

Island Cultural Archives: knowledge transfer opportunities in the Hebrides 2007-2008

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Overview of Workshop 2: Deserted Settlement
Thursday 13th September 2007

- 2.1 **Welcome and Introductions Kathryn A Burnett**, University of the West of Scotland, (formerly University of Paisley).
- 2.2 **Screenings from Workshop One: Oral Tradition Presenter: Tony Grace**, University of the West of Scotland, (formerly University of Paisley).
- 2.3 **The Settlement Story: who tells it and how? Group Discussion**
 - 2.3.1 **East Benbecula Settlements Presentation: *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla***
Presenter: Angus MacMillan East Benbecula Settlement: Genealogical Research
 - 2.3.2 **East Benbecula Settlements Presentation: *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla***
Presenter: Flora MacDonald East Benbecula Settlement: Meanish
 - 2.3.3 **The Settlement Story: who tells it and how? Group Discussion & Reflections**
- 2.4 **Landscape and Environment: Settlement Heritage Legacies Group Discussion**
- 2.5 **Afternoon session: Exploring Synergies: Knowledge Transfer of Cultural Resource**
 - 2.5.1 **Local Resources: South Uist Estates Collection: Settlement Legacies**
Presenter: Ray Burnett *Urras Tasglann Uibhist a Deas is Bharraigh /SUBAT*
 - 2.5.2 **Case Study: The East Side Story: Visual Essay: East Gerinish** Presenter: Tony Grace
University of the West of Scotland, (formerly University of Paisley).
 - 2.5.3 **Case Study: The East Side Story: The Archival Perspective: South Uist and Canna**
Ray Burnett, *Prodigia* in association with Magda Sagarzazu, *Archivist, NTS, Canna* and *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas*
- 2.6 **Close and Thanks**

2.1 Welcome and Introductions Kathryn A Burnett, University of the West of Scotland, (formerly University of Paisley).

The second workshop in the programme is one dedicated to the theme of 'Deserted Settlement'. This workshop follows on from the first event staged in August that had 'Oral Tradition' as its theme. Several people who had attended this first workshop returned to take part in the second event and these included, Dana MacPhee Museums Office for the area, Donald MacNeil, (Dòmhnall Nellie), Chair of *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist a Dheas, CEUD*, (South Uist Historical Society) and Effie MacMillan, Secretary of CEUD, who had been unable to join us in the first workshop due to a family funeral. Dr James Oliver attended in his capacity as a social researcher examining the role and status of Gaelic in the community today, a Leverhulme funded research project, University of Edinburgh. Ray Burnett, island historian and researcher who would deliver one of the presentations later in the day, attended as representative of the South Uist and Barra Archive Trust (SUBAT), an archive resource that consists of papers explicitly linked to the island's estate history. The estate papers are significant given the changeover of the old estate management to community ownership status. There is an implicit agenda arising within the islands generally and more specifically within the local historical societies, museums and archive groups as to what the records can provide by way of new knowledge as well as the conformation of already established fact in relation to the social history, management and aspirations of the area over time. The recent community buy-out company, Stòras Uibhist, is managed through a board of directors. One of the community-elected directors, Sarah MacEachan, kindly agreed to attend the workshop. Sarah thereby provided input from someone with hands-on involvement in the current new company and the recent buy out process but also, and importantly, from a young island Gael who continues to live and work locally, has undertaken several projects based on promotion and development of Gaelic culture and is currently employed by *Storlann*, the Gaelic agency that produces and publishes books and learning materials in Gaelic.

From the *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla* (Benbecula Historical Society), in addition to Catriona Muir who had attended and presented a session at the first workshop on oral tradition resources in relation to the *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla*, the group were delighted to have Angus MacMillan whose own island roots had led him to extensive genealogical research on the families of Benbecula and elsewhere. Angus would present some of his work to the group and has a long and well-developed relationship with the *Comunn Eachdraidh*. The workshop group was further complimented by the attendance and involvement of Flora MacDonald. Flora, of both Benbecula and North Uist lineage, would present a fascinating account of personal as well as researched accounts of her own childhood home at Meanish, in the area known as Nunton Hill, on the east side of Benbecula. The synergy here between other interests and experiences of the attendees would become all too clear as the morning session progressed. In addition to the PI, Kathryn Burnett, Tony Grace also from the University of West of Scotland (formerly Paisley) was present. Tony continued to film the workshop event and proceedings as he had done previously in workshop one.

2.2 Screenings from Workshop One: Oral Tradition Presenter: Tony Grace, University of the West of Scotland, (formerly University of Paisley)

The morning started with a brief introduction to the project and some reflections on the programme for the day by Kathryn. The group were then invited to view some of the discussion and exploration of the material culture via the hands-on sessions that had taken place in Workshop One. Tony Grace had edited a sort set of segments from the first workshop's film record and these were screened. At this stage the group were invited to reflect on some of the issues raised within the short segments of film and throughout the day discussions and issues raised in first event and questions raised and information shared in this event. Later the workshop programme would return back to this technique, more especially in the third event Workshop Three, examining visual legacies of the islands. The showing of the film was firstly an enjoyable experience. Participants who had been involved

in workshop one identified with the interesting points that had emerged from getting the group together in the museum and examining in a collective fashion the material there and the intangible knowledge that emerged from engagement with them.

