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Doomsday fieldwork, or, how to rescue Gaelic culture? The salvage paradigm in geography, archaeology and folklore, 1955-1962

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Abstract

Amid a resurgence of interest both in histories of scientific fieldwork and in the geographies of the Cold War, this paper presents a comparative history of field practice across the distinct epistemic traditions of geography, archaeology and folklore. The paper follows the intellectual practices of three research teams attempting to 'rescue' Gaelic culture from the development of a missile-testing station in the Scottish Hebrides. The aims of the paper are fivefold: to extend insights from the histories of scientific fieldwork to understand the production of social knowledge; to consider the co-constitutiion of fieldwork and the region; to expand recent histories of geography in the mid twentieth century; to draw out the lingering significance of the 'salvage paradigm' in geography and other social sciences; and to reconceptualise this salvage fieldwork as a way of constructing social life as much as rescuing it.

In 1954, when Britain first decided to buy America's new Corporal missile system – the world's first nuclear-armed guided missile and the progenitor of contemporary weapons of mass destruction – it raised a problem common to the purchase of many extravagant gadgets: where will we put it? A missile with a range of over 80 miles inevitably takes up a lot of space. It seemed that the most obvious place to build a new test site – obvious, perhaps, in its remoteness from London – was in the archipelago of Scotland's Outer Hebrides (MacDonald, 2006). By the late 1950s the Hebridean landscape and seascape were thus transformed into a theatre of military operations, despite widespread disquiet about the effect of this new 'rocket range' on island life and culture.[1] The islands had long been a nationalist symbol of Scotland's cultural riches, a last bastion of Gaelic civilisation that had been pushed to the margins by the hegemony of English words and English ways. This at least is the premise of Sir Compton Mackenzie's novel *Whisky Galore* (1947), a 'genial farce' about doughty island spirit in the face of military hubris, later to turn into a successful Ealing comedy. The announcement of the rocket range in 1955, however, gave this narrative a new political edge; the result was *Rockets Galore* (1957), a self-described 'bitter farce' that emphatically registered Mackenzie's dissent at the 'the murder of island life' but which failed to take off in either bookshops or box office (Mackenzie, 1957: 9). The campaign of opposition to the rocket range, in which Mackenzie played an important part, is a longer story than can be told here, but some of its central concerns – the need to determine which cultural practices and artefacts might be lost and which must be saved through academic fieldwork – are the subject of this paper. I present a comparative history of fieldwork across geography, archaeology and folklore, all of which attempted to record, and thereby redeem, forms of regional social life that were expected to be displaced by missile testing.

The presence of weapons of mass destruction was, in one sense, the least significant objection to the range. The most vocal apprehension was expressed in relation to three apparently vulnerable aspects of Hebridean culture: the 'traditional' crofting landscape and environment; various prehistoric remains,

mostly Iron Age wheelhouses and chambered cairns; and the oral tradition of Gaelic Scotland in story and song. In each case, the proposal of the rocket range was seen by many as a death sentence for those islands affected: South Uist, Benbecula and North Uist (collectively known as the Uists).[2] An entire crofting township, West Gerinish in South Uist, was to be evacuated. The construction of vast military runways for aircraft was to encase archaeological sites under a tarmac blanket. And the most worrisome threat for some (though not, it should be said, for the majority of the islands' population) came from the prospect of hundreds of soldiers and other personnel connected with missile testing: those 'southerners' with their English language, English accents, Elvis records and other corrupting influences (Strand and Davidson, 1962: 47). The very existence of rockets and rock 'n' roll in such close proximity to Gaelic 'folk' was felt to inexorably lead to its cultural extinction, a concern that stood in for a wider set of complaints about the direction of modernity itself.

In the tenth volume of his immodestly proportioned autobiography *My Life and Times*, Mackenzie recorded that hearing about the range put him 'in a state of agitated fury' — 'this means death for the Outer Isles that were a refuge from this machine-driven world of today' (Mackenzie, 1971: 53). The Dundee Central Committee of the Scottish National Party also protested at 'the further destruction of what remains of the Highland and Celtic way of life which is being slowly obliterated ... by generations of London control'.[3] The militant nationalist and self-styled 'Scottish Patriot' Wendy Wood took an even gloomier view, believing that the Outer Hebrides would be annexed in their entirety by the United States.[4] Although some of the protest was couched in terms of its opposition to nuclear weapons, this was a distinctly minority position, public support for the atomic arsenal holding firm in the period before the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). It is instructive that a protest meeting convened at Iochdar, South Uist, on the 17th August 1955, which expressed its 'deep concern' about the threat to 'the way of life of our people, to the very character of the local population and to the security of tenure of many crofters in their land and their homes' also clarified that it had 'no desire to obstruct any measures necessary for

national defence'.[5] The problem was the location. Seamus Delargey, the head of the Irish Folklore Commission and a prominent critic of the range, lobbied the Canadian industrialist Sir James Dunn with a letter in which he stated that 'I am all in favour of such a [guided missile] station but <u>not</u> in the heart of the ancient Gaelic country of the Outer Isles'.[6]

