for knowledge and the recording of historical truth.

Catriona explained to us how a *Comunn Eachdraidh* should be about remembering our own people; "it is about these people and such and such; and about a way of life all those years ago ..." Through examining the life of one man through the resources developed via local historical research and connections Catriona provided for the group a very personal account of how individual lives are located into communities and their social and economic realities.

Her description of Seannaidh Ceit Eilidh, born in 1898, as first of all illegitimate, a small 'wee stocky' man but also 'according to folk tradition, a bit of a fighter' was shared with the group. Catriona illustrated her talk with photographs of the man himself but also of 'his place and his people'. Catriona provided us with several photographic stills of the crofts and township where Seannaidh Ceit Eilidh had lived and through her references to him and other accounts from the place we were given a rich insight into how the *Comunn Eachdraidh* in Benbecula provides an important framework for ordinary people to share knowledge on, discuss and research further their own history. Catriona described how she had been given a photograph of a man without a name but had been intrigued to piece together more and more of the man's story and it was through her own research in association with the *Comunn Eachdraidh* that the history of the man and his connections unfolded and a more known account was made possible. In addition to the detail of Seannaidh Ceit Eilidh's story Catriona moved to some broader themes that relate to the role and nature of a local historical society in a place like Uist today.

Firstly, a key question to explore was the future for *Comunn Eachdraidh* in terms of new technologies such as the internet and digitization simply, if individuals can access the resources from beyond the place and online is there a need for *Comunn Eachdraidh*? Catriona's view, and as wonderfully illustrated in her own talk, was that the resources in themselves have to be brought alive through the knowledge of the people in the place and to have an archival artefact such as photograph or a recording is only part of the story (32.44 -36.00 mins). Catriona referred to the wider discussion points already noted for the workshop and made some comment regarding the issues of access and management of community archive resources.

The opportunity for photographs to be identified and circulated through a network of individuals presents useful machinery for preserving and enhancing local knowledge. The wealth of this is known by those who already involve themselves in *Comunn Eachdraidh*. There relationship between voluntary organisations and the local authority was discussed, and one

question that might be worth examining over time is how this might be more fruitfully developed. The society has a growing collection of photographs, maps and documents relating to the people and places of Benbecula, as well as oral recordings, and the management these materials raise questions for the society in terms of ownership and access, but also storage and funding. Later the discussion returned to this point and the important spectre of funding was raised and the challenges that face a small community organisation such as a *Comunn Eachdraidh*. Specifically there are concerns that much of the funding is 'project based' and this presents a challenge to small scale and remote community organisations such as the *Comunn Eachdraidh*., and it should be noted that Catriona's concerns were returned to in the group discussion later (for example, section 1.3.7).

In the context of the new community ownership status it was interesting to reflect on how history was in the making as through Catriona's archival materials we could identify where built and natural resource that was once taken for granted to be part of an Estate history such as the development of roads from track at Muir or Aird, or of the breaking open of quarries locally in Dun Gannachie to supplement income, (cue 44.49 mins) large parts of the landscape now belong to the community in principle and over time a new historical account will be developed in relation to how this relationship will unfold both symbolically and in terms of material changes and developments.

On a related but slightly different tack Catriona used her talk as an opportunity detail how the role of media technology such as photographs remain a crucial tool for interrogating the history and 'story of a place'. In particular Catriona brought to our attention the highly nuanced nature of landscape over as it changes and reforms over time. The example was given of how names for places change and are lost as well as given anew. There is a direct role for the *Comunn Eachdraidh* to document this landscape, not least in terms of Gaelic names that are at risk of being lost:

FILM CLIP DISCUSSION POINT (cue 40.33 mins)  
(The Colonel's house and the view to St. Kilda).

In reference to the landscape of the loch that is so central to the township, there is a clear sedimentation of historical data here and the various interpretations on the name of the island are open to debate and further research. In the discussion Catriona opened up to the group her own 'take' on the island and its name and a cross-referencing opportunity from within Uist using memory and knowledge as held today was possible and yet this very act revealed how ephemeral and complex such a process is. Further examples followed.

Viewing Catriona's presentation and her own reflections on some of the issues already raised by the day's discussions was a rich experience for the group. The exercise of bringing the *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla* archive materials and, importantly the knowledge that derives from them, neatly illustrated the simple advantage of how collective examination of an archival resource and the opportunity to establish the detailed facts over, for example, a single small island site can potentially generate a huge amount of documented fact as well as narrative in its name. A number of opportunities for cross-collaboration and exchange arose within the session as well as suggestions for future synergy, not least the perennial problem of how to resolve ethical issues over the ownership and custody of oral recordings for example (cue 46 mins). Implicit in the debate over how resources are held in trust is the question of power and who operates as an agent of power and in what role for both the resource and the individual or collective to whom it may be attributed.