Importantly, Effie MacMillan, who had been unable to attend workshop one, was presented with the group's activities in relation to the local historical societies collection of materials in the Kildonan Museum. Effie has played a pivotal role as Secretary of CEUD, in both preserving and championing the material culture, as well as its story, for the area. The screening of some aspects of the previous event provided a direct insight into who the previous workshop had run and the informality of the proceedings and provided a basis by which the group was able to continue in this manner for this next workshop day.

2.3 The Settlement Story: who tells it and how? Group Discussion

The programme stated that the theme for this initial discussion session of the day was to invite the group to explore the idea of a 'settlement story' and who tells the story and why? Before the group would hear the various individual presentations from the participants the PI took the opportunity to invite thoughts on the theme ore generally and Kathryn, as PI, connected the group to the previous workshop's discussion and the simple yet binding fact that for all the participants in that event the core value of archival resource and museum artefacts was the 'people's story' that could be told in relation to them or through them. This 'people factor' was suggested as something that had come through very strongly in workshop one with the implicit question: how much does this 'people's story' figure in any historical account of former island settlement?

Dana MacPhee agreed with this and when on to suggest that in terms of how a story is told one of the issues is: where you do start from? In relation to the local area there is established archaeological knowledge of the early prehistoric landscape and then there are large gaps, followed by later knowledge and records, further gaps, and then that which is more recent. The pattern of the knowledge, in other words, is sporadic and there is a challenge to fill the gaps. Furthermore, the story of settlement is therefore an unfolding one. Kathryn invited Catriona Muir, secretary of *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla* (Benbecula Historical Society) to comment on this. Catriona agreed that the gaps and the filling of the gaps from the point of a 'people's story' was indeed central to the role and work of a *Comunn Eachdraidh*. Catriona expanded on this by stating that if you are doing work on a township (crofting settlement) and produce something written then it has to have an appeal; not too much academic matter but more of a positioning of the people's story, For example by bringing in people's own lived experience such as the experiences of childhood, histories can be uncovered and shared more productively. The story of the settlement, from the point of view of a *Comunn Eachdraidh* is that it should always be from the people's perspective.

FILM DISCUSSION POINT (12:39 mins)

Catriona went on to demonstrate how the complimentary nature of knowledge can be so important such as that which would hopefully be given to the workshop by the following contributions of Angus and Flora. This returned the group to another key theme that had strongly emerged from the first workshop, namely that the sum is more than the parts.

Kathryn Burnett wondered to what extent the group viewed the telling of a settlement story as being required of any particular organisation? Sarah MacEachan offered the response that this would always be problematic as it would be difficult to get all the detail required from any single organisation. The group discussed and reflected on this for a moment. Sarah indicated that there are difficulties with what a community wants in terms of knowledge; : how far back do individuals or communities want to go to know the story or facts of a place and its people? From this observation the idea of filling the knowledge gap was returned to

and it was suggested again that without people's knowledge it was implicitly impossible for the gaps to be filled. Kathryn suggested that perhaps it was here that the complimentary role of different types of knowledge and information such as archives and documented records become so important. Dana agreed but pointed out that as with all the records they are selective, incomplete and only ever a translation of a past: ("None of us as time-lords"). Kathryn invited the discussion to turn to thinking about current records of community history and how these are sourced and secured. Participants were invited to view how today's experience compares with previous times in terms of the goal of securing a less patchy, more complete record. Catriona certainly viewed the use of technology today as being helpful; making the mechanics of recording oral history and documenting records far easier now.

FILM DISCUSSION POINT (18.50 mins) 'Everything has a story ... wealth of history'

Flora MacDonald drew the group's attention back to one of the issues that had been explored in the first workshop, and that is the issue of funds to produce and disseminate oral history and the stories of people and places. Kathryn asked the group if there was any view on what role Gaelic television played in this 'telling of the story'? The group shared some thoughts on this including the view from Catriona Muir that there are difficulties with how television will seek to position a story in a particular way and the version of history is not always how others may know it. Issues such as these would be returned to later and subsequently in Workshop Three: Visual Legacies. The session was brought to a close and the shift made to introduce in more detail the participants Angus MacMillan and Flora MacDonald who would each provide the group with their own view of how a settlement story can, and perhaps should, be told, using both archives and cultural heritage such as oral tradition and community knowledge.

2.3.1 East Benbecula Settlements Presentation: *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla* Presenter: Angus MacMillan East Benbecula Settlement: Genealogical Research

Angus began his talk by showing the group a map of the east side of Benbecula illustrating some of the now deserted settlements of that area and cross-referenced this information with that available in Ray Burnett's book on the history of Benbecula.ⁱ Angus referred the group to various documents that provide information on the 'story of' settlements such as where Flora grew up, and other places some of which have people living there today. Angus developed a theme of the 'waxing and waning' of settlements throughout his talk as both a settlement's purpose and fortunes change over time as result of socio-economic conditions but also again importantly, in the context of the group, the nuances of individuals' histories, Angus proceeded to trace this through several MacPherson families in particular and the linkages with wider Clan Ranald history such as the settlement at Rarinish and how a story circulates that suggests how and why MacPhersons settled here and that which can be understood from historical and more specifically genealogical research. As an aside, Angus highlighted how many of the 'tale telling' or bard families have some degree of association with the more remote reaches of the islands' settlement map (36.36 mins)..