Alongside these cultural elites, academics too were particularly anxious about what might be lost by the development, though they seldom challenged the logic of nuclear security. And it was not just cultural assets that were at stake: the rocket range was thought to inevitably damage the 'machair', a sand dune system and calcareous grassland that was rare in European terms. Professor J. A. Steers, the Cambridge geographer and coastal geomorphologist, wrote that this 'coast is the best development of machair in the country … things like this [rocket range] are in the habit of spreading and if that is the case, I do hope that the [Nature] Conservancy will do all it can at the present time to get transference to, say, Benbecula or part of Lewis'.[7] Typically for the discipline at the time, he felt he had a duty to publicly withhold criticism. Some of the letters of protest published in *The Scotsman* newspaper were, he felt, 'written by extremists and although I do feel a great deal of sympathy with them, I am most anxious not to get involved in any paper controversy'.

But not all academics shared the cautious stance of British geography that Steers personified. In the stories that follow the three disciplines that rushed to preserve aspects of Hebridean culture – geography, archaeology and folklore – represent very different modes of political, as well as epistemological, engagement. The geographers at Glasgow University's Crofting Survey attempted a coolly 'impartial' survey of landscape and social conditions with a view to creating an 'objective' record of the region prior to the development. They were neither working for the Government nor contesting its decision to locate the range in the Hebrides. The archaeologists on the other hand – honours students and their supervisor at Edinburgh University – had their work funded by the Government's Ministry of Works and were to some extent agents of a state-sponsored attempt

to salvage valuable sites of antiquity. The folklorists at Edinburgh University's School of Scottish Studies were more explicitly oppositionist, initially campaigning against the range before hoping to benefit – as the archaeologists had – from government funding for their own recording programme to 'rescue' Gaelic culture in the Uists. I examine these disciplinary episodes in some detail, drawing on several different archives and a range of published sources, set against a background of personal correspondence and interviews. The result is an attempt, as Trevor Barnes (borrowing from Bruno Latour) puts it, to 'follow' a series of fieldworkers, inasmuch as this is possible fifty years after the event (Barnes, 2008b). Running across these stories are five themes which I develop in the section below. In the first instance, I aim to expand the scope of recent histories of fieldwork, a prominent theme in the history of science. Secondly, all of the histories of fieldwork pursued here share the specific regional context of the Outer Hebrides, a geographical parameter which casts the disciplinary practices in sharper relief. Thirdly, the paper situates these stories within a renewed interest in the 1950s as a period of disciplinary change. Fourth, it attends to the significance of the 'salvage paradigm', this apparent need to rescue people, things, culture and data from the encroachments of modernity. And lastly, I want to reconceptualise this salvage fieldwork as a way of constructing social life as much as rescuing it.

Salvaging the field

It is now a decade since Felix Driver noted in *Transactions* 'how rarely we have reflected on the place of field-work in our collective disciplinary imagination' (Driver, 2000: 267). It would be difficult to make such a claim now. Encouraged by Driver's editorial, and drawing inspiration from Henrika Kuklick and Robert E. Kohler's collection *Science in the Field*, the business of fieldwork is now a mainstream historiographical concern (Kuklick and Kohler, 1996). There is a significant corpus of historical scholarship on the politics, practices, performances, spaces, mobilities, logistics, embodiments, inscriptions,

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translations, institutions, instruments and contingencies of fieldwork (Crang, 2003; Dewsbury and Naylor, 2002; Greenhough, 2006; Kohler, 2002; Lorimer 2003a; 2003b; Lorimer and Spedding, 2005; Matless, 2003; Merchant, 2000; Naylor, 2002; 2003; 2005; Powell, 2008; Withers and Finnegan, 2003). Much of this research takes its lead from the new historical geographies of science, in which the various spaces of knowledge production – field, laboratory, archive, museum, library, lecture hall – are regarded as active rather than incidental contexts (Outram, 1996; Withers, 2001; 2007; Livingstone, 1995; 2003; 2005; Finnegan, 2008). This of course was the great irony of earlier historiographies of geography: that they had neglected the role of space in the development of disciplinary ideas (Livingstone, 1995).

