



Festivals, Faces and Fire: A Survey of Fieldwork Photography by Ian MacKenzie for the School of Scottish Studies, 1985-2005

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***Abstract:** This paper will discuss original fieldwork produced by Ian MacKenzie, Photographer at the School of Scottish Studies from 1985 to the present day, in the context of the existing photographic collection. Using visual examples, the paper will assess the amount of material generated; the type of material; the subject areas covered and when they were documented; how they were commissioned; and the academic involvement in such fieldwork. The distinctive approach of the ethnological photographer in the field will be examined, based on his own experience, and compared to some other forms of photography. Finally, the paper will comment on fieldwork ideas that were not enacted, and speculate on future developments and opportunities for original ethnological photography within the Archives of the School of Scottish Studies.*

Introduction

I trained at Napier College (Edinburgh) from 1976-1980, and then at the Royal College of Art in London, from 1982-1984, my main interests being art photography and documentary photography. It is most likely that my images from a 1979 series in my home village of Tomatin, Inverness-shire, were what convinced the interview



Ian Mackenzie: Mickey and Paul, Tomatin (Inverness-shire), 1979.

board at the School of Scottish Studies to hire me as a photographer in the summer of 1985. These photographs consist of portraits of the local community. At the time they were taken, I had been away at college for three years. As a result of distance, the community that was second nature to me and those that I knew from childhood became increasingly interesting, and I had perhaps my first experience of understanding the difference between viewing a community from the inside and as an outsider.

After having spent a year working as a freelance photographer, I was keen to start work at 27 George Square in August of that year – it was such an interesting environment. Now, nearly twenty years later, I am still in the post, though there has been much change during that time. The opportunity to give this paper today, has acted as a spur to review, as objectively as I can, the particular contribution that I have made to the Archives of the School of Scottish Studies.

The School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh was established in 1951 as a centre for interdisciplinary research on Scottish subjects, including language and traditional culture. As such, it provides extensive opportunities for study and research. The School's periodical, *Tocher* (meaning 'dowry' in Scots) was first published in 1971 and serves as an outlet for the oral tradition material held in its archives.¹ It includes articles relating to culture and customs, beliefs and superstitions, legends and folk tales, tales (non-fiction), and song. Volumes have also been dedicated to individual Scottish singers, storytellers and tradition-bearers.



Ian MacKenzie: The School of Scottish Studies, 27 George Square, University of Edinburgh, 1997.

The archives of the School of Scottish Studies include a Sound Archive and Photographic Archive. The Sound Archive holds staff and student field recordings as well as supplementary collections which include tapes made for the [Scottish] Place-Name Survey, and Gaelic and Scots linguistic surveys; and recordings submitted by

¹ *Tocher*, meaning 'dowry' in Scots, comes from the Scottish Gaelic *tochar*, now usually *tochradh*.

oral history groups from throughout Scotland. There are also collections of commercial discs which have been donated to the School, including the John Levy Collection of ethnic music, and the Will Forrest Collection of popular and Folk Music. There is also a collection of recordings made by Edgar Ashton at the Edinburgh University Folk Club in the 1960s.

The Photographic Archive comprises several individual image collections. The Main Archive holds thousands of black and white photographs, dating mainly from the 1930s to the 1980s, and originating from sources including staff and student fieldwork, and donations and individual collections of the photographs. Werner Kissling's images from the Hebrides and Galloway, dating from the 1930s to the 1950s, form the single largest collection in the Main Archive, amounting to some 5000 images distributed through various subject areas. Photographic collections separate from the Main Archive include Robert Atkinson's images of the Western Isles, taken during ornithological field trips in the 1930s and 1940s; the Rehfish Archive of images of Travellers in Aberdeen and Blairgowrie in the 1950s; McCormick's 'Tinkler-Gypsies of Galloway, 1906'; a collection of black and white photographs and postcards; and the Flett Negatives, a small collection of dance images. There is additionally a significant collection of slides, including original colour slides and black and white copies of photographs found in the Main Archive. These also cover various subject areas, and include the collections of Robert Atkinson, the historian Dr Marinell Ash, and the geologist A. Mackie.