Angus provided the group with a number of interesting examples of familial links and demonstrated how inter-island and mainland lineages develop. In the cases of townships regarded as relatively central to the settlement map of Benbecula today, Angus demonstrated how the settlement of places such as Craigastrone, Lidistrome and Uskevagh were all subject to change, not least because for much of history the settlements were viewed as highly peripheral to the wider sense of Benbecula community. Angus concluded his talk by summarising how the shift over time of the economic purpose from a pastoral focus to manufacturing industry such as kelp and later evidence of artisans such as the smith, Beaton, at Lidistrome, provide a narrative of settlement change and development. Similarly, a focus on the concept of 'incomer' families in historical terms can reveal interesting connections between settlement establishment and purpose and success or demise. The historical record is

clear and perhaps the oral memory even more so, the subsistence life that the people who settled in these parts over the last few centuries was not an easy one.

2.3.2 East Benbecula Settlements Presentation: *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla*
Presenter: Flora MacDonald East Benbecula Settlement: Meanish

Flora MacDonald knows the parts of the island that Angus spoke of well and Flora's own presentation provided a rich compliment to Angus's work on the genealogical mapping of the settlements from the east side of Benbecula. Flora's account of her own family's 'story of settlement' tracing her lineage from earlier times out in the Monach Isles and then North Uist. The family were required to make decisions to relocate and eventually the family was settled in Liniclate, Benbecula, this first Benbecula resident being Angus MacDonald and his sister Rachael 'of the songs'.

Flora talked of how some families were moved within the islands on the basis of religion, notably Protestant families settled in largely Catholic areas. A different kind of power could also work to dislocate families from places and by way of illustration Flora recounted the legend (her term) of the spirit child, a ghost, that had troubled the MacDonald household in Liniclate. Apparently, a stone had been lifted from a local graveyard to be used as a door lintel and as the stone had been taken from that part of the graveyard where children were buried it was unsurprisingly a small child that would visit itself upon the family. Not being able to withstand this attention, the family of her great-grandfather, moved out and resettled at Griminish.

Flora's account of how her great-grandfather had died relatively young leaving a young widow and family illustrated the human or personal aspect that lies behind the social demographic details of a place such as births, marriages and deaths, as Flora detailed how his widow was forced to move again to Uskevagh and how difficult social conditions were for women in such a position (44 - 46 mins)..

In these two elements of Flora's presentation the richness of island oral tradition in relation to the story of settlement is grasped. The organic, natural presence of the supernatural in the historical legacy as well as the matter of fact reality of poverty, hardship and victimisation, are each in themselves a basis for ongoing and future study and knowledge exchange in relation to archival records.

Flora moved to speak more particularly about her own father's story of settling his family, albeit for only a few years' at Meanish. In relation to Nunton Hill, Flora provided her own account of her father's attempt to secure land to settle on out at Meanish when the land became available for resettlement in the early 1920s. Meanish was one of seven crofts created on Nunton Hill at that time, the other smallholdings being at Rossinish, Rarnish and Scaraleod.

Education and the role of this in settlement history was then explored firstly by Flora's own recollections and then taken up more collectively by the group. Flora began by explaining how central schooling was to be both for her father, and his attempts to secure a sustainable community at Meanish, but also for Flora, and her own experience of the place and the opportunity schooling gave to her to connect with a wider world (52 mins). Flora's father had sought to establish a side school for the children, four in total, by making a plea to Inverness Country Council to provide a building and teacher for his own children and others nearby. There were no roads to the school on the other side of Benbecula at Torlum and the children were small and need to be providing with education locally. In 1947, Flora's father saw his wish granted and a 'side-school' was established at Meanish. A corrugated iron fabricated hut, was relocated from South Uist (Glendale) and brought to Meanish and placed on plot of decrofted land from her father's croft. In 1947 the school roll opened with four children, Flora,

her brother, and two others. Later her sister would come to swell the ranks to five (53.20 mins).

Aside from Flora's memories being shared with the group, itself a most rewarding experience for all, and the interplay of documentary evidence and personal testimony, Flora's story was of particular significance to the group gathered in this 'Deserted Settlement' workshop as Effie MacMillan, Secretary to CEUD, a retired teacher had been one of the teachers that had come to Meanish and taught the children including Flora. This connection between two of the workshop participants was particularly special and had come about through a series of pre-workshop discussions with the Commun Eachdraidh, and particular thanks to Catriona Muir for facilitating much of this bringing together of both Flora and Effie in the workshop event (Note: Catriona Muir, Effie MacMillan and Flora MacDonald pictured below).

Flora and Effie shared their knowledge and memories of the school, its establishment, the nature of the building and teaching there, and the wider implications such a school had for both Meanish and the communities nearby, most notably Effie's own home settlement of Uskevagh, where her father had a small shop that all the resettled families around the loch would visit by boat.