All of this research has helped reclaim the field as a worthy object of scholarship; no longer can it be dismissed as the 'site of compromised work' in comparison to the ordered world of the laboratory (Kuklick and Kohler, 1996: 1). But this recent attention has been more than a little uneven. Kuklick and Kohler lament the absence of research on fieldwork in the social sciences compared with the natural sciences (however see Schumaker, 1996). In histories of geographical fieldwork too, science has taken centre stage. This paper by contrast is concerned with the production of knowledge about social life, in this case that of the Outer Hebrides. Moreover, it is framed as a comparative history of field practice, considering aspects of competition and collaboration between different epistemic traditions. One might argue that conventional histories of geography tend to concentrate on what is distinctively geographical rather than following parallel developments in allied disciplines. While there are exceptions here – an obvious one is David Livingstone's *The Geographical Tradition* – to the extent that there are moments of comparative analysis, they are understandably more concerned with central theoretical concerns than with the messiness of field practice (Livingstone, 1992). The unpublished doctoral work of Paul Merchant, from which I draw significant insight and information, stands out here (Merchant, 2000). As his example shows, a comparative approach is able to reveal correspondences within the fieldwork enterprise. It is apparent that the differences in the object of disciplines

are often less significant than a host of shared concerns. In the episodes I discuss here these include the urgent need to stem a cultural loss through the processes and technologies of recording; the methodological question of how to acquire access to community knowledge; and the need to use fieldwork for research training and thus for disciplinary renewal.

Taking my bearings from the spatial turn in the history of science, I situate the paper within the specific geographical frame of the region (see Livingstone, 2003; Finnegan, 2008: 384). It is no coincidence that all these stories are located in the same place: the salvage paradigm is geographically configured such that salvaging the field and redeeming its resources is, at the same time, a bid to preserve regional character — in this instance, maintaining the Gaelic culture of the Outer Hebrides as a symbolic resource that is also central for Scottish nationhood. This question of geographical scale has recently gained traction among historians of science. For instance, Diarmid Finnegan has expressed concern that 'discounting the meso-scale and concentrating on the movement between the local and the global may miss the ways in which science becomes entangled with national concerns or regional identities' (Finnegan, 2008: 384). In a similar vein, Simon Naylor has explicitly asked 'what role does the region play in the doing of fieldwork?' (Naylor, 2010: 9). As he observes, the region is not merely a container for scholarly endeavour but is itself part of what is at stake in the conduct of research (Naylor, 2010). What unfolds in the stories that follow is that disciplinary differences in method and approach are not just about appropriate conduct in the field but appropriate conduct in *this* field: the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd.* It is a region that is simultaneously configured as both marginal and central. Indeed, the peripherality that makes the islands valuable as a storehouse of Gaelic culture also renders them a desirable Cold War *place d'armes.*

Although this paper is about more than the history of geography, it takes as its subject one of the most neglected eras of the discipline. Save for the infamous spat between Richard Hartshorne and Fred K. Schaefer, the 1950s are often

overlooked as unproductive moment when bland regional description still held the quantitative revolution at bay. This of course is a crude generalization: the understanding of the region was itself being transformed by World War and Cold War, a more 'scientific' geography becoming part of the analytical machinery of national security (Barnes and Farish, 2006; Barnes, 2008). Indeed, as the work of Trevor Barnes and Matthew Farish has recently established, the role of geography as a state and military enterprise is one of the dominant themes of this era (Barnes 2005; 2008; Barnes and Farish, 2006; Farish, 2005; see also Power and Sidaway, 2004; Matless, Oldfield and Swain, 2008; Kirsch, 2005). A similar story is of course true for many other branches of knowledge that came to be re-made by the strategic demands of the Cold War (Leslie, 1993; Lowen, 1997; Edwards, 1996; Gerovitch, 2001; Cloud, 2001; Solovey, 2001; Kaiser, 2002). Although in the account I present here academic geography is figured as a much less strategically important discipline than in Barnes' work, it is nonetheless clear that security considerations established the parameters of much research, even in the regionalism that lingered from an earlier era (Clout and Gosme, 2003). My interest here, however, is less in geography as the direct intellectual apparatus of the state than in how it responded to the transformations of the social and environmental order brought on by the Cold War.

That such responses were often nostalgic takes me to another theme. I want to draw out the significance of the 'salvage paradigm', a movement which has gone almost unnoticed in the history of geography. For the historian James Clifford, the salvage paradigm is a 'pervasive ideological complex' most commonly associated with anthropology and ethnology that embodies 'a desire to rescue something "authentic" out of destructive historical changes' (Clifford, 2002: 160). It assumes a linear model of progress from pastoral life to modernity, dividing the world according to a series of binary oppositions between primitive/civilized, static/dynamic and authentic/inauthentic. As authenticity always exists immediately prior to the present there is always a sense that entering 'the modern world' must come at the cost of an irreversible loss of 'tradition'. Not only is the paradigm premised on an assumption of absence, loss and desire, it also

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implicitly specifies a redemptive action, casting the academic researcher as saviour – someone who can resurrect a fractured wholeness (Edwards, 2001: 158). But this saviour appears as a bivalent figure. As the act of recording is itself a hallmark of the very modernity that it seeks to mitigate, it has become commonplace to observe that in 'saving' the object of her study, the researcher also destroys it (see Wolfe, 2000: 239). At the very least she administers the last rites.