Fieldwork

As the School of Scottish Studies' Photographer, I am responsible for the care and management of its photographic collections, but I also contribute to them. Fieldwork represents a small percentage of my actual work hours, but may be of the most significance in the long term. In 1987, I was asked to compile some course notes for Ethnology students on using photography as a fieldwork tool. After introducing myself, I wrote the following:

The most enjoyable aspect of my work is going out on fieldwork. I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to meet many interesting people and to have observed a variety of customs and traditions that, surprisingly in our modern society, still survive today. It is my job to photograph and sometimes videotape these people and events for the Archive of the School of Scottish Studies.

How useful I have been to the students over the years is hard for me to say, but I want to talk not about the methodology of fieldwork, but about the range of subjects in the fieldwork undertaken. I want to look at when fieldwork was undertaken, the locations, who initiated it and why, and what value it may have in the long term. Firstly, it is worth defining ethnological photography and considering how it differs from press photography, editorial documentary photography and fine art photography. These are the three areas in the spectrum of photography are perhaps closest to the field of ethnological photography, which I believe that differs in the following ways:

- The job of the press photographer is to capture that single image that tells the story in one go; that works as a visual headline, instant and complete for the reader. Ethnological photography is aware of the potential distortion of the single image and the role of the photographer's prejudices and aesthetic judgements in composing it. Rather, the ethnological photographer seeks to record a series of images from the whole event: before the action, the scene of the action, the action and events as they unfold and after the event is over, perhaps going on to cover related follow on activities. Rather than the single image, it looks for a sequence or series of images including different angles and points of view.



Ian MacKenzie: Smearisary (Inverness-shire), 2004.

- The editorial documentary photographer is also looking for a series of images but arguably, although they show more than the press photo, they are particularly governed by the photographer's aesthetics and perhaps the 'take'

they have on the subject, or the type of publication they are aimed at. There is a commercial consideration. The ethnological photographer aims to be much more neutral in the manner of recording images. Background and other aspects of the scene that a documentary photographer would crop or edit by changing viewpoint or getting in close, the ethnological photographer will allow to be as they are. This is because these images can be read later by many different audiences or researchers. All the information in an image is potentially useful and may gain in importance with the passing of time.

- Art photographers, if they are making images in ethnological areas, are likely to be looking for some essence of the event or person or experience that chimes with them, or reveals a truth. It is a personal journey or exploration. They may obsessively concentrate on one aspect, ignoring other aspects. Distortion, juxtaposition, removal from original context, and the synthesis of new meanings and suggestions is often the desired end. Ethnological photographers know that their images exist to explain and show information in context with other records – sound recordings, written sources, and oral tradition. Their work is part of a larger work than that of the artists.

A crucial aspect of ethnological photography – and this it has in common with most other forms of photography – is that images have to be made at the time, when the event is actually happening. For example, when the storyteller is telling the story, or when the house is still standing and the thatch is in good repair. Other ethnological material can be collected later, drawn from written sources, or recorded onto tape by people who remember. But ethnological photographs, whether commissioned or made incidentally, have to be taken in real time, at the time. A simple but significant fact, this is why visual recording on still or video in the field of ethnology must be encouraged and not neglected.

The Fieldwork Contribution

Before examining some of the fieldwork images that I have produced, the following statistics will give some indication of the scale of the work from which the examples are taken. Between 1985 and the early part of 2005, I generated some 18,900 35mm black and white negatives in total, of which approximately 8500 are original fieldwork photographs. The balance of 10,400 are mainly copies of old photographs and images used in general teaching. Colour slide images are estimated at around 7000 in total. Around half are original fieldwork images, giving 3500 slides, the balance of

3500 being copies and teaching examples. Therefore, the estimated total of images, in both colour and black and white, is 25,900. The total of original fieldwork images in both mediums is 12,000. This means that 46.3% of all the images I have made are connected with original fieldwork. There have been 27 extended fieldtrips of more than one day, and 87 day or part-day trips. Most of these were commissioned by academic members of staff, or sanctioned by them on behalf of a student at either Honours or Postgraduate level. A few were initiated by me, and some by people in close contact with the School.

