

# folk life

## NEWSLETTER

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*Gweithdy, the new facility for the display, demonstration and practice of crafts and traditional buildings skills at St Fagans National Museum of History ©Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales.*

THE SOCIETY FOR FOLK LIFE STUDIES

# ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2018

St Fagans, Cardiff, Wales

13th to 16th September 2018

The conference venue will be St Fagans,  
National Museum of History,  
National Museum Cardiff and Cardiff Story Museum

The accommodation will be at  
Premier Inn, Churchill Way

The conference programme is being developed and currently there are still opportunities to propose papers. The themes are

**\*\*St Fagans at seventy\*\***  
**\*\*Sport, culture and national identity\*\***  
**\*\*Urban identity\*\***

If you would like to contribute a paper, please contact the Conference Secretary, Steph Mastoris ([steph.mastoris@museumwales.ac.uk](mailto:steph.mastoris@museumwales.ac.uk)).

Please see the Society's website for the full programme where you can also find a booking form, copies of which are enclosed with this newsletter.

**A *free* student place at the  
2018 conference**

Once again the Society is offering a free place at its annual conference to a student in full-time education.

All fees and the cost of bookable meals will be included, but the person attending will have to pay for his or her own travel. To be considered for this opportunity, a person must not have attended the annual conference before. A short review of the conference will be required from the successful applicant.

Applications for this **free place** should be made to the Conference Secretary, Steph Mastoris ([steph.mastoris@museumwales.ac.uk](mailto:steph.mastoris@museumwales.ac.uk)), by the end of May.

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The Society's  
**CONFERENCE 2019**  
will be held in Cumbria



This great location will provide the opportunity to explore the English Lakeland and Cumbrian folklife. Our local hosts will be Tullie House Museum. As usual, the conference will be held around the second or third weekend in September. More details will be posted on the Society's website during this year.

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**Study Day**  
**5 May 2018**  
**Dunmurry & Kilwarlin,**  
**Northern Ireland**

In May there will be the opportunity to visit First Dunmurry (Non-Subscribing) Presbyterian Church. Dunmurry retains a strong village identity and is

situated on the outskirts of Belfast. The church we are planning to visit is the third structure to have been built on the site and was constructed in 1779. It is best described as a vernacular gem.

In the Non-Subscribing tradition, Communion usually takes place only twice a year, at the beginning of both May and November. The Dunmurry church retains an ancient form of Communion observance, and it will be possible to see how this takes place as the Communion Tables will be kept in place for the Study Day.

In addition to being a building of very great interest, Dunmurry meeting-house contains some fascinating monuments, including one to a member of the Andrews family. Naval architect Thomas Andrews famously died on the Titanic, and the family were Ulster Unitarians. The church also features a magnificent window attributed to Tiffany, and the graveyard surrounding the church contains significant features.

Dunmurry is easily accessible by public transport, and the railway halt is a short uphill walk from the church. From Belfast City Airport, take the train from Sydenham for either Lisburn or Portadown (there are only two platforms) for a journey of nine stops. From the International airport, there is a coach to Great Victoria Street. From there, the journey is four stops along the same line.

The cost of the Study Day will be £20 per head, to include a light lunch. Please see booking form enclosed.

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**CONFERENCE 2017**

The conference was opened by the President Linda Ballard where she welcomed everyone to Ayrshire.

**Conference Papers**

**Linda Ballard**  
*Presidential Address*

Linda's presidential address was given at Robert Burns's Bachelors' Club, a 17th century house where Burns and his friends formed a debating club in 1780. In doing so, she became only the second woman speaker at the Bachelors' Club!

The aim of her address was to share memories of her time at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, an institution which she left four years ago after many years of service. She began with a brief history of UFTM, which came into being by Act of Parliament in 1958 - a period of great change in Ulster. The late Prof Estyn Evans was the chair of the interviewing panel when Linda was appointed - an experience she found 'terrifying'. Estyn Evans' aim was to emphasise what united Northern Ireland, not what divided it - a vision which did not sit comfortably with some politicians in that period. Linda regrets that the Museum no longer has such a strong intellectual visionary. She likened UFTM as being in a state of suspended animation, a Sleeping Beauty waiting to be woken up. Acknowledging that museums have to live in the real world, as businesses, Linda underlined that what they produced has to be grounded in knowledge based on the collections. They have the potential to be arenas for dialogue between different factors. However, in order for UFTM to function in this way, it has to be underpinned by the attitude of its founders.

Linda then went on to outline the different phases of her own career, and how her grandmother's folksong repertoire inspired her research interest in folklore and how difference is worked out. This caused uproar at home as folklore 'belonged to the other side'. Her grandmother had a huge repertoire of ballads. As a child with her brother, she had been given singing lessons, and became a concert singer. Her uncle sang 'arranged' versions of folk songs for the BBC, not the versions he learned as a child.

Appointed as a researcher in oral traditions at 22 years of age, Linda recounted how Estyn Evans would take the time to have lunch with young researchers to see how they were getting on. She reminisced about her early field work trips, working with George Sheridan to collect supernatural beliefs, and some of the storytellers she had the privilege of recording.

However, after 16 years of collecting oral traditions, Linda took a challenging turn in her career by taking charge of the Museum's textile collections. She recalls meeting the late Ann Buck at a Folk Life conference in Leicester and confessing 'The only

thing I know about costume is from 19th century novels'. She was much reassured by Ann's response: 'Well, my dear, how do you think I got started!' Linda did much to revitalise the Museum through the introduction of craft events, but later changed direction again, moving to the office of Michael Houlihan while he was Chief Executive of NMNI. Returning to UFTM as Curator of Folk Life, she curated Northern Ireland's contribution to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which provoked her researcher's mind to question the validity of folk festivals as a platform for the performance of folk narratives.

After a career of changes in direction, Linda left the museum world to take perhaps her most radical change of all. She decided to study theology, with no idea at first that she would eventually be ordained as a minister of the Non Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland. Many thanks to Linda for an entertaining account of her very varied career and an illuminating perspective on the changes which have taken place in the museum world.