These shared accounts, coupled with the documents sourced by Flora such as letters and photographs allowed the group to piece together a picture of the place and its significance for the communities who had sought to establish themselves there in living memory. Unfortunately, the living at Meanish proved too difficult and after only five years the school closed, and the family moved again to a 'core' township on the more densely populated east side of Benbecula. Over time the other families on Nunton Hill made the same decision. From Nunton Hill, church, shops and other basic social and community amenities were only accessible by footpath or boat. History shows that the people were not considered important enough to support their choice of settlement. Apart from a side school, which itself was only intermittently staffed, there was a minimal provision of other services. In particular there was no road and without the latter and a degree of inward development in terms of infrastructure, over time the Nunton Hill families were forced to abandon the houses, byres, enclosures and boat slips they had built, the arable crop lands and peat banks they had reclaimed themselves on their hard-earned crofts and begin again elsewhere. The buildings can still be seen where Flora grew up but as of yet, no one has yet returned to make a home in Meanish, and locations like it (58 mins).

2.3.3 The Settlement Story: who tells it and how? Group Discussion & Reflections

In following on from many of the earlier discussion, the group turned to listen to Effie MacMillan give her account and personal recollections of living and working in the east side of Benbecula. Effie had been brought up in Uskevagh on Benbecula's east side, and the group was able to listen to her recollections of the place. Effie reiterated Flora's point that living there was not easy and the workshop would return to this theme later, and at this point the group's attention turned to the documents, including photographs that Flora had brought to share with the group, and Effie, (who had been Flora's teacher), especially.

Effie MacMillan had been the teacher who taught at Meanish 'side-school'. This point was not insignificant to the session's discussions and knowledge exchange.

The AHRC funded workshops were each being held in the new build complex at Kildonan Museum, isle of South Uist but located beyond the main building is a building that had direct relevance to the workshop discussions that were going on inside the main building.

Effie MacMillan had been the teacher who taught at Meanish 'side-school'. The Meanish 'side-school' building had been one of several corrugated iron fabrications that were provided by the education authority of Inverness County Council in the early twentieth century, for the purposes of schooling the island's children. Several of the fabricated buildings, especially the smaller 'side school' units, were located and then relocated as demography and schooling demands changed. The Meanish building no longer exists, although its concrete founds and playground boundary can still be seen. The transitory nature of this key social history of education in the islands was something that Effie MacMillan had sought to secure for future generations. Following discussions with Scottish Museums Council, Effie as the Secretary of CEUD, had sought to retain one of the corrugated iron buildings located at Kildonan School as representative of this history. The building that now occupies a spot on the Kildonan Museum complex site had been located at Uskevagh on Benbecula's east side at one time, Effie's own home community. The building had eventually been brought to Kildonan School to act as a canteen for the school. The building presently acts as a store for the CEUD collection but there may be some further more active use developed for this building over time.

A number of issues raised by the presentations were explored further by the group. The theme of fleshing out archival records was picked up by several participants and developed around Angus's work on the more genealogical aspects of history. Ray Burnett made reference to the legacy of Alexander Carmichael's research in the islands and while this had relevance for Benbecula it was particularly important in relation to South Uist. This might form the basis for some further study and collaboration not last with academics (including Dr Stiùbhart, University of Edinburgh)..

The group explored the tensions between a 'family history' and the more collective legacy of the history of a township, a community, even an island. The extent to which accounts from history are at best versions of the past was considered. The group strongly expressed the view that in terms of 'accuracy' or 'truth', the extent to which 'story', narrative account, personally reminiscence, or even a factual record meet these criteria is always a matter of degree and subject to critical interrogation. Throughout this second workshop and in the other two events, several examples of this tension in respect of what is knowledge and how it is 'verified' were examined by the groups. Historical research into people, especially, is often difficult to deal with in analytical terms and the 'story' often contains important information beyond that which might be deemed historically or factually correct (1:08 mins).

Returning back to the theme of settlement and desertion the group examined the nature of community identity and boundaries. In relation to the wider 'East side', i.e. the arc of households around Loch Uskevagh, questions were asked as to how each household viewed themselves in relation to the others. Did the Nunton Hill settlement see themselves as distinct from the other isolated household at Lidistrome, for example, or the more populous townships of Uskevagh, Buaile Rarnish and Craigastrome which were also only accessible by footpath or boat? Effie reported that in her view the people on the 'East side', that is those who lived around the loch and who communicated and socialised regularly with each other by boat, saw each others as neighbours, and yes, as part of a distinct community (1.10 mins).

2.4 Landscape and Environment: Settlement Heritage Legacies Group Discussion

This session was amalgamated into both the sections that follow. The main reason for this was that one participant was unable to attend the workshop until the afternoon and the topic was of particular relevance to this participant and the group collectively decide to refocus on

the theme in the later part of the day. The discussion that did develop this theme was rich and provided considerable insight into the utility and research potential of the archive materials brought to the workshop.

2.5 Afternoon session: Exploring Synergies: Knowledge Transfer of Cultural Resource

The group undertook a recap on some of the useful issues and ideas shared in the morning sessions and the focus turned to a third element in the day in relation of bringing together the tangible and the intangible heritage together through a focused exploration of archive documents held by the South Uist and Barra Archive Trust, and facilitating a direct link to the history of the communities in the islands of South Uist, Benbecula and Eriskay with the legacy of the South Uist Estate. The archive is a relatively recent project, funded from several bodies including the Heritage Lottery Fund, and supported by key academic institutions in Scotland. This resource presents a particularly interesting interface potential for the community's local history and cultural archive development. A number of research synergies emerged from the workshop two discussions detailed here and are being developed in collaboration with both HEI partners and local cultural archive agencies.