Numbers and statistics, however do not give the full picture. In order to understand the nature of the fieldwork undertaken for the School of Scottish Studies, we need to look at the pictures themselves. Starting with Festivals, including Fire



Ian MacKenzie: Burning the Clavie, Burghead (Moray), January 1986.

Festivals, this is one of the most interesting areas of fieldwork, as it inevitably involves travel, meeting people and often seeing something quite out of the ordinary. The first such trip for me was in early January of 1986, to the village of Burghead on the North East coast, between Inverness and Elgin to photograph the Burning of the Clavie. This is a fire festival that takes place on the old New Year (12 January). The trip was initiated by Margaret Bennett, then Lecturer in Custom and Belief at the School of Scottish Studies. The sequence of fieldwork images consists of images from the day before, including the construction of the Clavie, the 'Clavie Crew' and helpers in Dan Ralph's workshop with the newly made Clavie. On the night of the actual burning, the Clavie is taken from door to door. A piece of burnt Clavie is considered to be good luck. After the house visiting, it is taken to be burnt out on the Doorie Hill in front of local crowds. The people of Burghead were very kind and

helpful to us, and this was not to be an uncommon experience in such fieldwork in the future. It was also here that I learned that it is not wise to wear a new down jacket anywhere near a blazing fire (!).



Ian MacKenzie: Preparing the Burryman, South Queensferry (Edinburgh), 1986.

Another fieldwork trip involved the recording of the Burryman of South Queensferry. Close to Edinburgh, just under the Forth Rail and Road bridges, this peculiar custom takes place early August every year on the Friday before the Ferry Fair. The first trip I made was in 1986, and later trips were in 1987 and 1991. These were encouraged, again, by the Custom and Belief Lecturers, Margaret Bennett and Dr Emily Lyle. The images above and below show the preparation of Alan Reid as the Burryman, and his subsequent procession round South Queensferry.



Ian MacKenzie: The Burryman, South Queensferry (Edinburgh), 1986.

Other festivals where photographic fieldwork has been undertaken include the Borders Ba' Games in Denholm in 1988, Jedburgh in 1996, and Ancrum in 2000; the Fisherman's Walk at Musselburgh in 1987 and 1989; the Flambeaux at Comrie in 1997-1998; the Bonfire at Biggar in 2001-2002; visits to the Cloutie Wells at Culloden in 1987 and 1989, and Munlochry in 1996; the Scottish Miners Gala in 1988; the Free Colliers March in 1988; Pitlochry Highland Games in 2000; and the Scottish Pipe Band Championships in 2001. The fieldwork trips to Musselburgh for the Fisherman's Walk were instigated by Margaret Mackay, who at the time was Lecturer in Material

Culture at the School. Musselburgh is a fishing community that still retains its identity although its fishing industry has largely disappeared. This identity is worn proudly by

some of the teenagers in the town, as can be seen in the first of the images below. The Flambeaux at Comrie are long birch poles with hessian-wrapped ends which are soaked in paraffin for several days. They are taken out on Hogmanay (31 December), and assembled at a particular location in the town where they are lit on the stroke of midnight and then carried through the streets. The Scottish Miners Gala and Free Colliers March are examples of urban festival activities, and take place in Edinburgh and Falkirk respectively. Fieldwork at the Scottish Pipe Band Championships at Dumbarton was instigated by a Postgraduate student who was particularly interested in the subject. Parades with a political motive have also been covered in fieldwork, the images collected



Ian MacKenzie: Teenagers at the Fisherman's Walk, Musselburgh (East Lothian) 1987.

including some from my own files of the Anti-Poll Tax marches in Glasgow on 31 March 1990, and Anti-War protests in Glasgow and Edinburgh in March 2003.



Ian MacKenzie: Free Colliers March, Falkirk, 1988 (left); The Flambeaux, Comrie (Perth and Kinross), 1998 (right).