### **Beth Thomas**

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### **Gavin Sprott**

*An Introduction to Ayrshire  
& Robert Burns the Farmer*

I must admit to arriving at the 2017 conference knowing very little of Robert Burns beyond his *Address to a Haggis* that was of course read at our family Burns Suppers. Gavin Sprott's paper was therefore a very welcome introduction to the poet and his relationship with the landscape and society of eighteenth-century Ayrshire.

Gavin asked us to ponder the question, 'who was Robert Burns?' His paper explored what his poems might tell us about the society he lived in, and what the historical study of rural Ayrshire at this important turning point in Scottish intellectual and agricultural history might reveal about who Robert Burns was. Did 'The Ploughman Poet' see himself as a farmer, a poet, a radical, or something else entirely?



The lowland Scotland that Burns knew was a society in transition, from the growth of improvement agriculture to the tension between traditional orthodox Calvinism and enlightenment philosophies. Some of his poems—such as the scornful ‘Holy Willie’s Prayer’—gave voice to those changing beliefs, as new ways of thinking filtered from centres of learning to local populations. It is also clear that Burns loved the land, though Spratt queries whether he was steered into a continuation of farming by the romanticism of his audiences. Nevertheless, Burns was a successful new-style farmer, and poems such as the ‘The Auld Farmer’s New-Year-Morning Salutation To His Auld Mare, Maggie’ describe an affection for an old farm horse that remains rooted in lived experience rather than nostalgic sentiment.

For Spratt, Burns’ poems are a window to the rapidly changing society of lowland Scotland in the late-eighteenth-century as much as they are clues to Burns’ identity. His paper was an engaging and thought-provoking beginning to the conference, and was concluded with one particularly evocative stanza of Burns’ 1785 poem ‘The Holy Fair’. It speaks of his love for nature and place and his familiarity with the landscape and farming, and captures more subtly Burns the free spirit we are perhaps more familiar with from the exuberant ‘Tam o’Shanter’:

*Upon a simmer Sunday morn  
When Nature’s face is fair,  
I walked forth to view the corn,  
An’ snuff the caller air.  
The rising sun owre Galston muirs  
Wi’ glorious light was glintin;  
The hares were hirplin down the furs,  
The lav’ rocks they were chantin  
Fu’ sweet that day.*

**Felicity McWilliams**

## **Professor Gerald Carruthers**

*Robert Burns, Scottish Presbyterianism, the Enlightenment and Folk Culture*

This wide-ranging paper opened by addressing questions familiar to all of us who are involved in the study of folk culture: effectively, who are the folk, and what is their culture? Professor Carruthers focused on a specific issue raised by these questions, highlighting the problematic nature of ‘folklife’ when viewed from a literary perspective. He reminded his audience of the familiar concerns arising from perceptions of a close interrelationship between folklife and cultural nationalism, raised the concept of folklife being somehow culturally ‘closer to the people’ and suggested difficulties arising from the development of a narrative of authenticity perceived to be inherent in folklife. He also raised the issue of the validity of religion as a relevant element of folklife, suggesting that there is sometimes a failure of recognition in this regard. This provided the context for his assessment of the tensions and contradictions implicit in Burns’ status as a (or perhaps, the) national poet. Professor Carruthers pointed out that in Burns’ writing, folk culture, Calvinism and the Enlightenment collide.

Considering Burns as a ‘folk poet’, Professor Carruthers pointed out that the poetic structures frequently employed by Burns could not be considered as essentially native to Ayrshire. Stanza forms used by Burns, notably the habbie stanza, had previously been associated with Tories and with the Jacobites. As tension persisted in respect of whether Stewarts or Hanoverians should occupy the throne, it appeared culture sided with the Jacobites. Furthermore, the use of such verse forms carried religious as well as political connotations. Their jaunty nature put them at odds with the requirements of Calvinism. And, Professor Carruthers remarked, as the Jacobite tradition was strongly streaked with Deism, this too could be interpreted as a challenge to prevailing Ayrshire Calvinism. Citing ‘Holy Willie’s Prayer’ as a specific example, he suggested that Burns’ poetry may be read as anti-Calvinist propaganda. Burns’ writing therefore had the capacity to influence ‘real life’, and to eclipse the truth.





Professor Carruthers emphasised that Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published in 1759, was a favourite element of Burns' reading, helping to position Burns within the Enlightenment. Briefly exploring Burns' family background he showed that if Burns was a ploughman poet, his position was much more substantial than that of a landless farm labourer. He showed too that numerous other poets followed Burns' example and found him to be an inspiration. Rather than draw on native Ayrshire poetic models, Burns established a poetic community in the region. He demonstrated that Burns' writing, whether bawdy or not, crossed cultural boundaries and was not constrained to styles of writing native to Ayrshire. He remarked on the irony of the opportunities to collect folksong afforded to Burns as a result of his work as an excise man.

Drilling more deeply into the relationship between Burns' poetry and Ayrshire Calvinism, Professor Carruthers addressed the relevance of the Patronage Act of 1711-12 to the stance taken by Burns. This Act limited the power of congregations by providing that ministers should be appointed not by them, but by the landlord. Burns, while theologically liberal, was in favour of patronage in the appointment of ministers and satirised the stance of the Calvinists. Burns may be considered a spokesman for the moderates rather than a representative of popular Ayrshire Calvinism. Professor Carruthers also questioned the validity of associating Burns with Thomas Muir, as the two were more likely to have held opposing views. While Muir was a popular figure, Burns' milieu was again that of the moderates. Burns was producing folk culture, not a product of that culture. 'Tam O'Shanter' was originally written to provide a footnote to an account written by an antiquarian friend of Burns about Alloway Kirk.

Professor Carruthers concluded this fascinating paper by commenting that rather than representing the folk culture of Ayrshire, Burns frequently sat rather awkwardly amid the people of Ayrshire and of Scotland. He asked if Burns might better be considered as a maverick whose writing is often



slippery in nature. Intriguingly, he also remarked that the folk culture of Scottish Presbyterianism is all too frequently overlooked.