It is this richness that perhaps poses one particular challenge to the community at large as it continues to come to terms with how cultural heritage is recorded, managed and accessed both now and in the future.

### 1.3.7 Cultural Archives: as resource, research and revival? **Group Discussion:**

#### **Chaired by Mairead MacDonald**

Mairead led the discussion by drawing together the morning's sessions and the suggestion that archival materials are of crucial value but it is the people and their engagement with the materials that is perhaps of singular importance and this was then picked up by Bill Innes whereby the group considered how it is that you can get a community to value its culture:

FILM CLIP DISCUSSION POINT (49 MINS) 'People are at the core of everything'

Kathryn (PI) interjected that a real challenge was to develop the valuing of cultural resource in 'organic' and not in artificial terms. In a small community such as Benbecula, or South Uist, the pressure on sustaining voluntary involvement with cultural resources is considerable. The population is declining and as with society more generally people are living increasingly privatised lives. Although mechanisms may be put in place to try to facilitate greater community involvement evidence would suggest that a slow but steady approach trend towards increased engagement with the resource may be more likely. Mairead suggested that it is so often the case that it is only when a thing is most obviously nearly lost is it most valued but it is important to consider the positive steps that have taken place to secure the cultural heritage of the community and make good on it.

Nonetheless history and institutions have played their part in how this relationship has developed. Bill commented on the somewhat problematic relationship in previous times between the community its resource and the universities, for example the discussion considered the contentious issue of copyright and how this has been used in previous times to exercise a degree of control over recorded resources, more especially the oral tradition, and some institutions and individuals within universities had in effect prevented the resource from being 'returned back to the community'. A project such as *Tobar an Dualchais* was most welcome but arguably 40 years too late, and furthermore, despite all of its wonderful and welcome elements there remains the problem of involving certain sectors of the community in discussion and experience of a resource in digital form. The issues of access was further examined in terms of the existing institutional resource of the community school's library with its impressive collection of Gaelic and local historical material, and yet this is a resource largely untouched. Questions should be raised more generally as to how these materials might be developed within projects such that the rich wealth of knowledge and artefact might be engaged with more widely.

The discussion then turned to reflect on how so much of the cultural resource funding is project based and this in itself was viewed as limiting (104 mins). The alternative is of course for the resource to be economically viable in a more strictly profit generating mode, although the group spent less time viewing this at this stage these thoughts were returned to in later workshops. Comparisons were drawn with Orkney and its apparent success with cultural tourism and the apparently well developed approach it takes to preservation and promotion of the historical landscape. The wheelhouse at Kilpheder in South Uist was mentioned by Gilbert (105 mins), and the group explored its fate in relation to that of Skara Brae, Orkney. The islands of South Uist and Benbecula already have a good relationship with Sheffield University in respect of long running archaeological research and work in the area (107 mins). The work done by Sheffield is clear excellent and welcome in broad terms and yet the extent to which this research is dove-tailed

with other historical and cultural research and agenda is an areas for further exploration, perhaps.

Given that a key theme throughout has been the important of oral testimony and the people at the centre of the landscape, any possibility for a greater synergy between a known people's history with that of artefacts such as ruins and finds was something the group all viewed as worth developing over time. Based on the group's discussion the relationship between archaeological sites, cultural tourism and access would be a further concrete set of concerns to be examined in more detail at a later stage.

This session returned back to an important theme already touched upon throughout the morning, namely how the future of Gaelic and its oral tradition might be ensured and enhanced. A number of points emerged here but two are of note here. First, the relationship between the islands and the Gaelic diaspora, specifically to the Scottish cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh, presented both challenges and opportunities for the island culture and its development. Broadly younger people of university age are educated away from home and little return. More specifically there are very few young people opting to develop specifically Gaelic related studies and scholarship and this is in contrast to previous decades. These demographics could be examined further and a research particular focus developed here.

Secondly, the group shared a number of opinions on the way in which Gaelic and its oral tradition has both gained and lost value and the issue of 'cultural confidence'. The legacy of the past, where children were stopped or indeed punished for using Gaelic is less distant that some had realised (1.13 mins); the generations of young Gaels in the 60s 70s and 80s struggled in a broader social milieu where Gaelic was not broadly supported nor valued whereas generations of Gaels who grew up in the 90s and today appear to be more confident in their own identity and capable of more positive development of their Gaelic tradition. Music is one example of where the younger Gaelic generation has appeared to flourish and here is one particular arena where research and community cultural heritage might serve each other well and this theme is returned to later in the session (1.21 mins).

