

Centre for History News



Our spring newsletter emerges as we welcome Professor Todd Walker, our new UHI principal, on a virtual visit to the Centre for History. His appointment from Australia is bringing fresh thinking and ideas to UHI and we look forward to helping in that mission.

We have been working remotely for over a year and despite the challenges of the pandemic, there has been plenty to celebrate in that time. Our teaching has continued to be rated as excellent with many pedagogic innovations being added to our range of online skills. Our flagship online seminar series, History Talks Live, was conceived and born in the pandemic and regularly attracts audiences in the many hundreds. Student numbers are increasing too, especially at masters' level, and the ongoing enthusiasm and resilience of our students constantly amazes us.

As we continue to build and develop our research and teaching, I hope you find this newsletter refreshing and inspiring. There is much to be proud of at the Centre for History.

Professor David Worthington

Spring 2021

The Centre for History has been part of the University of the Highlands and Islands since 2005 and is internationally renowned for our research and teaching in Highland, Scottish and wider world history.

We are normally based at Burghfield House (the building on the left in the above image) in the cathedral town of Dornoch, Sutherland, but during the pandemic we are proudly operating from spare bedrooms, studies and living rooms across Scotland.

You can find out what we do by following us on Facebook or Twitter **@UHIHistory**

Visit our website to find out more about our undergraduate history degrees and online masters courses www.history.uhi.ac.uk

Or email us on history@uhi.ac.uk

We look forward to hearing from you!



University of the
Highlands and Islands
Centre for History

Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd
agus nan Eilean
Ionad Eachdraidh

TEACHING NEWS



Room to talk

This semester our undergraduate teaching team, led by **Dr Lucy Dean**, taught twelve modules to more than 200 students. We covered a wide range of themes and historical periods (from Robert Bruce to the music and politics of black America), introduced 'break out rooms' in our larger classes to encourage discussion in more intimate groups, and opened a History Student Common Room, giving students a non-teaching online space to talk amongst themselves.

Student well-being and mental health has been a big priority for the university over the winter. At the Centre for History, we are very aware that students can find studying from home a struggle and we are doing all we can to keep in touch and ease their difficulties where possible.

MLitts 'sans frontières'

There has been a big rise in masters' students joining our online MLitt programmes with another seventeen postgraduates enrolling with the Centre in January. The seventeen joined a postgraduate student body nearly ten times that size and are now studying online from their homes all over the world, including Inverness, Sligo, Tarland, Somerset, Singapore, West Hollywood, Edinburgh, Humberside, Germany, North Uist, Canada, Wick, Dunfermline, Oban and Lewis!

No more exams!

From September 2021 we will no longer set traditional exams. This is a direction we have been going for several years, with many history modules featuring additional essays or other assessments rather than a sit-down exam. We think this is a fairer and less anxiety-inducing way to assess our students' work.

As ensemble exams have been impossible during the pandemic, history students on modules which normally run exams are currently being allowed a week to write their exam answers at home, which are then marked accordingly.

Spring reading weekend

At a recent undergraduate reading weekend some of our students took part in a series of fun online events. **Dr Katy Turton** and **Dr Alison Chand** held a historical scavenger hunt, **Dr Iain Robertson** took them on a virtual walking tour and **Dr Lucy Dean** and **Dr Nicola Martin** led a hands-on session on using primary sources. Our wonderful student rep, Rozaliya, opened the weekend with a 'What got you into history?' discussion as well as hosting a film evening. The weekend ended with 'Tales from the Archives' – the dos and don'ts of archive visits, with input from many staff. The weekend was the brainchild of **Dr Lucy Dean** who hopes to hold it face-to-face next year.

STUDENT NEWS



NC 500 - the inside story

PhD student **Julian Grant** has spent the pandemic year working on a community project with Castletown Heritage Society. Participants used disposable cameras to capture their own personal 'living landscapes' along the North Coast 500. This is the first time the tourist route has been studied through the eyes of the people who live there, and their photographs and words tell a rich and poignant story. Read about [Julian's research](#) and see the photos at [Castletown Heritage Society](#).