**Linda-May Ballard**

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**Chris Waddell**

*'Ae Spark o Nature's Fire': Robert Burns, Scots  
Language and Nature  
Burns cottage*

In this paper our local host provided a fascinating insight into the language Burns used in his poetry to describe the flora and fauna of the south-west of Scotland. So we were treated to a wonderful catalogue of names, such as: *mavis* (thrush), *blitter* (snipe), *laverock* (skylark), *cushat* (wood pigeon), *maukin* (hare), *baukie bird* (bat), *breer* (dog rose),

*gowan* (daisy) and *ragweed* (ragwort).

In each case Chris also outlined the folklore associated with each of these plants and animals and quoted a relevant extract from Burns' poetry. For instance, as witches were believed to use the ragwort for their nocturnal travels, so in his 1785 poem, *Address to the Deil*: Burns writes:

*Let warlocks grim, an' wither'd hags  
Tell how wi' you, on ragweed nags,  
They skim the muirs an' dizzy crags,  
Wi' wicked speed;*

Although Burns cannot be considered to be a nature-poet and probably was no better an observer of nature than the average countryman, his poetry contains many passages that show he had a deep appreciation of the natural world. Furthermore, he often used plants and animals to exemplify truths



*Burns birthplace*

about the human condition. So in many instances he empathises more with the hunted animal – ‘a brother creature’ - than with the human hunter, and feels sorry for the *gowan* being uprooted by his plough.

*Wee, modest crimson-tipped flow'r,  
Thou's met me in an evil hour;  
For I maun crush amang the stoure  
Thy slender stem:  
To spare thee now is past my pow'r,  
Thou bonie gem.*

This paper also served as an informative prelude to Chris's guided walk in the afternoon around Burns' birthplace and its locality.

**Roy Vickery & Steph Mastoris**

## **Claudia Kinmonth**

*Rattling Noggins & Whistling Spoons:*

*Links between Irish and Scots*

*Material Culture*

In the mid twentieth century two pioneering studies of the material culture of traditional living spaces of Irish and Scottish homes made a significant contribution to our knowledge. These were E. Estyn Evans' *Irish Folk Ways* of 1957 and Isobel F. Grant's *Highland Folk Ways* of 1961. Both revealed interesting similarities and differences between these culturally and geographically related countries that are only separated by a sixteen-mile sea channel. However, Claudia's paper based on her recent research into museum collections, demonstrated many other interesting relationships between these adjacent cultures.

*Woven  
noggin,  
oak with  
ash band*



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Both, for example, featured curtained bed outshots next to the hearth, as in north western Ireland and most parts of Scotland. Only Ireland appeared to have used stacked peats to make basic furniture such as fireside benches. That country's 'Sligo chairs', with their three legs, the rear one rising up to support a horizontal back rest, were probably the result of French-introduced designs of caquetteuse chairs adopted into Scotland in the early sixteenth century. Their characteristic features of a truncated triangular seat and narrow back panel entered Ireland with the seventeenth century Scottish planters. Alternative designs, such as the Sutherland chairs made of two L-shaped timbers linked by short horizontal bars and mounted on legs, similarly influenced the designs of chairs made in Derry, again as a direct result of Scottish immigration. Both countries used dual-purpose furniture, folding settle-tables being found in Ireland and at Kingussie, along with settle-beds, their seats folding forward to convert to floor-level beds.

One of the main items of tableware was the noggin, a small wooden tub or squat beaker with a vertical handle raised above its brim. In Scotland these were either turned or coopered, the most ornate having staves of contrasting woods joined by 'feathering' one into another and bound with (hazel?) bands. In Ireland many were made by forming a broad, thin strip of ash into a drum, joining the ends by a zig-zag 'woven' joint of great internal complexity. In Ireland too methers, square handled beakers carved out of the solid, were made with a double base in order to contain a pebble or dried pea in order to produce an audible rattle. The same feature also appeared in Scottish noggins that were known as 'rattling luggies'.

Horn spoons, of which a hundred have been found in Irish museums, were made with shallow bowls and plain handles, all formed by pressing a single strip of horn. A mould for producing them remains in the Highland Folk Museum at Kingussie. More

elegant examples following the Old English pattern of the 1690s or fiddle pattern of c. 1800 were neatly carved to shape after being moulded. Some Northern Irish spoons incorporated a whistle at the end of their handles, this feature also being found in Manx and Scottish examples. Large horn ladles were used in Ireland, but most were made of wood, their bowls being turned and their integral handles carved with a notched end for suspension. There was a suggestion that these were used in butter-making [but Cumbrian evidence saw them being used to ladle milk from a communal bowl when eating porridge]. The basins used for liquid foods in both countries was usually of white glazed earthenware decorated as spongeware, as made in Belleek, Fermanagh, as well as in both Scottish and English potteries of the nineteenth century.

Claudia's paper demonstrated the importance of studying museum collections in order to trace the regional material culture of the recent past. We look forward to her further work in this subject, for which a brief incursion into Cumbria and Northumberland would provide much useful comparative material.

**Peter Brears**

## David Jones

### *Scottish Furniture at Dumfries House*

Dr David Jones presented this most illuminating and interesting talk on Dumfries House and its furniture. Completed in 1759, Dumfries House was built by William, Fifth Earl of Dumfries. It cost just over £797 to build and it was completed in three years. Previous structures on this site had included a tower house and a late seventeenth-century house. Dumfries House was 'lightly occupied' throughout the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries and little changed in it over that period of time. Dr Jones recalled that, at the time of his first visit to the House, it had seemed somewhat austere. Jones also recalled that, on that occasion, the butler had informed him that sand had been used to scrub the floors in the House for over 200 years!

The Fifth Earl was undecided as to the style of furnishings he should adopt in his new house and he consulted with others as to how best he should proceed. Between 1756 and 1759 he purchased some furniture from the company of Thomas Chippendale for his new home. Although financed from Scotland, Chippendale's mid-eighteenth-century firm was based in the St Martin's Lane area of London. Chippendale advertised his wares in the local newspapers every week and the secret of his success lies in the 'life' and 'latent energy' in his furniture. Although still somewhat undecided, the Earl eventually purchased 14 chairs and 2 sofas for the Drawing-room of Dumfries House. In 1759 this order was followed up by another for card tables, with 'scrolled toes,' to accompany the other items of furniture in the Drawing-room. Dumfries House became a 'proving ground' for the Chippendale firm. Indeed, of the 700 documented pieces of Chippendale furniture in the world, 50 were made for this house.