The anecdote Mairead MacDonald shared with the group regarding her early days of learning to drive offered a particular useful metaphor for the discussions, where as a young Gael Mairead noted that "she was used to giving up my way on the main road" (1.16 mins), and a funny but poignant illustration of how attitudes have been but may be subject to change.

#### FILM CLIP DISCUSSION POINT (1.16 mins)

Problems do remain within the community in terms of attitudes and agency, however. The group debated how Gaelic medium teaching has both its strengths and weaknesses (1.17 mins). Furthermore, the wider relationship between education and historical legacy or heritage was examined. The wider Scottish concerns over how, and to what extent, Scottish history is taught in Schools, not to mention Gaelic history, were reflected upon and the group agreed that these structural problems have considerable reach to the remote island communities of Uist and its neighbours.

## 1.4 Afternoon session: Exploring Synergies: Knowledge Transfer of Cultural Resource

### 1.4.1 Knowledge Transfer: an Overview from the Arts and Humanities Presenter Kathryn A. Burnett, University of the West of Scotland, (formerly University of Paisley).

What is Knowledge Transfer?<sup>v</sup> The term is used widely in many contexts but for the purposes of this research project it is useful to draw on the position set out by the AHRC itself. It has been well established that arts and the humanities have the potential to contribute greatly to the economic, social and cultural spheres of society. In response to this goal the AHRC has set out a number of goals that include ensuring that the knowledge and understanding generated by arts and humanities research is widely disseminated and that a knowledge transfer (KT) plan, underpinned by a broad definition of knowledge transfer is developed. This plan will endeavour to exploit fully the new knowledge and learning that are generated in higher education institutions such that they have to be applied to areas of life where they can make a difference.

One aspect of this is to develop knowledge transfer with a business and economic focus, as well as knowledge interaction with other audiences, including the public and voluntary sectors. This broader definition thus encompasses public engagement and understanding. The AHRC state that such a deliberately wide-ranging focus 'allows, for example, knowledge interaction with the museums and galleries and heritage sectors to be captured' as well as 'research that informs public policy and the enhancement of civil society'. Furthermore, the potential for knowledge transfer in high-quality content as derived from arts and humanities research for print, film, digital and broadcasting media is considerable and would include knowledge transfer experienced through the research of and dissemination by contemporary exhibitions and performances. The AHRC has set out a Knowledge Transfer Plan and the (PI) detailed some aspects of the scheme here:

#### AHRC Knowledge Transfer Plan<sup>vi</sup>

- Engage with the creative industries and support high quality research to underpin their expansion;
- Establish an integrated research strategy for museums and galleries, to increase the amount of high quality research supporting special exhibitions, redisplay and conservation, and to ensure that cultural policy research benefits from the input of the museums and galleries sector;
- Develop new schemes to support knowledge transfer activities;
- Ensure that our existing schemes maximise their knowledge transfer potential;
- Develop strategic partnerships to promote the interests of arts and humanities research and its value to our social, economic and cultural life.

### 1.4.2 Knowledge Transfer of Cultural Resource Contribution by Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, Research Officer, Carmichael Watson Project, University of Edinburgh

Unable to attend due to personal reasons. Apologies recorded.

## 1.5 Tangible and Intangible Heritage: Island Cultural Resources

A key theme for the workshops overall was the interplay locally between an appreciation of the tangible and intangible heritage. The knowledge that is shared and exchanged locally and that

which is also developed and accessed via academia were issues examined through all three workshops but in the sessions that follow there was a particular focus on potential for research synergy in relation to local museum materials and the local archive resources. These materials and resources included both the tangible in the form of estate papers and pots, mill stones, for example, and the intangible in the form of oral memory, museum handling practice, and personal reflection. These elements were fruitfully brought together in a focussed session for discussion, on island cultural archives, research, and history and heritage practice. These sessions that follow here were engaging in the moment but they also provided the basis for several research project discussion that followed in the Workshops Two and Three.