But I would rather think of this moment in a different way: that such fieldwork is less an act of destruction or salvage than one of *construction*, as a generative creation of social life which is orchestrated under the sign of its loss or rescue. This is a line of analysis that, coming out of science studies, has been too seldom present in histories of fieldwork. It holds that research practices are productive; in other words, that fieldworkers enact the object of their own enquiry. Epistemological differences or differences in field practice are thus not only interesting for what they say about their respective disciplines but also for how they *bring into being* the different versions of social life that they purport to describe. This theory has been given elegant expression by sociologists John Law and John Urry who make the case that social sciences 'participate in, reflect upon, and enact the social'; 'they make differences; they enact realities; and they can help bring into being what they discover' (Law and Urry, 2004: 392; Law 2004). Without reproducing their lengthy argument in its entirety I want to pursue their unlikely conclusion that the objects of fieldwork – in this case, the crofting landscape, the antiquity of the islands, and the oral tradition of Gaelic folk – are the *product* of these research activities. They are the ontological effects of particular field practices. A similar argument holds true for the making of the region. As Law and Urry argue, 'to the extent that [social science] … enacts methods that look for or assume certain structural stabilities, it enacts those stabilities while interfering with other [alternative] realities' (Law and Urry, 2004: 404). In the first of the three stories – in this case, about geographers' investigation of crofting – I want to show how fieldwork of various guises has long given discursive and material shape to this particular form of agriculture.

Doomsday geographies: Glasgow University's Crofting Survey

A form of small scale tenant agriculture, crofting was originally seen as the solution to famine, overpopulation and the bourgeoisie's need for an indentured labour force. The history of crofting, however, is the history of how it came to be understood as a problem in itself (see Condry, 1976). In 1883 the Napier Commission was tasked by the British Government with an enquiry into the 'condition' of the Scottish crofters. Its extensive fieldwork exploring the crofting way of life helped define, and thereby consolidate, crofting as a form of land tenure, ultimately through the auspices of the Crofters' Holding Act of 1886 (Hunter, 1984). Successive public enquiries throughout the twentieth century have further investigated the alleged ills of crofting[8] – variously: land quality; land tenure; insufficient acreage; scarcity of capital; out-migration; cultural conservatism – the general tone being summed up in the title of Adam Collier's 1953 report, *The Crofting Problem* (Collier, 1953).

It is against this background that in 1956 a team of geographers from Glasgow University, led by Alan Moisley and James Caird, proposed a detailed 'crofting survey' that would create a repository of information to inform the subsequent development of land use policy (Lorimer and Philo, 2009). The survey was initially intended to cover the Uists. This, after all, was the area under the most immediate threat from the proposed rocket range. But the success of this first study saw it later extended to many other townships and islands, covering over two thousand individual crofts. These other crofting areas seemed no less beleaguered, even if the threat was attributed to depopulation and neglect rather than military interference. The challenges facing the Uists, however, were quite specific. The range was 'expected to bring great changes both as the result of an influx of alien population and the availability of new occupations' (Caird, 1956: 11). The task of geographers was thus 'to study and record the current situation: to make in fact a Doomsday survey before the Atomic Age descends on the islands' (Caird, 1956:11), an 'inventory' of 'the pre-Rocket era'.[9]

This term 'Doomsday' is rather suggestive. In the first instance the advent of the 'Atomic Age' seems to give an apocalyptic urgency to their fieldwork. There is a sense of foreboding, of impending judgement. But Caird's emphasis on recording 'the current situation' also invokes the contemporaneous 'Domesday' geographies of H.C. Darby which had seen William the Conqueror's 1086 Domesday Book mined as the ultimate baseline record of the humanised landscape (Darby, 1952; Williams, 2003; Clout, 2003). Darby's respect for this Norman fieldwork endeavour was undisguised: the Domesday Book offered, as he saw it, an unrivalled record of historic England to which he devoted thirty years of painstaking research. His first book, *The Domesday Geography of Eastern England*, was published just four years before the Crofting Survey.

Moisley and Caird's study may be on a different scale but it was nonetheless proposed, like the original Domesday Book, as an archive of facts. In one sense this was because a lack of accurate information was thought to be a contributing factor to the 'crofting problem' (Campbell, 1958: 24). But it is also necessary to contextualise their approach within the conventions of regional survey at the time, on the very eve of the quantitative revolution (see Matless, 1992). Paul Merchant notes the trenchant critique, by geography's new quantitative revolutionaries, of this type of descriptive fieldwork. He cites William Bunge's *Theoretical Geography* which characterised geographical 'describers' as devoted to 'inventory' and 'classifications' (Bunge, 1962). 'Their work becomes repetitious' says Bunge; 'their expectation is that some day, some way, someone will find these results invaluable' (Bunge quoted in Merchant, 2000: 202). This is certainly an accurate portrait of how Moisley and Caird understood the future value of their work. Caird later approvingly quoted Arthur Geddes when he remarked that 'the geographer's first task is to describe' (Caird, 1980: 220). And in a interview with Merchant, Caird felt that their archive 'would be useful for measuring change later on', enthusing that 'we've still got it, got it all down here' as if in wait for another H.C. Darby in the year 2856. It was, in other words, a rescue operation to preserve crofting – in fact if not in form – for future