Welcome new researchers

Five new research students have joined the Centre in recent months. **Vicki Jagger**, **Charlotte Evans** and **Oisín Ó Ruacháinn** are working on PhDs, while **Aila Schäfer** and **Aimee Houghton** are studying for MRes degrees. Aimee is jointly supervised with the Environmental Research Institute. All our research students get together at fortnightly online hangouts, but we are very much looking forward to seeing them in person – especially as Oisín and Aimee are still in their US homes! Find out more about [their research](#) on our website.

Exploring 'atom town'

Dr Linda Ross, who completed her PhD with the Centre last year, has just had an article published in the prestigious journal *Scottish Historical Review*. [Dounreay; creating the nuclear north](#) looks at the ways in which the siting of a nuclear reactor near the small Highland town of Thurso shaped and changed the area. As Linda says, her article 'puts people and place at the centre of the nuclear project, revealing Dounreay's role in creating a mid-twentieth century Highland counter-narrative of in-migration and modernity far removed from traditional discourses of depopulation.'

Whisky in the Highlands

We encourage our PhD students to give lectures and talks so we were delighted when **Darroch Bratt** gave the Institute of Archaeology's first seminar of 2021. Darroch is jointly supervised by the Centre for History and the Institute of Archaeology and his talk [Whisky Distilling in the Highlands and Islands](#) combines both disciplines.

STAFF NEWS



Despite Covid restrictions our staff have given more lectures, are writing more articles, chapters and books, and are taking part in and organising more public engagement events than ever before. Here's a snapshot of their activities over the last few months:

Dr Alison Chand has an [article published in the Oral History Review](#) comparing interviewee responses to different interviewers to see how popular memory and 'preparedness' might impact successive interviews.

Dr Lucy Dean wrote for the [Dundonald Castle blog](#) on the 650th anniversary of Robert II's coronation at the end of March and also spoke at the Royal Studies Network roundtable in April. She is co-organiser of the Tenth Kings and Queens conference, to be held online from 29 June to 2 July.

Dr Amy Hayes is a founding member of the Trinity Network and was involved in the online symposium 'Reviving the Trinity' and is also co-organiser of the Tenth Kings and Queens conference.

Professor Jim Hunter's article on the [potato blight famine in Scotland](#) is published on the Great Irish Famine of 1845-52 website, part of an ambitious project of TV programmes and online material run by Ireland's state broadcaster RTÉ and University College Cork.

Professor Marjory Harper's *Testimonies of Transition* came out as an [audiobook](#) in December 2020 and includes her oral recordings of migrant experiences.

Dr Linsey Hunter has been working with the Mearns Coastal Heritage Trail (MERCHAT) voluntary group offering historical advice for some of the proposed interpretation on the trail.

Dr Nicola Martin was interviewed for a two part special Unearthed [podcast on the Highland Clearances](#).

Dr Iain MacInnes was interviewed [online](#) by Brazilian academics on 'medievalism' in March and spoke at an [international forum](#) 'Muhammet Bayram Han – the Turkmen and traditions of humanism, patriotism and courage of the Turkmen people' organised by the Turkmenistan government in April.

Dr Jim MacPherson co-edited a new book of essays on contemporary novelist, poet and short story writer, [Michel Faber](#), and created new interpretation for the Clan Macpherson Museum.

Dr Elizabeth Ritchie's article [Men and Place](#) on male identity in the Scottish Gaelhealtachd was published in January's *Genealogy* journal. In April, the *Scottish Historical Review* published her work on [family life and the spread of evangelic culture](#).

Dr Iain Robertson has been busy finalising our REF 2021 submission – the culmination of four years of work! See more in Research.

Dr Katy Turton held an online discussion of the part women played in the 1905 revolution in Russia and has just published her first novel on the subject – [Blackbird's Song](#).

Dr Philippa Woodcock's careers presentation [Why study the history of war?](#) was included in a British Academy schools initiative (Dr Nicola Martin and MLitt student Nathan Slingsby also contributed).

Professor David Worthington was co-convenor of a series of [seminars](#) for the Coastal History Network, an international network of scholars working on the coast which he founded in the spring of 2020 and which now has circa 160 members

And finally, we bade a sad farewell to **Dr Katie Carpenter** and wished her well in her new full time history lectureship at the University of Lincoln.