In addition to the furniture that he purchased from Chippendale, the Fifth Earl commissioned pieces from Alexander Peter, Francis Brodie, and William Mathie. These three talented Edinburgh

cabinetmakers were responsible for many of the pieces of furniture that are still visible in Dumfries House today.

Little is known of Alexander Peter. However the Hall chairs with thistle badge, the decorative motif of the Fifth Earl, are among his works. So too are the 24 mahogany dining-room chairs. These were supplied at a cost of 30 shillings each, according to a bill, which survives in the archives.

The work of William Mathie is represented by the large, ornate, wall mirrors in the drawing-room.

Brodie (1708-1782), the son of a gentleman, is the best documented of these three cabinetmakers. Conservative in his work, he favoured an early eighteenth-century Scottish style. His 'Lady's Closet' consists of a mirror on a chest of drawers and incorporates a writing desk. Brodie's gilt Eagle table in the Entrance Hall is somewhat dwarfed by the proportions of the present Dumfries House. This table was obviously made either for the earlier seventeenth-century house, or the tower house, which formerly stood at this site.

The visit to Dumfries House was, in the opinion of this writer, one of the high-points of the Folklife Conference. The talk by Dr Jones greatly added to the understanding and enjoyment of this great house.

**Patricia O'Hare**



*Ayrshire lace, known as whitework*

### **Dr Sally Tuckett**

#### *Ayrshire Whitework*

This paper, given by Dr Sally Tuckett, lecturer in dress and textile histories at the University of Glasgow, who will be known to members as the author of recent work on the Scottish Turkey Red cotton printing industry, looked at the history of the Ayrshire whitework industry in Scotland, debunking the myth that it was a predominantly rural craft, and describing how it became a massive industry, organised by large companies, using thousands of female outworkers in local towns in south western Scotland and exporting their finely embroidered products world-wide, for example, one large company employed 500 people in its warehouse and 25,000 needlewomen in Scotland and Ireland.

Sally looked at the reasons for the establishment of this industry, including the existing cotton industry and network of proficient textile workers in Ayrshire and Ireland.

She had gathered an impressive amount of data from census returns and parliamentary reports as well as contemporary newspapers and other commentaries, showing who the workers were and where they lived in Ayrshire, their working conditions and how the industry rose to massive proportions, before declining quite suddenly during the latter nineteenth century, partly due to changes in women's fashions as well as industrialisation. The conditions of home working were also relevant as the hand-work, despite being very finely done was often in a dirty state when it was returned to the companies, needing further careful cleaning before distribution.

Despite attempts to revive the industry as a high quality craft during the arts and crafts revival period, the industry was no longer viable by the end of the century.

This excellent study is part of the more general story of the rise and fall of craft and handicraft in Britain, particularly in Scotland, and highlights the often



ignored role played by thousands of women in a large and important industry.

For those wishing to read further, Sally has published an article on this subject, 'Needle Crusaders': the nineteenth-century Ayrshire Whitework Industry in the *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* (2016).

**Christine Stevens**

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**Bob Powell**

*Ayrshire to Anglia: The movement of Scots farmers and their related culture to East Anglia, 1880s – 1950s*

Bob was brought up in East Anglia where his interest in all things agricultural developed. His curiosity was sparked by the fact that the standard two-wheeled cart of the area was known as a Scotch cart, rather than just a plain tumbril or cart. There was a story behind this terminology which he investigated and related to us in a fascinating paper.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century most East Anglian farms were largely dependent on grain crops. Many were held by tenant farmers paying high rents and on short leases. The collapse of wheat prices forced many into debt. Meanwhile farmers in Scotland still ran a mixed farming system with livestock as an integral part and so they were not so dependent on wheat prices. Also Scottish farmers generally had longer tenancies and had invested in more efficient machinery. Some had money to invest and were looking for new opportunities.

A gentleman named Primrose McConnell (1856-1931) was the first Scotsman to realise the potential of the rich agricultural land of East Anglia. Having studied agriculture at Edinburgh he had farmed 250 acres of land in Ayrshire before moving to a 'derelict' farm in Essex of 600 acres. Here he introduced mixed farming and made a great success

of it, becoming quite wealthy in the process. He became a lecturer and was highly instrumental in persuading fellow Scots to follow his example.

He started a trend which led to many families migrating from different parts of Scotland to the south, mainly Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk. They settled in well; became established members of local society; and many became substantial landowners founding 'dynasties' that survive to this day. They brought their own style of farming and some equipment with them. For example, Archie Mitchell in 1958 moved his whole farm by train from Lanarkshire to Saxthorpe in North Norfolk, including 106 pedigree cattle. Not surprisingly some continued to use Scottish-sourced machinery, leading to large numbers of Oliver ploughs, for instance, finding their way from the USA via Scotland to East Anglia.

Some of these farmers left a particular legacy by recording their own stories in published books during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Traces of the heritage of these families can still be found throughout East Anglia if you know what to look for. A Highland Ploughing medal turned up in a sale at North Walsham; a set of Scotch harness was used with an English cart at a recent Norfolk Show; and Burns' Night Dinners are still popular!

In this talk Bob ably combined family history with material culture. He demonstrated his own deep understanding of farming processes and equipment and his keen eye for detail. Knowing some of the places in Norfolk that Bob mentioned made the story particularly interesting for me but I am sure was enjoyed by all.

And Bob did find out why Scotch carts are so called in East Anglia!

**Catherine Wilson**

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## John Baldwin

*'Stoars, Cleps & Croakies / Liris, Pivins & Sgrails:  
Some ethnological evidence for cultural diffusion  
along the western seaways.'*

With the above somewhat intriguing title, John's paper was a well-researched and in-depth study relating to the tangible and intangible culture surrounding the seabirds harvested as a source of community nutrition. In this instance the primary bird and environment focussed on was that of the 'Manx Shearwater' ("*Puffinus Puffinus*") which inhabits the coastal fringes from the Scilly Isles to the Isle of Man and up the seaways to the Hebrides, Orkneys and as far as Shetland and the Faroes.