generations (not least of historical geographers). The first fifty years, however, have proved to be quiet ones: the many papers, book chapters and survey reports – far less the full undigested mass of archived data – have scarcely been cited (Caird, 1958; 1958b; Caird and Tivy, 1957; Caird and Moisley, 1961; Caird and Moisley, 1964; Moisley, 1960; 1961; 1962; 1962b; MacSween, 1959; Wheeler, 1960).

In conceiving the Crofting Survey, an important template for Moisley and Caird was Frank Fraser Darling's recently published *West Highland Survey,* a seminal treatise on the Highland landscape (Darling, 1955). The difference between the Crofting Survey and *West Highland Survey* was chiefly in scale: Darling's survey offered a regional portrait of parishes and groups of parishes which 'served as a starting point' for the Glasgow geographers, from which a much more detailed and localised picture 'township by township, croft by croft' could be sketched out (Moisley, 1957a). Darling's research team had covered the entire West Highland region, collecting data on a bespoke 'Copeland-Chatterson' punch card system'.[10] But there was also recognition that important information might 'not fit into any pre-conceived punch card scheme' (Darling, 1955: 199). His 'field survey officers' were told to 'expand … information in a general way on the back of the … cards'. 'Awkward questionnaires' were prohibited, favouring instead 'the development of the powers of observation and deduction'. In interviews too, 'the direct question was avoided as far as possible, because this is not in the code of manners of Gaeldom' (Darling, 1955: 199). And this body of information was, in the manner of later ethnographies, kept completely confidential. Here then was a 'scientific' methodology (Darling insisted his survey was 'ecological rather than sociological') with an oddly ethnographic sensibility, a contradiction that would also characterise the Crofting Survey.

Figure 1. A landscape of facts. One of the Crofting Survey's card indexes with tabular data stamp, University of Dundee Archives.

Starting fieldwork in September 1956, the Crofting Survey visited almost every croft in Benbecula and the northern part of South Uist, over 400 in total, information being collected on cropping, stock management, township boundaries and household demographics. Caird sought permission from Darling to examine the cards of the *West Highland Survey*, before opting for the less expensive option of index cards with a tabular data form imprinted by a rubber stamp (see figure 1).[11] The information was then collected by Glasgow's own honours students on a card-per-croft basis (rather than Darling's card-per-township model) before being translated to the more abstract form of the map. To the extent that this study could testify to the existence of these communities before the arrival of the rocket range, it was to be a specifically cartographic memorial. And, like the *West Highland Survey*, it revealed the influence of key

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'gatekeeper' informants whose positions of power within the locality the trainee geographers were taught to respect and to harness. Bureaucratic notions of social authority were internalised within the methodology: students sought the active assistance and blessing of 'priests, ministers and school teachers'. Moisley had already written to Catholic priests and Presbyterian ministers as 'influential people', asking them to 'let your people know what we are about'.[12] Township clerks 'could provide us with much data about the township as a whole,' observed Moisley, and 'their wives too were often most knowledgeable about such matters as births, deaths, immigration and emigration in recent years' (Moisley, 1957a).

It is notable then that interviews and circumscribed forms of participant observation were an important source of information even if, as with Darling, they were never a formalised component of their methodology.[13] In a review of the work of a Finnish colleague, Stig Jaatinen, Caird approvingly notes how 'Jaatinen lived with the crofters *en famille*, and it is obvious from his writing that he understands the Outer Hebridean crofter, for purely statistical studies fail to touch on the essential problems of the crofting way of life' (Caird, 1958: 192). Jaatinen himself acknowledges that 'the success of my Hebridean journey was largely due to the helpfulness of my crofter hosts, who through their appealing attitude to a stranger, and their traditional way of life, still in many respects undisturbed by the disharmony of modern times, left me with the deepest impression' (Jaatinen, 1957: 6). While the figure of the crofter was widely caricatured as backward among modern agricultural policymakers, it is notable that the Crofting Survey gives weight to the credibility of the participant subject.