2.5.1 Local Resources: South Uist Estates Collection: Settlement Legacies

Presenter: Ray Burnett *Urras Tasglann Uibhist a Deas is Bharraigh/SUBAT*

Ray Burnett led this session and began by referring back to the talk given in workshop one by Catriona Muir on the role and nature of *Comunn Eachdraidh* and Angus MacMillan's talk earlier in the day in this second workshop. Ray set out a series of estate maps some from the National Archives of Scotland (NAS) others from the South Uist Estates collection of the South Uist and Barra Archives Trust (SUBAT). The NAS material is accessible to the public in Edinburgh, the SUBAT material is being prepared for public access on South Uist. Ray demonstrated how the settlement story as told by archive resources such as historical maps is subject to change and reframing over time.

On the 1805 survey maps of South Uist and Benbecula the principal township settlements are all on the fertile west side of the islands with only a scattering of small settlement clusters on the east side of South Uist and no more than a handful of scattered individual households on the east side of Benbecula. This represents a last glimpse of the settlement pattern of the social order of clan-ship and pre-capitalist agriculture. With the eclipse of the old order and the tenurial reorganisation required by new land use practices the pattern changes dramatically, only to change again with a subsequent extended crofterisation of the landscape.



By the 1870s the maps of Benbecula and South Uist reflect a significantly different settlement pattern: one that is dominated by a series of large sheep-farms or tacks (Nunton, Drimdsdale, Ormiclate & Milton, Bornish, etc.) with the farm house, steading, arable and stock rearing parks on the fertile west and the east side cleared of human occupancy and given over to grazing, with only a handful of isolated shepherd's dwellings. A third map from the 1920s shows a further dramatic shift in the settlement pattern as a result of the provision of new crofter holdings, the 'break up' of the farms and the partial crofterisation and re-settlement of the 'East side' over the period 1894 - 1924 with only the most isolated area at the 'back of Beinn Mhor' on South Uist left completely deserted.



It is the new smallholdings and township settlements established in this final phase that were subsequently abandoned over the 1950s-1980s that now constitute the deserted but remembered cultural landscape of the 'East side', (illustrated in this photograph by the ruins of two houses occupied but abandoned in living memory). Maps therefore provide a useful platform on which the narrative of settlement, clearance, re-settlement and abandonment can be traced, providing researchers with a convenient starting point, or representation of the historical settlement process. They are not, however, the 'whole story'. Examples of these new townships include East Gerinish, Glendale on South Uist, and Nunton Hill on Benbecula, which of course had been the focus of much of this morning's discussion and it is through the interface of archive (maps, photographs and other documents), along with personal memory and oral history that the narrative begins to take on an element of substance and becomes meaningful.

The group refocused on the theme from the mornings session "Who tells the settlement story?" and moved on to reflect on this in relation to the relationship between environment and landscape and human settlement and history. The group considered the example of signage linked to the recent tree planting schemes on Benbecula, for example. At Meanish, Ray Burnett drew the group's attention to the planting of trees over a social landscape – where people had lived and worked in living memory – and the sign that details the types of tree planted but does not mention anything of the people who had once lived in the place. The irony is that the Meanish sits a short distance from the concrete founds of the school that Flora and her siblings had attended. Walking to the footpath to Meanish and coming across this foundation invites the question what the latter is and why is it here: but without any local historical knowledge, or indeed some signage to explain, the visitor is no wiser. On the west side of Benbecula a similar tree planting scheme has raised concern amongst the *Comunn Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla*, where the historical references to people have been omitted from the signage that accompanies the trees. Picking up on this theme, Catriona Muir explained to the group that agencies often fail to take account of the social history in relation to projects and development locally. There must be a more responsive and sympathetic relationship with local groups who act in the name of local history but Catriona also pointed out that the nature of the local interest in social history, is often fractured and groups and individuals sometimes at odds with each other. Catriona argued that whilst there are undoubtedly problems with some of the agencies and how they relate to the historical legacy, there can also be problems within the community itself where a failure on the individual's part to take responsibility and "act on behalf of their own history" is a concern: "it is our 'own fault' we need to stand up for ourselves ..." (8.43 Mins Disc 2 Workshop 2).

In these examples of recent tree planting schemes and, as we will see later in the discussion, in the related examples of agency-driven policy on 'path provision and improvements', the pressures that bear on the historical landscape are considerable but as yet broadly absent from any local public debate.

The discussion explored the maps again in reference to the knowledge that is available on footpaths in the Meanish/Nunton Hill area on the east side of Benbecula. One of the paths showing on the later map is the path built by Flora's father when he and his brother settled Meanish in the mid twentieth century. There was some discussion as to why certain proposed paths in the earlier estate maps did not seem to have been ever completed and there was some discussion as to what the maps showed in relation to certain house sites, such as that which was known as 'Nunton Hill House' and the rationale for their location. The discussion opened out again into cross-referencing with both the genealogical research that Angus had brought to the day and the oral historical knowledge retained and imparted by several of the participants as the group tried to piece together some of the story of the place and its relationships, including contextualising the history of the settlement of East Benbecula with reference to the wider social history of the West Highlands (Kintail and Gairloch) and beyond.