I was interested in having the opportunity to review John's paper for two reasons. Firstly, because of the Conference theme of "Cross-cultural connections in material culture", although John's paper also substantially reflected the non-material links. Secondly, as my wife's family were some of the Guga (Gannet) hunters who annually sailed from Port of Ness, Lewis to the tiny rocky island of Sula Sgeir in the Atlantic for similar purposes.

In spite of the latter family association, as a 'farmer' by instinct, I would not profess to have any knowledge of the overall subject and that includes the natural history of seabirds. From that perspective, the introduction to the Shearwater as being "pigeon sized", laying single white eggs and living in burrows that they regularly approached like avian secret agents under the cover of night or storms for their protection was a welcome introduction. However, as we were also to learn these birds in their multitudes were not exactly quiet.

The variety of means to catch the birds too, from the clubbing of torch dazzled birds at night to hooking them from their nests down in the burrows was fascinating. The latter method was an introduction to the terminology of the "Stoar", a hooked stick that allowed the hunter to reach down inside the burrow

without being pecked. Further, representing the research being presented, historic references were given, for example, to the supply of "Stoars for the puffin hunters" by William Sharrock on the Isle of Man in May 1728 for £5 17s 10d. Comparing the different regions and cultures, other methods described included aerial clubbing in the Hebrides where the 'stear' or long poles like fishing rods were used to "whack" and stun the "puffins" as they flew past.

The terminology presented was comprehensive, for example, 'stoar', 'croakie' and 'clep' representing the names for different hooked implements. These were also compared to the similar tools used for fish, hooking boats and elements of crofting agriculture. However, of particular emphasis from a non-material aspect was the study of the terminology derived from such as Gaelic (*For which Edward Dwelly's 'The Illustrated Scottish Gaelic English Dictionary' was a source*), Norse or northern English. The overall picture is somewhat complicated but undoubtedly intriguing.

Away from the material culture and terminology, further fascinating aspects included the emotional reactions to the "haunting" effects of the birds' night flights as reflected in natural history, literature and lore. These references, such as in Frank Fraser Darling's 'Island Years' (1940) reflect the night time flights of the birds, sometimes in their thousands, when they fly with phenomenal noise. An 1811 report from the Isle of Man described that they "*cackled like geese, when there were no geese in sight*" and Nordic stories, such as from the Faroes, compared the noise to that of the mythical Trolls inhabiting places where the Shearwaters were harvested. In fact, the RSPB Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe (2006) describes the noise as a "*Loud, strangled wailing.*"

In conclusion, John's paper included a considerable amount of researched, considered and condensed information that well represented the Conference





*St. Boniface's cloutie well*

theme of cross-cultural connections. I was impressed by the depth of John's study and information offered, particularly the comprehensive detail presented visually in tabulated form where the terminology and language origins were compared. Reflecting on John's presentation, his paper deserves to be available to not only study at leisure the large amount of information offered but also to be shown as an example to inspire other cross-cultural studies, especially stretching beyond our immediate islands, that may be undertaken.

**Bob Powell**

### **Heather Holmes**

#### *In Different Worlds: Healing at the Cloutie Well*

The final paper of the conference was given by Heather Holmes, beautifully illustrated by her own photographs and account of her personal experience of the 'cloutie well' associated with St Boniface (St Curitán), close to the A832 near the village of Munloch in the Black Isle, Ross and Cromarty, Scotland.

Rag wells, or 'cloutie wells', are wells or springs where people attach rags, 'cloots', on the trees and bushes surrounding the water source, usually as offerings in the hope of healing, though people visit the well for various other motives too—coins thrown in the water containers suggest some see it as a 'wishing well'. Ethnographers have become interested in recent years and authorities such as the Forestry Commission have taken measures to enable easier access to the well, inevitably changing the relationship between the visitor and the setting.



## EXCURSIONS

### **Walking Tour around the ‘Birthplace of a genius’: Robert Burns in Alloway.**

A traditional component of any SFLS conference programme is a walking tour relevant to the conference theme and this year was no exception. The Friday afternoon slot makes sense, early enough in the overall programme and hot on the heels of a morning’s session devoted to Robert Burns’ ‘identity and place in literature’ (a conference main theme). Here we were looking especially at the interpretation techniques employed to promote the presentation of his birthplace in Alloway, in effect the southern extremities of Ayr and a couple of miles south of the town centre.

Three hours were allocated, a good amount of time and complete with welcome tea break, but it turned out to be not quite long enough to do justice to all that was on offer. Our guide was Chris Waddell, fresh from his pre-lunch talk and as animated a guide as one could hope for. In his role as Learning Manager at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum (a post he has held since February 2013) Chris has the interesting task of linking together all the various components and themes of the extended RBBM site, and the tour revealed something of the challenges in doing so.

Robert Burns Birthplace Museum is the National Trust for Scotland [NTS] promotional banner for the cluster of sites relevant to the Burns heritage and marketed as inter-linked. They are handy to each other, via a recently developed ‘Poets Path’, a ten-minute walk linking Burns Cottage (the ‘original’ site and the poet’s birthplace) with the Burns Monument & Gardens, the iconic and photogenic Brig O’Doon and Alloway Auld Kirk. A handy NTS ‘Map of Auld Alloway’ leaflet links all this up too.

The major new ‘flagship’ Burns Museum, opened in December 2010, is the project’s anchor and provides its focus within an attractive new building, including a dedicated museum gallery and a striking and obviously well-patronized café. At a cost of £21m, largely borne for NTS by the Scottish Government and the Heritage Lottery Fund, it ought to be punching at top weight. Unfortunately lack of time prevented anything other than a cursory glance around the museum which was certainly a missed opportunity.