Two hundred and fifty years earlier, the naturalist and traveller Martin Martin toured the Hebrides and for the first time used 'emic' or native accounts in his presentation of chorographical knowledge to the Royal Society (Withers, 1999). It raised an important question in the making of geography in the seventeenth century: can lay knowledge be trustworthy? If this question was a little less fraught for twentieth century geographers, similar notions of trust and credibility nonetheless underlie the Crofting Survey. And somewhat surprisingly it was

geography rather than, say, anthropology, that asserted the value of emic testimony and acknowledged the limits of positivism[14]. By contrast, a team of anthropologists from Cambridge had earlier set out to investigate Hebridean society equipped with an 'anthropometer' and some head callipers (Searight et al, 1944). Their sample population of over 150 people – some believing that they were having their head fitted for gas masks – submitted themselves to an intimate assessment of their 'bizygomatic breadth', 'facial height', 'head length' 'bigonial breadth' and skin colours (Searight et al, 1944: 31). After certain islanders were dropped from this study 'on the grounds of ancestry, immaturity or physical defect', the anthropologists concluded that 'the Outer Hebridean population is extremely light skinned', 'the large Benbecula head breadth … appears to be an extreme for the contemporary male inhabitants of the British Isles', but otherwise the features were 'quite unexceptional when the nature of the inbred island population is taken into account' (Searight et al, 1944: 32).

But returning to our key theme, we might ask in what sense can the Crofting Survey be considered as epistemologically productive? That is to say: how does the Survey enact the object of its own enquiry? I want to briefly consider the 'performative' character of fieldwork in two respects: firstly, with regard to the reproduction of crofting agriculture and secondly, with regard to geography as a discipline.

One of the purposes of Caird and Moisley's work was to settle an understanding of crofting such that future enquiries into the 'problem' must use the Crofting Survey's new empirical construction as their starting point. Caird and Moisley hoped that their version of crofting – now stabilised in their survey data – would be entered into the calculus of future policy reviews. One of the consequences of this, as with earlier studies, was to further enshrine the croft as the basic unit of social organisation in the Highland region. In other words, the croft was, in the terms of Law and Urry, the 'structural stability' that was enacted through the process of survey (Law and Urry, 2004: 404). A similar argument might be made about the rather different Napier Commission surveys of the 1880s that formally

inaugurated crofting in the first place. The paradox of the Crofting Survey was that the object of salvage − crofting agriculture − was itself a modern creation: the outcome of earlier economically rationalists transformations that had obliterated pre-modern ways of life.

The croft was to be 'salvaged' at two scales. In the specific case of the Uists, a knowledge of the local agricultural environment was to be preserved before the bulldozers moved in and the tarmac was laid. Across the wider region, however, the crofting system needed to be protected from the new economic rationalism of the Government's Department of Agriculture and the Crofters Commission, both of which were increasingly concerned with efficiency and productivity. It is worth noting that for all their emphasis on an impartial civic geography, the Crofting Survey explicitly opposed the formal amalgamation of croft holdings. It was deemed unnecessary because their detailed survey work had shown that informal amalgamations based on kinship or friendship – casual agreements to sublet – were already in effect. Philip Wheeler, one of the geographers involved in the survey, noted that it was simply a case of these arrangements being 'hidden from official eyes […] yet these details … are essential to a proper understanding of the crofting system and therefore to the formulation of plans for reform' (Wheeler quoted in Merchant, 2000: 181). Caird acknowledged the authority of the geographer at work when James Shaw Grant, then chairman of the Crofter's Commission, was persuaded to reconsider his plan to dismiss 'unproductive' crofting tenants and instead make legitimate the widespread practice of subletting (Merchant, 2000: 178). In these ways, then, the Crofting Survey slipped from description to prescription: existing agricultural arrangements like subletting were sustained through being documented. And in this way the system was redeemed by rigour in the field.

The Crofting Survey was productive in a second sense in that it enacted a more purposeful version of geographical fieldwork that was thought to be an important mechanism for disciplinary renewal. One obvious benefit of the survey was the training of students who would subsequently expand the methods and spirit of

the survey to other fields. And more fieldworkers meant a more comprehensive Crofting Survey. In addition to Glasgow's own students, the need for more surveyors presented an opportunity to invite the Geographical Field Group (GFG), the Nottingham-based successor to the Le Play Society, to participate in the project. The result was an extension of the initial survey from Benbecula and South Uist, to Barra in 1957, and to Harris, Waternish (Skye) and Park, Lewis in 1958. That this encounter between the GFG and the Crofting Survey was formative for both parties is one of the key arguments of Paul Merchant's research. While it would be an exaggeration to say that the Crofting Survey was highly influential in the development of geography as a field discipline, Merchant regards it as marking a shift in the conception of regional survey, from what GFG member Philip Wheeler remembers as an 'unsystematic' and 'aimless geography' to a more focused 'applied geography' in the model of L. Dudley Stamp (Merchant, 2000: 171).