The PI (Kathryn Burnett) asked the group to reflect again on the usefulness of such an archive map resource for the community? Angus Macmillan expressed the view that it was important for the maps to exist and for them to be seen, a view that was shared by Catriona Muir and others in the group. The question arose as to how these materials can be safely archived and accessed within the limited resources available in the community a question, it was agreed, that merited further investigation. Kathryn Burnett asked the group their thoughts on today's settlement trends and if they thought that people who relocate to these currently deserted sites? There was a general view that if a road and services were provided then people would move there. Nonetheless Flora, whose own father, with his brother, had in effect 'broken in' the Meanish site some decades earlier, and perhaps had most authority to comment in terms of the broader social morality agenda that underlies people's settlement choices and limitations, argued that as the place was now deserted she felt that it should be left as such. It was a peaceful, beautiful place and in a sense to encroach on this space now in a day when things are so much easier for people in socio-economic terms would be unworthy of the memory of those who had struggled so hard to first break in and then attempt to sustain a family in these remoter outreaches of the islands.

The group moved to explore a further example of social history and how its story is increasingly at risk of being lost, as well as the tangible heritage of settlements being at risk through natural decay, benign neglect and in some cases active destruction. The symbolic and actual experience of 'loss' therefore remains a key concern for this community both in theory and in praxis (c.f. Burnett 1997)ⁱⁱ.

The history of the east coast settlements is not complete without the important framing of these communities within the context of a substantial dependency on the sea for communication, for subsistence, and for work. The sea and boats figured strongly in the lives of all who lived and worked out of these small townships and the living memory of this knowledge is rich and yet unless required to be shared or commented upon it too is at risk of being lost over time. The group considered a number of examples of tangible heritage that exists as part of the material culture and environment, often constructed from wholly natural materials such as the stone slips and anchorages, or in the case of cultivated ground and paths the very soil and rocks are moved and repositioned to create a working and living landscape that now bears only an echo of its once everyday use. Dòmhnall Nellie, Effie and Flora each shared their own memories of living and working on the east side and the role boats played in their lives. These memories, often very personal accounts were shared with all in the workshop as in Flora's recollection of how her Father had built the small slip beside the house at Meanish and the boat itself was then moored lying off it but tied to the house window.

These images are all vignettes of a life now disappeared in real terms yet the consequences of this life for people remains in how they position themselves to-day and how current views are held on settlement, history and the concept of community and its survival. The value of a cultural memory to this survival was a key theme in both this and the prior discussion and it manifested itself in a number of exemplars and debates.

The group's capacity to take a small seemingly insignificant piece of information as derived from the archive resource and then work beyond it to create a rich matrix of fact, narrative and critique was evidenced repeatedly throughout this session as it had been in the previous event.

Kathryn (PI) asked the group to reflect on a comment made by Ray Burnett in terms of what use is the knowledge of these places and the memories associated with them for the communities of Benbecula, and South Uist today? (42 Mins Disc 2 Workshop 2) Was there any sense in which the cultural archives of the place could better serve the economy of the islands such as in relation to tourism, for example? Angus MacMillan expressed the view that whilst it is arguable that such knowledge could be used for economic development, he was

not generally supportive of this position. Angus went on to argue that all sorts of things are undertaken under the umbrella of 'precautionary principles' and we should be careful to protect the resource from a purely economic agenda. Rather than having the history being reduced to a question of visitor numbers, i.e. 'getting the Canadians in', he would hope that there was felt to be merit in valuing the resource for its own sake. Catriona Muir added to this by expressing again the distinction between those individuals who have a genuine interest in history and heritage such as the volunteers who are part of the Comunn Eachdraidh and those who are paid to undertake heritage and culture resource development as part of their job. There were, in Catriona's view, issues around the motivation that underpins this relationship. Kathryn asked the Comunn Eachdraidh representatives how they viewed the current tourism materials that are produced and distributed that position a cultural heritage of the region and to what extent these had been informed by 'local knowledge'? The answer was clear. The Comunn Eachdraidh represented in this event at least, had never been invited to be involved in the production of such materials. Again this suggests that there is room for further investigation into the nature of this relationship and how it might be better developed in such a way that the valuable work that the Comunn Eachdraidh undertake is given greater prominence and the materials produced are more locally nuanced. In terms of the wider use of digital materials it is arguable that there is considerable scope for the local tourism and cultural authorities to work more closely with Comunn Eachdraidh to champion their expertise but also acknowledge their considerable commitment to a living heritage that sadly continues to be at risk.