Generally, ‘clooty wells’ are natural springs surrounded by trees and there is often a container collecting water, which may be drunk or bathed in, or rag deposits are dipped before being attached to the trees. Offerings, or ritual deposits, are central to clooty wells: the Forestry Commission lists many types of item deposited: rags or cloth of different types and sizes, including a bed sheet; objects representing a person, for instance a shoe, or a child’s toy; objects representing a particular ailment, such as an asthma inhaler; or a train ticket, a plaster cast, representing a personal experience. Some consider that when a clout is dipped in the spring and hung up on the surrounding trees, the ailment will be transferred to the clout by the power of the water. The landscape of the clooty well is viewed as sacred by many, and some visitors invoke a spirit or guardian of the well to heal the ailment. Some visitors come at specific times or dates and perform particular actions, such as soaking a clout in the spring water, applying it to a particular part of the body, then hanging it up on a tree, or alternatively they spill some water on the ground, tie a rag up, then drink some water. Many cloots are placed close to other groups of rags, while others are placed in their own open spaces. Heather Holmes described her own process of healing by visiting the clooty well: bearing an open mind about the healing power, she put up her own clout, a sock, in silence. She visited the well several times to put a clout on her place of pain, washed the clout in the spring, and unobtrusively hung it up. On later visits, drinking the spring water became part of her routine, along with taking in the landscape, taking photographs and taking away bottles of the well water. She described a ‘tingly feeling’ in her hands on driving away, and she felt that each visit was very different, and gave her guidance and advice. Heather showed some of her photos illustrating her feelings of hope and healing during successive visits to the clooty well, showing the light falling on different parts of the clooty well landscape ‘illuminating a path of cloots’, a sign that she was on the right path and that ‘everything would be alright’. As Heather says, it’s “A place of positivity, hope and healing”.

**Caroline Oates**



*The Brig O'Doon*

That said, what Chris went out of his way to show us was rewarding and varied fare, taking in five sites and the Poet's Path between them. With our conference based at the Education Centre next door, opened by Alex Salmond in Nov 2009, our first port of call was Burns Cottage, a linear sequence of barn, byre, living room and kitchen, all within one single structure.

There was as much interest in the interpretation as the simplicity of the contents themselves, so nothing new there. The walk between this 'old' and the 'new' site gave Chris many opportunities to expand on his earlier biodiversity theme, explaining the planting regime as part of the path's development.

The final lap included a quick study of elaborately carved grave stones in the old churchyard and an appreciation of the immaculately kept gardens surrounding the Burns monument, a 70ft high Grecian-style temple built in 1823 by public subscription, and a chance to get a sense of the scale

of that achievement too, including its current restoration campaign, seeking £500K by public appeal.

The tour concluded with a delightful purpose-built statue house containing sculptures by James Thom of Tarbolton (1802-1850) of Tam O'Shanter and Souter Johnnie enjoying 'getting fou and unco happy' (getting drunk and very happy) in each other's company; and a view looking down upon the 15th century Brig O'Doon, with its dense cobbled surface rising over the striking raised arch – a suitable final memory of the mass of Burns' associations available on this very interesting tour.

Websites for further information:

[www.burnsmuseum.org.uk](http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk)

[www.burnsscotland.com](http://www.burnsscotland.com)

**David Viner**





*Dumfries House*

### **Dumfries House visit**

Not too promising weather on Saturday morning saw our party set off for Dumfries House, though it stayed sufficiently fine for us to enjoy the trip, and even explore the gardens and grounds afterwards.

Dumfries House itself was formerly part of the Bute estate, so those from Cardiff might have felt at home (especially as the later tapestry room is fitted out with wooden panelling carved in Bute's Cardiff workshops), though the House itself is no Victorian gothic pile, but a rather attractive Adam House filled with Chippendale and Scottish designed furniture, much of it part of the original furnishings. Saved for the nation in 2007, the house is now run by The Great Steward of Scotland's Dumfries House Trust, headed by HRH the Prince of Wales, known in Scotland as the Duke of Rothesay.

We were split into two groups, both with well-informed guides, though the second group had the considerable added benefit of the company of David Jones, Hon. keeper of furniture & eminent Scottish furniture specialist.

There are numerous outstanding pieces of early Chippendale furniture, particularly the magnificent breakfront bookcase, displayed in the blue drawing room with settees and chairs ordered from Chippendale in 1759. The bookcase had been originally used in the main bedroom together with impeccably restored bedstead, also ordered from Chippendale in 1759.

After a very pleasant lunch in the former library, there was time to visit the gardens and the restored walled garden and orangery.

**Christine Stevens**



**Minutes of the Society's Annual General Meeting**  
Held on Sunday 17 September 2017 at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, Alloway, Ayrshire,

**Present:** The President (Linda Ballard) and 23 members

**Apologies:**

Apologies were received from Prof. K. Kawashima, Matthew Richardson, Sarah Blowen, Dai Jenkins, Mared McAleavey, John Baldwin, Lillis O'Laoire, Dylan Jones.

**Minutes of the last AGM:**

These had been printed in the Newsletter. They were proposed by Senator Paul Coghlan (Seconded by Michael Larkin) & adopted by the meeting as a correct record.

**President's Report:**

Linda had nothing to report, except that she had enjoyed a very happy period as president of the society.

**Treasurer's Report:**

Duncan reported that there was a discrepancy between the number of newsletters sent out and the subscriptions received. The Membership Secretary and Treasurer need to cross-check their lists and identify those members to whom we should send a reminder. Journals are costing over £3,000 and the Treasurer is chasing up commission owed to the Society from Taylor & Francis. He put forward a proposal to increase subs from £25 to £30 p.a. (Motion seconded by Senator Paul Coghlan)

**Editors' Reports:**

**Journal:**

A written report had been submitted by Lillis.

**Newsletter:**

Elaine reported that this years' Newsletter was dispatched in late spring. The print run had now been reduced to 300. Postage costs had also gone down for some reason.

She asked for any contributions for this year's newsletter, such as reviews, to be with the editor by 15 November 2017. The Editor thanked all those that had contributed to 2017's newsletter, and in advance to the contributors for the 2018 publication.

**Website Officer's Report:**

Heather reported that the Society website was being kept up to date. We are also on Flashnews & Twitter. The society follows 8+ others and we have 673 followers (up from 583 last year). We have posted 194 tweets this year.

Heather asked for pictures, awards info. etc. for the website/flickr account.

[h.holmes@gov.scot](mailto:h.holmes@gov.scot)

[hectorhighlanders@btinternet.com](mailto:hectorhighlanders@btinternet.com)

**Secretary's Report:**

Matthew had nothing new to report

**Membership Secretary's Report:**

Dylan had submitted a written report. Individual membership 2015-2017 was down from 170 to 162.