The fieldworkers on the survey certainly tended to be evangelical about its value. It is notable that many of the reports were published in Glasgow's student-run geography journal *Drumlin*, plainly with the intention of encouraging other students to get involved (MacLeod, 1957; Campbell, 1958; Moisley, 1961; see also Philo, 1998). One of the most important outcomes of the survey was thus the production of geographers, students who were not only competent in survey techniques but also conscientious and sensitive to the demands of recording social life in an appropriate manner. 'Like most research,' wrote Alan Moisley to a prospective fieldworker Miss Hankay, 'it is mostly very routine and rather tedious … and requires very painstaking organisation to ensure that nothing is missed'.[15] And yet there was always the danger that unruly apprentices might undermine the research effort. In a letter to undergraduate fieldworkers Moisley cautioned not to 'wear anything that might cause unfavourable comment from local people; you should give the impression (at least!) of being business-like and competent'.[16] This comment appears to be directed towards women in the survey team. It is as if contemporary fashion might draw attention to the modernity of

the survey itself, a (hem-line?) marker of the contradictions inherent in saving such a 'traditional' society.

Excavating the oral: a rescue archaeology

> One of the many metaphors underlying archaeology is the idea of 'rescuing'. This applies to salvage archaeology and other forms of 'emergency' digging, but also to fieldwork as a whole. According to this very common metaphor, excavations are conceived as operations for salvaging fragments from the past. Researchers in the present, much like the crew of a rescue boat …try to salvage the past before it drowns (Reybrouck and Jacobs, 2006).

Three months after the announcement of the range – when the Crofting Survey was still at the planning stage – a lively discussion was taking place in Parliament about what might be displaced by the testing of missiles. In the House of Lords, some assurance was sought that, in the words of Lord Greenhill, 'this project was not going to lead to the destruction of one of the more desirable areas in the country'. Desirable also meant fragile. 'These communities maintain a precarious existence on the Atlantic fringe of our industrial society' declared Lord Polwarth[17]. But the vulnerability of the crofting communities was only one of their concerns, and by no means the most prominent. Consider the Earl of Haddington, a landowner from the Borders. Opening his contribution to the Lords debate on the range, he acknowledged that while 'the needs of defence … must override all other considerations', he had 'in a spirit of mild enquiry' … 'two missiles to fire', the first of which was 'loaded with ornithology' and the second with 'archaeology'.[18] Nature conservation was always the most politically persuasive grounds on which opposition was voiced, at least in the House of Lords. But Lord Haddington's second missile – archaeology – was armed with the payload of many rocket range critics. And as a member of the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland, he felt 'bound to protest against … [the] almost certain destruction' of Atlantic wheelhouses, one of the rarest British Iron Age dwellings.

Figure 2. The excavated wheelhouse at Sollas, North Uist supervised by R.J.C. Atkinson, 1957. Source: Historic Scotland.

For the military planners the concerns voiced by the noble Lords were harder to ignore than those of a community meeting in Iochdar. And to finance a rescue archaeology of key sites would have been a relatively inexpensive way of assuaging public unease. It was in this context that the Government's Ministry of Works commissioned the rescue archaeology of wheelhouses at West Gerinish (*A' Cheardach Mhòr*), Drimore (*A' Cheardach Bheag*), and at Sollas (*A' Choileag Shlignich*) along with four other structures. These excavations were undertaken in the summer of 1957 by R.J.C. Atkinson, a notable archaeologist then at Edinburgh University, who – like Caird and Moisley – used the fieldwork to train his honours students. One of these, Vincent Megaw, was named as 'Assistant Director', a title that rather belied his undergraduate status though he was later to become one of Australia's most prominent archaeologists.

This 'rescuing' of the Sollas wheelhouse was the one of the earliest large-scale salvage projects in Scottish archaeology and, true to the hopes of Lord Saltoun, it

yielded some important information about the Atlantic Iron Age (Campbell, 1991: 118). Like other wheelhouses in the Outer Hebrides and in Shetland, the Sollas structure was a round, semi-subterranean living space with individuated cells separated by piers radiating out from a communal hub (figure 2) (Hothersall and Tye, 2000). Radiocarbon dates from Atkinson's excavation initially put it close to 100AD, though subsequent analysis by Ian Armit suggests that this dates the decline of the original monumental structure rather than its inception (Armit, 1996: 146). The discovery of 3000 potsherds from cooking and storage vessels afforded a glimpse into prehistoric domestic life; ceremonial functions were indicated by burial pits containing the remains of dismembered animals suggesting ritual or votive offerings (Campbell, 1991: 150; Armit, 1996: 153). Perhaps the most intriguing find was a piece of blueish chalk pigment ('Egyptian Blue'), originally from the Mediterranean, which presents an unmistakable sign of contact with the Roman world – the only such evidence from a Scottish Iron Age site (Campbell, 1991: 124). But none of this was of much interest to the Ministry of Works. When the proposed military runway was eventually shelved, lifting the immediate threat to the wheelhouse, no further funding was granted for the research team to write up their findings. Indeed, the excavation report drawn from Atkinson's original data was not published until 1991 (Campbell, 1991).