The session concluded with a further two examples of oral history that linked the discussion yet again into the archive resources. Firstly, Dòmhnall Nellie returned the group's thoughts back to an earlier theme of how the archives can only ever tell a partial story and how important is the knowledge - much of it still unrecorded - that is held by the people themselves. He cited local place names, for example, many of which never appear on any map. The places that have meaning to people who work a landscape like that of the largely subsistence economy of the Uist both before and during the crofting centuries are integral to how the activity of a day is undertaken efficiently and importantly how people live and work safely within their environment. Dòmhnall Nellie explained how the knowledge associated with the sea such as which channels and landings would be safe or not depending on the state of the tide and the prevailing conditions at the time is deeply ingrained in a community that knows and works such a place. As this knowledge becomes no longer useful it loses its currency loses its usefulness, however, it also loses its currency. Dòmhnall Nellie illustrated the value of this knowledge in a wonderful story. This story, 'is a true story', and concerns a priest on the sea crossing to Vatersay from Barra questioning the sea knowledge of a local Vatersay man. The clip provides the story in full and the account demonstrates just how important local cultural knowledge of landscape is amongst a people whose very lives depend upon the actual physical resources.



FILM DISCUSSION POINT (47 mins) DISC 2 WORKSHOP 2

Flora provided her own take on this with reference to rocks that her mother had taught her to look out for on the way over the moor near her home at Meanish. Again these were real places and had significance and meaning for all in the vicinity but were not recorded in the authoritative or 'official' mapping exercises of the day. Effie reflected on her own younger years and how she had not been aware of what a particular Gaelic word had meant as it was attributed to a local landscape feature but she only discovered what the word did mean when she encountered the saddle quern that is held in the CEUD museum collection at Kildonan. She was then able to connect this object to her own childhood memory of a place that she had

previously not fully understood the cultural reference for. She surmised that in an earlier time the saddle quern technology would have been used collectively by the community but it had been replaced over time by different types of quern stones and the name of the saddle quern had therefore become a redundant knowledge (51 mins). In this account Effie demonstrated to the group the cycle of knowledge and how the tangible heritage is important to retain as it provides the basis for further research, debate and account in its name.

In summary to this linked series of talks and interactions it was clear that a number of individual contributions had greatly expanded the shared knowledge of the focus on the east side of Benbecula. This had been facilitated by the detailed references made to material culture and archival resources. This session began with a close look at a set of archive documents from the South Uist estate collection as presented by Ray Burnett on behalf of SUBAT. The group had worked in some detail with the information that the maps offered and cross-referenced this extensively with personal memories and individual research. The broad theme of the interface between landscape and environment in relation to settlement and deserted settlement in particular was evidenced repeatedly throughout the session. Elements of this session would reoccur in the last set of discussions for the day, but would also resurface in workshop three's discussions that would follow the next day event.

2.5.2 Case Study: The East Side Story: Visual Essay: East Gerinish Presenter: Tony Grace University of the West of Scotland, (formerly University of Paisley).

There had been a plan at an earlier stage to travel out to one of the deserted settlements with some of the workshop attendees. It proved difficult to arrange this due to the adverse weather conditions on the date proposed but this was partly overcome by the PI and her colleague Tony Grace making a separate trip to go and record one of the sites on video, the outlying abandoned part of East Gerinish township, a settlement only accessible by footpath or boat. The filmed material was then played back to the workshop participants and this screening and resultant discussion formed a valuable 'case study' session. The film showed the settlement's location in the landscape so typical of the island's east side: a boggy and rocky terrain of rough moorland and freshwater lochans combining with a fragmented coastline of bays, inlet and tidal outlets that can make navigation particularly difficult for the unfamiliar visitor.

A preliminary showing of the film introduced the area to all the group and helped those members with personal connections to the area to re-familiarise themselves with a place they had not visited for some time. The film was then shown again and those with personal knowledge of the place were invited to comment on it.

FILM DISCUSSION POINT (11.30 mins) DISC 3 WORKSHOP 2

The site of the remains of East Gerinish school is clearly visible with only the foundations and the boundary wall are remaining. As at Meanish, Benbecula, the original iron buildings of both the school and the adjacent teacher's accommodation have long been removed. Dòmhnall Nellie knows the area well. He fished here for many years, having started out at 14 years old with one of the fishermen of the settlement. Dòmhnall was able to add considerable details to the visual essay with his own memories but also he provided insight to other's questions as to the purpose or nature of some of the tangible heritage still visible. In addition to the film offering a visual record of a now deserted settlement that is poignant in its own right the group reflected on how this example at East Gerinish is replicated throughout the islands. Furthermore the story of the 'east side' of Benbecula and South Uist has always been a story that has been denied 'voice'. In the next session this would be returned to again in a brief round up of further archival materials that add to the collective resource pot for new and ongoing research on the area's history and cultural legacy.



Through the screening the discussion focused in on the people who had lived in each of the now abandoned houses and the living memories were cross-checked with the archival materials already known about. What the screening offered to the group was an opportunity to comment directly on the images that had in themselves been recorded for the specific purposes of the workshop but now constituted an archival resource in their own right. The material culture of these settlements, as was noted in the morning session, is being lost over time. The houses and outbuildings are mostly unroofed, the interior fittings gone, the enclosed arable, the *feannagan* (lazy-beds) and nearby peat-banks overgrown and reclaimed by the environment, the jetties disintegrating and the cleared inlets where the family boat was hauled up fouled with tidal debris and seaweed. Just how a community lays any claim to this landscape now that people no longer live here is an open question; why the community should want to continue to recognise the human presence of settlements such as those typified down the Uists eastern seaboard is a question that invites further speculation and debate. It is anticipated that the work of the Comunn Eachdraidh, and other organisations, can continue to focus and refocus this debate.