**Conference Secretary's report:**

Steph asked delegates to please complete the evaluation and feedback form, and return either a hard copy or by email. He complimented Duncan and Elaine on the conference organisation, the quality of the speakers and the venue, especially the Bachelors' Club. Proposals for forthcoming conferences were as follows: 2018 St Fagans, 2019 Cumbria, possibly Carlisle, 2020 Galway, 2021 possibly Cornwall.

**Study Day:**

Linda re-issued the invitation to visit Dunmurry church, Belfast. The suggested dates for this Study Day is 5 May 2018. Communion is celebrated twice a year and this is one of the occasions.

**Election of Officers**

The new president of the Society is Dafydd Roberts. Dafydd said it was a great privilege to be president

and thanked Linda for setting such a high standard. The new Vice President is Steph Mastoris, proposed by Cozette Griffin-Kremer (seconded by Christine Stevens). All the officers had agreed to continue to serve. The following new members of the Council were proposed by Michael Larkin (seconded by Steph Mastoris) and accepted by the meeting:

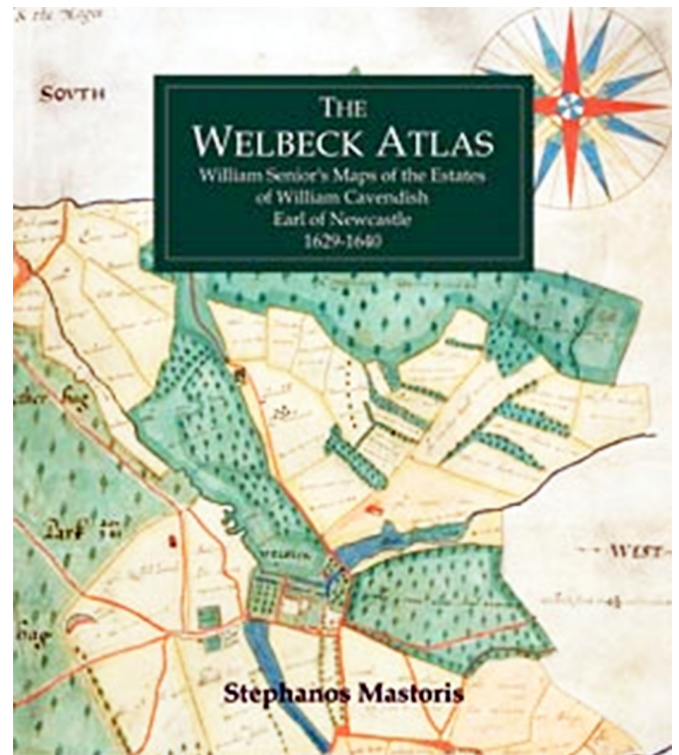
Ailbhe Nic Giollair Chomhail (NUI)  
Mared McAleavey (St Fagans)  
Aisling Ni Churraighin (NUI)  
David Eveleigh (Ironbridge)  
Bob Powell (Highland Folk Museum)

### Any Other Business

Senator Paul Coghlan suggested a more formal link with the Folklore Society. Caroline Oates (Folklore Society) put out a call for papers for a MERL conference on working life 27-29 April 2018. She agreed to send more details via Steph. Claudia Kinmonth thanked the outgoing president for all her hard work on behalf of the society and for setting such a high standard.

The President closed the meeting.

### Recent Publications



Thoroton Society Record Series

**Thoroton Society Record Series Volume 47 (2017). *The Welbeck Atlas: William Senior's maps of the estates of William Cavendish, Earl of Newcastle, 1629-1640*** edited by Stephanos Mastoris with an interactive digital flashcard edited by Andrew Nicholson

William Cavendish, Earl (later Duke) of Newcastle, of Welbeck Abbey, Nottinghamshire and Bolsover Castle, Derbyshire, was one of the largest English landowners of his day. In 1629 he appointed the surveyor William Senior to map his extensive estates in seven counties.

Over the previous twenty years Senior had undertaken a similar survey for Newcastle's Cavendish cousins - the 1st and 2nd Earls of Devonshire - of Hardwick and Chatsworth in Derbyshire. For both branches of the family Senior produced outstanding examples of vividly coloured maps bound into folio 'atlases'.

The Welbeck Atlas contains maps surveyed between 1629 and 1640 for Newcastle's properties in Nottinghamshire (19 maps), Derbyshire (27), Staffordshire (9), Northumberland (20), Gloucestershire (3) and Somerset (3). Together these cover over 106,000 acres of land and provide an important primary source for local historians and archaeologists of the counties involved as well as for genealogists and cartographic historians.

This ground-breaking Record Series edition incorporates two elements. Firstly this book contains a detailed Map Catalogue listing the names of all villages, fields and commons recorded on each map as well as the names of their tenants. This is prefaced by a scholarly introduction by the editor, Stephanos Mastoris, illustrated by over sixty colour plates of details from the maps.

Secondly, a digital set of full colour reproductions of the maps is provided on an interactive USB flashcard at the end of the volume. All images are capable of being enlarged on screen to any desired scale. Available on line. Please see the **Ordering Thoroton Society publications** page for information on purchasing Record Series volumes.

### **A Land Girl's Tale; concentrating on winning the war**

**By Mona McLeod**

Published by Scotland Street Press



Mona McLeod worked as a member of the Womens Land Army in Kirkcudbrightshire during the second World War. Known as Land Girls they undertook heavy agricultural work in fields, with animals, carrying hundred weight sacks, sawing wood, felling trees, filling up rat holes. This unique memoir provides a valuable record of a time when women faced the rigorous physical challenges involved in winning the war at home.

A Land Girl's Tale: Concentrating on Winning the War by Mona McLeod published 2017 priced £7.99

## **Forthcoming Conferences**

### **BALLADS AND MEMORY**

31 August–5 September 2018

National Museum of Ethnology, Prague

This conference will explore the idea of memory in relation to ballads and folk songs by looking at songs as carriers of cultural and community memory, by looking at the mechanisms whereby songs old and new have been perpetuated, and how they are being remembered and reshaped in the digital age. It will delve into the reasons for maintaining memories through song.