RESEARCH EXCELLENCE



Image: Suisnish township, Skye. Our research into the symbiotic, contested and complex relationships between land and people in the Highlands is informing public-policy debate on land reform and the community buyout movement.

Our research is changing the region

Over the last few years we have been collecting evidence of the societal and academic impact of the Centre's research and developing so-called 'impact case studies' around two key areas of our research.

The first case study examines how we have informed Scottish Government policy, inspired organisations such as Community Land Scotland, and influenced many people in the area of Scottish land reform through the research and publications of **Dr Elizabeth Ritchie**, **Dr Iain Robertson** and **Professor James Hunter**.

The second analyses how the Centre's collaborative research on historical vitality and resilience in the Highlands and Islands is helping to transform regional cultural practice and empower communities to make social and economic changes. It includes research from **Dr Jim MacPherson**, **Professor David Worthington** and **Professor James Hunter** and looks at how we inspired [the Spirit of the Highlands](#), a multi-million pound heritage development centred on Inverness Castle, but reaching across the whole region.

Our Reader, **Dr Iain Robertson**, has developed these case studies on our behalf, an enormous amount of work for him and for others involved.

What is REF 2021?

The Research Excellence Framework takes place roughly every seven years and is run by the four research funding councils for Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It's the primary medium for providing accountability for research investment and for allocating future research funding. The REF also gives the public an indication of the research standing of a department or unit and can be a very useful benchmark for how well it is doing. In line with university departments across the UK, we submitted our REF 2021 material this spring. There are three key changes since our 2014 submission :

- Our research publications have increased in range, influence and number.
- Research staff numbers have grown and include a higher proportion of women.
- We have significantly more research students and, with them, more funded PhD studentships.

The submission will be assessed extremely carefully by an expert panel in history who will look at the quality of our publications, our research environment and how our research has impacted the wider world.

It's a long and exacting process and, just like our students when they submit assignments, we will have to wait nervously and in anticipation to find out how we've done!

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



Photo credit ©Donnie Macleod, Lewis 1919 land act conference.

History Talks Live

One of the upsides of the new online world we all inhabit has been the increased opportunity for people to go to lectures, conferences and events which they would otherwise have missed.

In March last year we took the decision to make our Dornoch-based public seminar series a regular online event and to invite academics and the public to attend from their homes. Since then, we've hosted thirteen public lectures on subjects ranging from piracy in the eighteenth century to the Gaelic place names of Assynt. Our talks are live, with opportunities to ask questions at the end, and for those who cannot attend there are online [recordings of all the talks](#).

In the last twelve months more than 4000 people have attended or viewed our talks online. It's been extremely gratifying to see how much demand there appears to be for scholarly, well-researched, well-presented history.

The series is run by **Dr Iain Robertson** and **Dr Nicola Martin**, with input from the rest of the team. We're now working on talks for 2021-22 and are very excited at the mix of subjects and people. Do join us if you can!

To keep in touch with all our upcoming and past lectures go to [History Talks Live](#).

Spirit of the Highlands

At the end of last year **Professor David Worthington** talked about the conception and progress of 'the Spirit of the Highlands' in a [UHI blog](#) and, since then, story-collecting for the initial interpretation at Inverness Castle has intensified. David is currently working with the Castle team (via the UHI advisory group he leads on the development) to bring together academics, students and the public involved in different 'story gathering' research projects in the region, and to consider how best to archive and interpret the material they collect.

Macphersonia

Dr Jim MacPherson has been working very closely with the excellent Clan Macpherson Museum in Kingussie, for which he is a board member. Over the last few months Jim has developed and written new exhibition material for the redesigned exhibition hall which is due to open this summer. We're pretty sure that James Macpherson (of Ossian fame) will feature!

In a blog for [The Empire at Home](#), Jim explains how 'using the past as a resource in the present enables communities to change the ways in which their history is presented and to imagine alternative futures'. We look forward to seeing how this is reflected in the Clan Macpherson Museum when it reopens.