### **1.5.1 Group Activity exploring *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas's Kildonan Museum*** **Collection Facilitator: Dana MacPhee, *Museum nan Eilean***

In this section of the workshop the group listened to Dana's own account of how she views the richness of local cultural heritage and oral tradition. Dana spoke of various projects and activities that as Museums Officer for the area she has a remit for. Dana demonstrated her own deep interest and commitment to the community's tangible and intangible cultural resource. The session that follows would require the group to move to the museum exhibition rooms and work in a more 'hands-on' fashion with some of the collection. The Kildonan Museum's collection of artefacts is held in trust and managed by the *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas*, CEUD, and the museum has a particularly good collection of grinding stones. By way of an example of how the collection can be accessed and developed within a focused interactive session, Dana brought to our attention the specific cultural heritage associated with the quern or grinding stones of the area. Later Dana would facilitate a hands-on activity of grinding barley with the quern stone and this is discussed further below. Dana's own observation of how the community currently demonstrates its own cultural confidence and pride in its heritage are worth noting here. In particular the children and young people of the community do have an interest and an enthusiasm for museum artefacts but it is important that they get the opportunity to interact with the materials in a way that is meaningful for them.

Two particular objects were examined by the group in some detail:

- Quern stone - a domestic stone artefact for hand grinding grains
- Dye-Pot - an iron pot for the boiling up and dyeing of wool using crotal (lichen)

### **1.5.2 Group Activity exploring *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas's Kildonan Museum*** **Collection Facilitator: Dana MacPhee, *Museum nan Eilean***

#### **Learning Focus One: Quern stone**

Through in the actual museum space, the group gathered around one of the collection's 'privileged' exhibits, namely three different stones for grinding cereals. The querns, both saddle and rotary types, are a type of milling stone and are particularly special to the collection not least because they figure as the best selection in the Western Isles if not beyond (31 mins Disc 3). Some derive from the original collection by Canon MacQueen, others were collected up over the years by *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas*. Dana detailed how it is that she works with children and young people in terms of getting a hands-on experience of the museum's artefacts. In the demonstration to the group Dana showed how the stone is accessed by having it presented in a particular way, and comment on how it is 'displayed' in relation to the museum collection in general. We are all encouraged to get 'hands-on'. The stones are heavy and the management of the stones, not least as the grinding activity that takes place demonstrates how the artefact is

representative of physical work but also in its transferred context to a museum the stone requires supervision, surveillance even, not least from a health and safety perspective. The display of artefacts such as this invite comment as to how best to balance the access to the material heritage in a public venue safely. Yet material heritage requires to be engaged with other wise it ceases to be meaningful both in terms of any original sense of the object's utility or expression as well as any new attribution or meaning.

The location of the stone in the museum is representative of a long and wide-ranging history of object, practice and knowledge as well as in the case of the grinding of corn and barely, of subsistence, trade and economics. The discussion explores the local position of the mills, especially Mingarry in South Uist, in the community and its economy and the group shared information on the history of both the local mills and the use of querns, and the fact that the quern stones (a relatively portable and domestic technology) were often broken to retain power with the mill (see 46.58 mins, for example).



FILM CLIP DISCUSSION POINT ( 37 mins)

Turning the Rotary Quern: Dana and Gilbert grinding corn.

By taking part in the session we the participants have an appreciation of how the stone can trigger a collective interaction, and invite comment as to its value both past and currently. Dan shared with the group (39 mins Disc 3) how young adults and school children have worked with the artefact to explore its mechanics, its history and the social relevance for the community, and she explained how taking a group of children to the mill site at Mingarry is rewarding for it presents them with a connection between the objects in the museum and the local area. Gilbert interjected that his own father had worked at the mil in Mingarry and then provided the group with further detail on the nature of the mill works and its social relevance, as well as demonstrating how the stones became smooth over time and were required to be 'roughened' or pitted by hand to effect the grinding process.

FILM CLIP DISCUSSION POINT (40.11 mins) Gilbert and Mingarry Mill

Gilbert and Dana lift the stone to see the underside and the pitted surface and comparisons are drawn with mainland sandstone that is easier worked and has a series of grooves. The local Uist stone is harder to work and a more roughened pitting is more appropriate. The group returned to examine the mechanism of the stone in terms of how the wooden parts are constructed to facilitate the hand-grinding; Catriona Muir was especially interested in this and the possibility of sharing this information with the local historical group in Harris who have a quern stone but were without the local knowledge to assemble it, and she hoped to share the information with them now; a small but nonetheless useful transfer of knowledge.