So much of ethnology is about people. If we hear a sound recording of a person, we want to see what he or she looks like. Audio and visual is a connection so basic, that the School encourages its students to provide an image of their informants, either by taking photographs of the people themselves, or making copies of existing photographs. It is no surprise that much of my fieldwork photography relates to people, and their activities. Firstly, I want to consider images of informants and their work.

The image on the left below shows Kit Sked, a blacksmith from Cousland near Dalkeith, in his workshop in 1987. This photograph was taken during a full-scale fieldwork trip that included the use of video gear. The image on the right shows Peggy Livingstone of Musselburgh, dressed in traditional fishwife's clothing, in 1988.

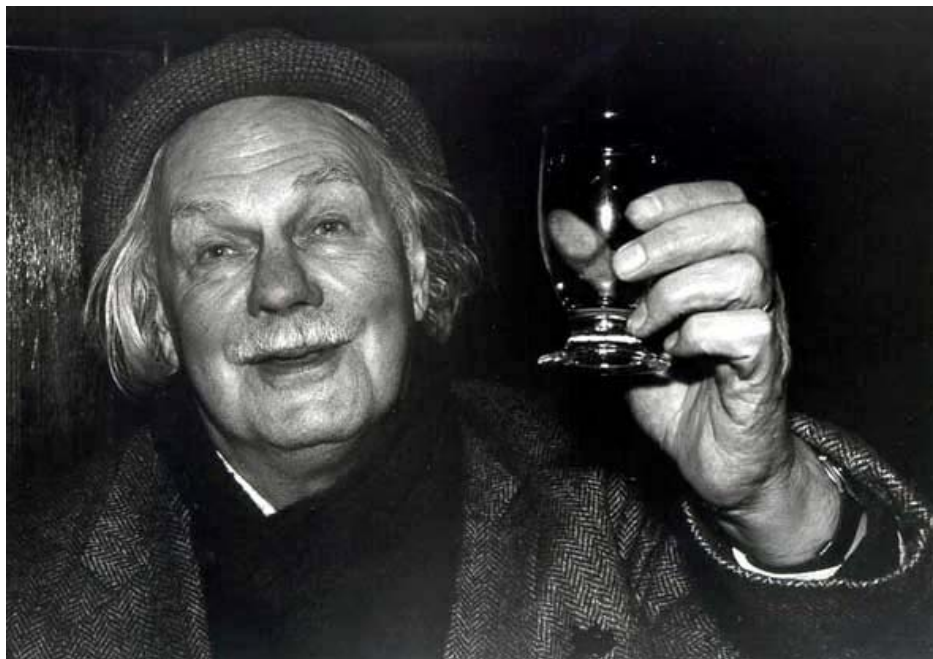


Ian MacKenzie: Kit Sked, Cousland (Midlothian), 1987 (left); Peggy Livingstone of Musselburgh, 1988 (right)

This particular photograph was taken in the studio and thus involved the informant visiting the School of Scottish Studies. This was arranged by Margaret Mackay during her time as Lecturer in Material Culture. Other images of informants at work include Alex Welsh Senior of Gourdon clearing the line after a day's line fishing in October 1985, taken during a full video and stills trip over several days and requiring three technicians; Donald Riddle, a fiddle maker from South Clunes near Inverness in December 1987, the result of a fieldwork trip initiated by the Balnain House Trust and Fred MacAulay (formerly of the BBC); and Jeannie Gibson of Bunessan, Mull, using

a sickle for harvesting in September 1989, taken during my first solo still and video field trip as technician, along with postgraduate Mairi MacArthur.

Much of the sound archive at the School of Scottish Studies consists of recordings from numerous informants who are performers or people with a repertoire of songs or stories that they learned via the oral tradition. Photographs of the informants accompany many of the recordings. These include singers photographed for Dr Sheila Douglas, for her book *The Sang's the Thing* and for the School's archives (Douglas 1992). Most were taken on intensive two or three day trips, where three or perhaps four informants would be visited in a day. We were fed in each house, hence my referring to this particular field trip as the Home Baking Tour of Scotland. Many Travellers have also been recorded telling stories for the archives including recordings of Duncan Williamson, Alan Bruford and Willie MacPhee telling stories to Ethnology students in the gardens of the School in 1987 and 1990; and Stanley Robertson, Sheila MacGregor and Essie Stewart at the Netherbow Theatre, Edinburgh during the annual Storytelling Festival in 2000.