*International Ballad Conference of the Kommission für Volksdichtung, organised in Prague by the National Museum, Charles University Faculty of Arts, Department of Ethnology, and the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences.*

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## **Obituaries**

### **Dr Venetia Newall**

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Dr Venetia Newall, who passed away on 15 April, 2017. Although it is some years since she has been able to be at our Conferences, she was formerly a very regular attender, well known and very highly respected for her knowledge of folklore. The author of numerous books and articles, she is perhaps best known for *An Egg at Easter: A Folklore Study*, published in 1971. She was also in great demand as an editor, notably of *The Witch Figure* in honour of the seventy fifth birthday of Katharine Briggs,





published in 1973. Contributors to this volume of essays included many noted scholars including Jacqueline Simpson, Hilda Ellis Davidson, John Widdowson, Carmen Blacker and Dr Newell herself. Dr Newell was also the natural choice as editor when in 1978 the Folklore Society held its centenary conference, publishing the proceedings as *Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century*, which appeared in 1980. A Christmas card from Dr Newell was something to be treasured. These may have been seasonal greetings, but they were also elegantly produced, beautifully illustrated works of scholarship addressing a wide range of topics.

Marking the loss of this learned lady and member of our Society, we extend our sympathy and good wishes to her family.

### **Lillis O Laoire**

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### **Susan Loughbrough**

Late last year we learned of the death on 15 May 2017 of Susan Loughbrough, a long-standing member of the Society and, along with her late husband, Brian, a regular attendee of our annual conferences.

Born Susan J Hunter in 1938, she married Brian Loughbrough in 1963, a year or so after he had been appointed Assistant Keeper of the Museum of English Rural life, and they enjoyed over fifty years of life together until Brian's death in May 2015. Their daughter Sarah was born in 1967, just after they moved to Lincoln, where Brian was to establish the Museum of Lincolnshire Life. This opened in July 1969 on the day Susan gave birth to their son, Roger! In 1972 Susan and Brian moved to Nottingham, where he had been appointed Chief Museums Officer.

From 1986 until her retirement in 2002 Susan taught Geography at Nottingham Girls High School, concentrating especially on Human Geography for A Level. A former colleague recalls:



*Susan was very professional, with a good sense of humour, calm and very level headed and reliable in a crisis. She loved her subject and was a very good geographer and fully participated in her department, leading field trips and contributing to them in an active and enthusiastic way. Susan was very organised and helpful to new teachers in the Geography department; a good team member, very cooperative and enjoyed the social life of the dept. always participating in meals out and sometimes organising them. All in all a great colleague and excellent teacher.*

In many respects the same could be said for Susan's engagement with the members of the Society for Folk Life Studies. She will be sadly missed by all of us who knew her.

### **Steph Mastoris**

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# *Good to know...*

Meet  
Dafydd Roberts  
our newly  
appointed  
President  
with effect  
from September  
2017.



## *What do I do*

I'm the Keeper of Amgueddfa Lechi Cymru/National Slate Museum, which is part of Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales. The Museum is at Llanberis, in north-west Wales, and is located within what used to be the engineering workshops of the former Dinorwig Slate Quarry. We employ about thirty staff, and the Museum attracts in the region of 140,000 visitors annually. Much of my time at present is occupied in working with a team (led by our local County Council) that's aiming to submit a World Heritage bid to UNESCO in 2019. The bid focusses on the cultural landscape of the slate quarrying areas of north-west Wales, and will include our museum.

I'm a Plaid Cymru member of Llandygai Community Council, a school governor, and a member of the Board of Eisteddfod Genedlaethol Cymru. In my spare time, I enjoy gardening, walking, and canal boating.

## *How long have I been a member of SFLS?*

I've been a member since 1984. I was encouraged to join by my line manager at the time, Dr. J. Geraint Jenkins, a former President of the Society. The first Conference I attended was the one held at Truro that year ; on the last day, Geraint imparted the news that I would be responsible for organising the 1986 Conference, which would be held at Bangor, in north-west Wales. In at the deep end, as they say! Over the successive years, I've been fortunate enough to be able to attend every Conference, and I've really enjoyed and appreciated the companionship and the perspective that being a member can provide.



*Meet the committee . . .*

Stephanos Mastoris  
(not to mention one of the Deputy Lieutenants for  
the county of West Glamorgan since August 2016.)



**Editor Folk Life Studies**  
Lillis Ó Laoire,



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Duncan Dornan



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**Editor Newsletter Elaine Edwards**



*Meet the committee . . .*

**Editor Reviews** Felicity McWilliams



**Secretary** Matthew Richardson



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**Website Officer** Heather Holmes



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**Membership Secretary** Dylan Jones





## *And finally...*

Wilfred Predgen Waugh (a Rex rabbit, if you're in doubt) also attended the year's conference. Perhaps a first for the Society...? He was snoozing *after* the presentations not during of course!



### **Have you, or are you about to change your address?**

If so, please let Dylan, the membership secretary know.

Email address: [lunedaiolan@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lunedaiolan@yahoo.co.uk)

Take a look at *your* Society's website

[www.folklifestudies.org.uk](http://www.folklifestudies.org.uk)

The contents of all issues of *Folk Life* are listed as well as core information about the Society, including a membership form along with notices of Society meetings and conferences and the text of the *Newsletter*. The site is also available for members to post relevant information. Please send text as e-mail attachments to the website officer

### **Members' online access to Folk Life**

Society for Folklife Studies members have access to the full online issues of *Folk Life* and *Gwerin*.

When you subscribed you will have provided our Membership Secretary with an email address. You will need this address to create your account to get access to the online issues of *Folk Life* and *Gwerin*.

Go to [www.tandfonline.com](http://www.tandfonline.com) and register with your email address. Once your account has been verified and you are logged in, you will see the Taylor and Francis Welcome screen. Please click "Your Account" next to your recognised name at the top of the screen.

Online access to the journal is reached via "Account settings" and "view your access". You will then find the journal name in the "Subscription" tab.

Heather.Holmes@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Contributions/comments should be forwarded to the newsletter editor  
Elaine Edwards at [e.edwards@nms.ac.uk](mailto:e.edwards@nms.ac.uk)

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