### **Learning Focus Two: Dye-Pot**

Dana brought the group's attention to another of the museum's artefacts and one that Effie, MacMillan, Secretary and founding member of *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas*, is especially keen to bring to greater prominence in the museum. The history of textiles in the area of South Uist, not least in relation to the sporting estate economy as it pertained to the islands of Benbecula, South Uist and Eriskay, is as yet something largely under-researched, and the knowledge of activities and stories of times past pertaining to the gathering, processing, use and selling of raw and processed materials such as thread, wool and tweed would befit a whole series of events and research dimensions in its own right.

Dana drew our attention to two large iron pots, one significantly larger than the other, that were representative of, if not actual, gifts to the households and communities in the area under the ownership and management of Lady Gordon Cathcart. The pots are large black and heavy, used for the boiling up of raw materials such as lichen (crotal in Gaelic) to dye wool. Positioned as they are below a framed image of Lady Gordon Cathcart the group reflected first on the pots as objects, and then the relationship between the artefacts and their benefactor, and what such a relationship signified. In Dana's view the pots suggest a positive step to encourage greater enterprise, perhaps even self-sufficiently within the communities. Later, historian, Ray Burnett, an expert on the archives and history of Lady Gordon Cathcart and her estate matters, would illustrate how this can be viewed a little differently (see below: **Learning Focus Three: Textile Production Memoranda**). A number of points arose from the discussions around the pots. Firstly, comparisons were drawn with objects held in museum collections in Canada and elsewhere where the emigrants (Gaelic diaspora) had taken with them various 'precious objects' as they set out to establish new lives elsewhere.

The group reflected again on the image hanging on the wall of the museum of Lady Gordon Cathcart and how little was known of her in these 'personal' terms; this was the only image that the group had seen of her and this began an interesting line in questions from a visual research position as to why this is so and what else may be available given further research focus; this has particular reference for the islands' estate paper archives and the two *Comunn Eachdraidh*.

Lastly, Donald MacNeil provided some fascinating insight into both the pots and the loom situated in the collection. He recounted his own mother's use of a dye-pot and how once the wool had been dyed it would be packed and sent on to the mainland whereupon no postage was required to be paid but one tenth of the weight of the wool would be retained by the mill in payment and the rest returned to the sender as thread. (58.12 mins).

The group spent some further time looking at some of the other exhibits and then returned to the workshop space in the Feis room next door, to continue with discussion and to hear a specifically developed link to the research undertaken by Ray Burnett in relation to the history of South Uist estate management and particularly Lady Gordon Cathcart.

### **Learning Focus Three: Textile Production Memoranda**

Ray (Disc 4) representing *SUBAT (South Uist and Barra Archive Trust)* had prepared some workshop materials from the archive's papers to link into Dana's hands-on session in the museum with the dye-pot and brought the group back to some broader contextual references on the management of the sporting estate and local archive documents that invited the group to debate the relationship and research potential for local oral tradition and the material culture.

Specifically, Ray presented an account of how one letter and a set of memorandum revealed details of how the wool and textile industry (known as the 'Homespun Industry') was developed and managed under Mrs Gordon, (later Lady Gordon Cathcart). In the workshop session the group was invited to explore the archive documents and information was revealed regarding the organisation or network of overseers, mainly women hand-picked from positions of relative status in the islands of South Uist, Barra and especially Benbecula, to manage and distribute work such as spinning, weaving and knitting to other local women.

Ray illustrated how the estate was of keen interest to the then Mrs Gordon on a number of counts, specifically (i) Grogarry Lodge, (ii) the Industrial School for Girls, now the old schoolhouse in Torlum, and (iii) the *Homespun Industry* as per the archive documents examined here and of course linking through to the material culture of the dye-pots that Dana had shown us earlier. The session generated a number of questions and Catriona Muir (10.40 mins Disc 4) suggested that more work could be done exploring the history of the *Homespun Industry* in Benbecula via both oral testimony and the documented archive evidence. There was clear consensus among the group, that a focus on the *Homespun Industry* and textile production for the islands would be most interesting and would serve a key objective of realigning both tangible and intangible heritage via the shared resources of oral testimony and legacy with archival resources and the museum artefacts.

## 1.6. Custodial Positions on Cultural Resource: Ownership, Stewardship & Management Group Discussion

The day finished by returning back to some of the questions introduced at the start of the day by Kathryn. These are detailed in the bullet list here:

- How do we think tangible and intangible aspects of this heritage 'connected'? How are they 'communicated'?
- What is known of how this relationship was understood in the past?
- What knowledge is available in relation to Archives and 'Oral Tradition'?
- How is this knowledge exchanged with others?
- e.g. Formal/Informal; Access/Language; Communication/Technologies
- How do we think these aspects are understood now?
- What of any future trends?
- How may the research potential as knowledge exchange of ICA here be taken forward?