Ian MacKenzie: Hamish Henderson at the Sandy Bells, Edinburgh, 1992

Staff and students of the School of Scottish Studies are also the subject of fieldwork photographs in the archives. These include Lecturers, visiting academics including John Widdowson in 1995, and Postgraduate and Honours students conducting fieldwork. The photograph above shows former Senior Lecturer Hamish Henderson at the Sandy Bells pub in Edinburgh, in 1992.

Photographs taken during a fieldwork trip by Dr Emily Lyle and Dr Katherine Campbell to interview Lizzie Angus (aged 106) in Ythanvale Nursing Home at Ellon in 2000 resulted in some good examples of ethnological photography. The fieldwork trip related to the Greig-Duncan Collection of Folk Songs.² Lizzie Angus personally remembered Gavin Greig as her schoolteacher. Some of the images taken on the day look rather 'untidy' – Mrs Angus's room in the nursing home was small, and some of the recording equipment had to be placed on the bed. However, the photographs record the situation as it was. My professional instincts as a photographer also allowed for the creation of more dramatic images of the event though, such as the close-up shot of Katherine Campbell and Lizzie Angus below.



Ian MacKenzie: Dr Katherine Campbell and Lizzie Angus, Ythanvale Nursing Home, Ellon (Aberdeenshire), 2000

This is just a taste of the work that has been done: there are many other subjects that have been covered, including traditional signs (1986), a cycle trip to the Western Isles (1986), mackerel fishing (1986 and 1987), grouse beating (1986), the Drumalban Dance Ensemble (1987), rabbit catching (1989), wells (1989), sheep clipping (1989), boat building (1989), Madras lace-making (1991), thatching (1991), curling stones (1991), a ship launch (1993), Pictish stones (1995), farm signs (1998), the official opening of the Scottish Parliament (1999), a farmers' market (2000), the Aliens Registration Book (2001), and the Save the Scottish Regiments March (2004), amongst others.

² The Greig-Duncan Collection is held at Historic Collections at the University of Aberdeen. Emily Lyle and Katherine Campbell edited the eighth and final volume of *The Greig-Duncan Folk Song Collection* for publication (Lyle and Campbell 2002).

I would now like to consider some ideas from a longer list of fieldwork gathering proposals, which, for one reason or another, were not enabled to happen.

During a period of severe financial restrictions in the early 1990s, when there was virtually no funding available for fieldwork expenses, I proposed that the School of Scottish Studies combine with other organisations, such as the Scottish Arts Council, The Scottish Tourist Board, local authorities and business sponsorship, to launch a series of Photography Commissions. These would have been available, by competitive process, to young photographers out of college, or photographers who perhaps lived in a particular place with an inside view on a community, to cover aspects of fieldwork that we had identified as missing or under-represented in the School's archives. This could have been anything from traditional dance and the religious traditions of the Western Isles, to the oil industry in Scotland. This was an ambitious idea, but it would have set an agenda that, over a period of years, could have generated diverse, high quality sets of images. These would have benefited the photographers involved and the archive holdings, as well as offering an opportunity for raising the profile of the Department in the general Scottish cultural scene.

The Carrying Stream Exhibition was toured in a number of different forms to a wide range of places and venues in Scotland. Using photography, text and music, it communicated the work of the School of Scottish Studies to the public and raised its profile. The exhibition received much positive feedback. A development on this activity that might have contributed much to fieldwork across the board was the concept of using the exhibition to target areas where the archives either had little material or where the School wanted to undertake further research. Using the exhibition as a focal point the School could have, in combination with lectures and music, established links in the host community. This sharing approach would have led to information, and field recording in sound, video, and photography, including the copying of old photos of interest in family possession. All of this, if used in a strategic way, would have made a significant contribution to the archives.