What is clear is that the archival resource that is available to tell this story and provide a historical context for the community's development - its ebb and flow of human settlement and survival - is a key resource and a basis for continued research and collaborative activity. The current socio-economic profile of the islands remains a concern. The recent community buy-out has taken place in the demographic context of an overall aging population with little evidence of younger people aspiring to professional or skilled employment finding work in the area and thus being 'lost' to the mainland and beyond. Migration has long been a feature of all of Scotland's rural areas and the Uists is no exception. This broader theme of migration and settlement has to be much more than an 'academic pursuit'. The political and macro-economic histories of the region have always, and will continue to shape the nature of people's settlement choices. How the new community ownership status will inform the future choices of islanders, both locals and incomers alike, is worthy of continued study. In some of the smaller island and remote rural buy out situations such as Eigg, Knoydart and Assynt the community ownership status has arguably began to reverse a problematic demographic but there is no simple formula and there are 'tradeoffs' required. The South Uist, Benbecula and Eriskay situation is different in scale but is also conflated by the continued presence of the MOD's missile testing range head and associated support facilities, now leased and operated by the multinational arms development company, Quinetic. The islands have to come to terms with this legacy in relation to future possibilities to grow and importantly retain the population through skilled employment and appropriate levels of services. By way of a simple of illustration of this politicised landscape legacy and how synergies were already developing that reference this in this workshop and would be developed in Workshop Three that would follow, Professor Murdo Macdonald cross-referenced his own research work on the reappropriation of the visual culture and art of the highlands and islands of Scotland with wider political themes on militarisation of the rural space, including reference to works such as Will MacLean's "Inner Sound". The drawing out of a more holistic approach to cultural resource and the archives which are available in its name is an activity that not only builds on existing research dialogues therefore but it also offers a platform for a range of creative, community focused projects that work in tandem with universities and academics both from within Scotland and beyond.

2.5.3 Case Study: The East Side Story: The Archival Perspective: South Uist and Canna Ray Burnett, *Prodigia* in association with Magda Sagarzazu, *Archivist, NTS, Canna* and *Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist A Deas*

To end the day the workshop moved again to examine some of the rich archival resource available to research further the islands history and cultural heritage. Ray Burnett again presented the group with a series of



slides detailing available resources for further research and possible future research synergies between the local historical societies and other agencies and projects, such as the Carmichael Project on the papers of Alexander Carmichael held at the University of Edinburgh and the John Lorne Campbell collection on the islands of Canna and held in trust by the National Trust for Scotland. Ray began by turning the group's attention to the valuable work undertaken by Father Allan, 'Maighstir Ailean'ⁱⁱⁱ. The priest, originally from Lochaber, spent much of his relatively short life (he died at the age of just 45) first on South Uist, latterly on Eriskay ('*Fr. Allan's Island*') but also visited and collected lore in neighbouring Barra and the now deserted Barra Isles.

The image here shows a still from Media nan Eilean's drama-documentary that detailed the priest's life and in particular his great skill and foresight as a collector of the islands oral tradition. Floraidh Komori is currently undertaking research on the priest's papers and is producing a series of articles for the local Uist newspaper 'Am Paiper'. This material, a further rich resource of the island's social, cultural and oral history, offers itself as a further example of research synergy. There are clear links to be made with genealogical research but also there are certain collaborative opportunities with research relating to the South Uist estate papers.

A second arena for continued collaboration relates to the Alexander Carmichael (Carmichael-Watson Collection) archive held by the University of Edinburgh. Ray demonstrated that the SUBAT papers offer considerable research potential when studied alongside the related papers held by Edinburgh University and Canna. By way of demonstrating to the group how archival research is undertaken and the particular challenges posed when working with old documents not least their fragile or 'aged' state and including (in this case) the obscuring of text by yellowed sellotape, handwriting vagaries, and the 'translation' issues regarding the Anglicisation of Gaelic names and place-names, Ray illustrated to the group, again with reference to actual material archives, how this process of working with archive resources is, at the very minimum, a matter of skill, expertise and patience. Nonetheless, whilst so much of this work is painstakingly time-consuming the rewards, in terms of the addition such materials pose to any narrative of the islands history and cultural heritage, are undisputed. How local agencies might further develop training and skills on some aspects of archival management, not least in reference to digital technologies, is one area for focused further discussion. The collections are managed by individuals who are extremely keen to offer the materials for research and the potential for any number of collaborative projects that would serve the interests and needs of the local Comunn Eachdraidh, for example, is considerable. Catriona Muir asked if the Canna collection is catalogued and Ray advised Catriona and the group of the current work that was being undertaken in this respect.

2.6 Close and Thanks

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

i R. Burnett, (1989) Benbecula, The Mingulay Press

ii K.A. Burnett (1997) 'Negotiating Home: Categorisation and Representation of Identity among Indigenous and Incoming People of Uist, in the Outer Hebrides', PhD Thesis, Glasgow Caledonian University

iii See R. Black (2002) (Ed) Eilean na h-Oige. The Poems of Fr Allan McDonald, Mungo .