Kathryn suggested that as the group sessions had already examined so much of this within the day it was important not to go over old ground but perhaps to look in some detail at a few of the points to finish would be useful. Dana MacPhee (20.26 mins) picked up on the theme of how tangible and intangible heritage is communicated via archive and artefacts and she suggested that as important and enjoyable it is to work with museum artefacts it is the living and spoken accounts of the material culture that can be so rewarding, and the link was made to the session in the morning by Bill Innes on the South Uist *bardachd* and how listening to poetry spoken and then linking this spoken text to the material 'artefact' culture is a rich combination for both the novice and expert studying the culture; as well as for both local and visitor alike. The group considered Bill's suggestion of exploring further how the use of poetry and oral recordings could be worked in with the museum artefacts in some future installation within the museum context. Donald returned to this suggestion later and further discussion would take place both at this and later workshops as to how the *Comunn Eachdraidh* based at Kildonan might seek to develop this further.

The group reflected on the 'waste' of resource when temporary exhibitions are developed but then materials are stored or lost as the exhibition makes way for new events. The group reflected on how some of these materials might be retained in some format for future reference. This is a theme that would resurface in workshop three relating to how visual legacies – archives and collections – are often not accessed as widely as they might.

The discussion moved to reflect on other resources that are arguably already archived but hard to access such as private television and radio productions. The group reflected again on how local organisations may wish to develop a more joined-up approach to local and national media organisations and secure a more productive relationship over time in respect of recordings and edits relating to the local area, its history and culture, not least the history of the future as it is recorded today.

Broadly, the group examined how the knowledge that already exists in the community could be better communicated using current technologies and there was much discussion on the role of publications, events and digital technologies such as the internet but also production of digital video (DVD) outputs. Bill (39.30 mins Disc 4) suggested that in addition to this better use could be made of television archives but importantly also the rich resource pertaining to radio, not least Gaelic radio content, and how that could be developed for wider access and audience. The group agreed that there was potential here for the *Comunn Eachdraidh* to raise within their membership and this is something that could perhaps be developed in partnership over time.

For *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla* there were concerns that it was more difficult to see what the society would get out of any longer term partnership with Higher Education Institutions, for example. The discussion turned to reflect on this and there were a number of contributions around the group as to what might be a positive take on the potential for synergy between *Comunn Eachdraidh* and universities such as Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, that which now serves the area from a local perspective via the University of the Highlands and Islands/Millennium Institute (UHI/MI) arrangement. There was some discussion as to the potential for developing learning materials locally and as collaboration between education providers as well as local historical societies. Emphasis might be given, to pick up on one of the points from Bill in the morning session, to explore what might be developed as 'new knowledge' and to consider how different audiences might be reached and for what purpose. This led to some discussion of the bullet point on Future Trends and Bill Innes, James Oliver, Ray Burnett and Catriona Muir each debated the trend that sees educators and research bodies as having to work more collaboratively with external and community centred bodies and organisations. Indeed the wider debate as to the added value of digitization was something that also presents opportunities for the cultural organisations in Uist but this would require considerable local debate as to how this might be best moved forward.

More problematic, the group agreed, was how the local structural agencies, can make good on their stated intentions to support and develop the cultural economy. There was some discussion as to the tensions between heritage, history and tourism, for example. The group shared their concerns over how funding opportunities were often opaquely defined and local realisation was often problematic. This would be theme the workshops would return to in September.

## 1.7 Close and Thanks

Kathryn Burnett (PI) thanked everyone for their time and valuable contributions, some brief insight was shared on the forthcoming next two workshops and invitations extended to the participants to be involved, in addition to those who already intended to attend.

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i This funeral of the oldest women on Benbecula, herself a valued oral tradition informant, was itself a reminder of the fragility of the tradition under discussion.

ii See <http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/dualchas/index.html>

iii See <http://www.kildonanmuseum.co.uk>

iv Bill Innes, (2006) *Old South Uist*, Stenlake, page 4.

v Within a modern, knowledge driven economy, knowledge transfer (KT) is about transferring good ideas, research results and skills between universities, other research organisations, business and the wider community to enable innovative new products and services to be developed. (Source: <http://campus.leeds.ac.uk/kt/faq.htm#1>).

vi Source: [http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/about/ke/knowledge/knowledge\\_transfer\\_strategy.asp](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/about/ke/knowledge/knowledge_transfer_strategy.asp)