Yet, the glass should be viewed as more than half full. The archives of the School of Scottish Studies have a tremendous amount of important recordings, manuscripts, videotapes and photographs stored in a safe environment and accessible to future generations. This resource is being added to even now by staff (when the pressures of teaching and publishing permit) and students in their project work at all levels. In my particular area, I see the possibility of more digitisation

projects, in order to make more widely accessible parts of our collections.³ In the near future I am also keen to facilitate a topographical place-name project, looking at and illustrating specific landscape features (such as mountain shapes, and the naming conventions given to them); and a plant-lore project, focusing on recording of the plants on the *machair* of the Western Isles and combining the images with their Gaelic names, lore and uses.

Tobar an Dualchais (which is Gaelic for 'The Well of Knowledge') is a large scale, collaborative digitising and cataloguing project for sound recordings in the School of Scottish Studies, the BBC and the Campbells of Canna Collections. Granted Heritage Lottery Funding, this project is likely to commence later this year (2005), with the end goal being thousands of hours of original archive recordings available on the World Wide Web. Now is a good time to be thinking of making new images, from all over Scotland, which will visually support the delivery of this audio resource when it comes online.

To finish, I would like to take one more look back at a fieldwork experience that most stands out in my memory. In the summer of 1988 a fieldwork team from the School of Scottish Studies made a series of visits, some lasting several days at a time, to the villages of Plockton and Dornie in Wester Ross, to extensively record, photograph and videotape the notable informant Duncan Matheson. The team was headed by Senior Lecturer in Oral Tradition, Donald Archie MacDonald, along with Chief Technician Fred Kent, Electronics Technician Neil MacQueen, photographer Ian MacKenzie (myself) and a visiting professor from East Tennessee State University, Dr Tom Burton.

During one of our visits Duncan Matheson led us up a hill, showing us the site of a secret still and recalling the characters and stories associated with it. He took us across the river to locate a stone, the object of local strongman legend. He was a fund of place-name information and patiently allowed us to set up, make technical checks and record him in the field and later in his home. We extensively videotaped the progress of his heather thatching project in Plockton, where things ran on 'Highland Time' and there was always space to enjoy the summer weather, knowing that there would be a good meal later and many drams before bed.

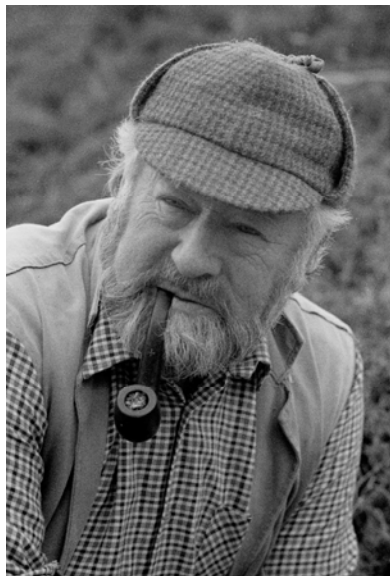
Duncan was a generous man and not only with his time. We were about to depart to return to the city one morning when, typical of the man, he appeared with fresh wild salmon wrapped in newspaper for each of us. As we were thanking him for

³ These may include a collaborative project to digitise the photographs of Werner Kissling, in conjunction with the University of Leeds, Dumfries Museum Service, and any other holders of his images.

this delight, he placed a clutch of fresh eggs on the dashboard, announcing 'There's your breakfast as well'. Careful repacking was required before we could finally set off down the bumpy single track road.



(Left): Duncan Matheson and Fieldworkers, Plockton (Highlands), 1988. (Left-right) Donald Archie MacDonald, Duncan Matheson, Fred Kent, Ian MacKenzie, Neil MacQueen.



Ian MacKenzie: Duncan Matheson (left); Fred and Duncan (right), Plockton (Highlands), 1988.

Although I didn't know it at the time, this was nearly the last of these large scale field excursions, and I was privileged to have been a part of it. The thought of such field trips happening again, in today's tighter financial and time restricted climate, is hard to imagine. Yet, I believe that it is possible to find the means to once again ford the 'carrying stream' of Scottish tradition.

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