All of this prehistorical detail was established only through painstaking archaeological fieldwork. And more than most scholarly enterprises, excavation was physically quite demanding. As the handful of honours students was insufficient to move the tons of turf, soil and sand that had completely buried the wheelhouse structure, a number of local crofters were paid to assist with the spadework of excavation. Being thus integrated into the fieldwork process, they acted as conduits for a more fluid exchange between the ordinarily bounded field of archaeological enquiry and Uist as a site of a living oral tradition. This involvement of the local community in the conduct of fieldwork (as opposed to being the object of fieldwork) proved to be unexpectedly fruitful. Their genial interest in the project ultimately revealed to the archaeology students other

prehistoric sites which they would visit in their 'leisure hours' (Megaw and Simpson, 1960: 62). In this way attention was drawn to a short cist burial which, Megaw learned, had been disturbed by a crofter – John Macaskill of Newton – while ploughing on the machair two years previously. Permission to excavate was readily given, but the discovery of a complete female skeleton there was to trigger a local controversy about proper conduct in the field.

'The discovery of the cist burial was the cause of a considerable display of local opinion on behaviour towards the dead', observed Megaw with some understatement (Megaw, 1957: 484). Many islanders were deeply suspicious of exhumation, favouring no disturbance of any human remains and strongly commending the 'Christian burial' of any bones found. This injunction was supported by a number of cautionary local tales told to the archaeologists in which any character who disturbed a grave was condemned to a life of perpetual insomnia (Megaw, 1957: 484). While these stories were interesting, their moral force was deeply inconvenient for the researchers. 'Owing to the dictates of local propriety' wrote a rueful Megaw in his published account of the cist, 'a complete anatomical examination of the skeletal remains … proved impossible' (Megaw and Simpson, 1960: 73). At the same time, however, the many folk narratives that surfaced about buried treasure, death, burial, second sight and the evil eye, were felt to be of real value. Vincent Megaw went on to publish his first academic paper (the first of 300 throughout his career) on this 'folklore and tradition' of North Uist, obtained informally from crofters working in the immediate context of the dig (Megaw, 1957). Excavation thus became an archaeology of the oral as well as of the material; and it had slipped from the strictly scientific investigation of a distant Celtic antiquity to a more qualitative investigation of living Gaelic tradition.

Figure 3. The production of the wheelhouse site, North Uist, 1957; sorting materials between relevant artefacts and irrelevant natural objects. Source: Historic Scotland.

Ultimately, however, the only threat from which the wheelhouse had to be rescued was the threat of its continued subterranean obscurity. And in the end, the same crofters who had participated in the excavation were, three years later, re-employed by the Air Ministry to backfill the wheelhouse as the cheapest practical means of preserving its structure. It remains there still, unmarked beneath the machair, and undisturbed by archaeologists or fighter pilots. An apparent paradox here is that in order for the wheelhouse to be saved it has to be (at least partly) destroyed through the sacrificial acts of excavation and backfilling. In this sense, it can be seen as a votive offering to modernity itself: a destruction – or even a sublimation – in which a modern vision of prehistory is founded on the erasure of its material trace. This of course is a familiar paradox in archaeology (Lucas, 2001). As the celebrity archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler famously put it, 'excavation *is* destruction' (Wheeler, 1956: 15). Philip Barker, another great field archaeologist, held that 'every archaeological site is

itself a document … destroyed by the very process which enables us to read it (Barker, 1993: 1).

In this instance, however, I want to re-think excavation less as destruction than as a form of *construction*. These material and oral excavations of the archaeologists can be considered as a bringing-to-life through fieldwork. I am not arguing that Atkinson and his students 'fabricated' an Iron Age wheelhouse. But the structure was in an important sense brought into being through science in the field which, as John Law argues, implies the agency and involvement of instruments, architectures, texts and bodies (Law, 2004: 19). The fieldworkers can be credited with creating *both* a striking new monument in a previously empty field *and* a more detailed prehistoric imaginary. To the extent that we can talk about fieldwork giving shape to social realities, this theory has a particular application to archaeology, a discipline whose search for the prehistoric monument so often *renders monumental* what might previously have been a pile of stones (in the case of the Sollas wheelhouse, not even a pile stones – an empty field). Most obviously there is the constructive 'clearing' that goes in to the making of an archaeological site (figure 3), the massive labour of organising and differentiating materials into relevant artefacts vs. irrelevant natural objects (Thomas, 1996: 62). The Sollas fieldwork was thus productive in that it created a monumental structure out of an unremarkable pasture, leaving behind as mujch the imprint of modern field science as the trace of an ancient Iron Age dwelling. The resultant wheelhouse was quite literally a monument to the impending rocket range.

The excavation also furnished a more detailed vision of antiquity. Without these and allied labours, Hebridean prehistory would have no meaningful shape or form. As the archaeologist Cornelius Holtorf writes, 'all our knowledge, whether certain or speculative, about the past lives [of sites or artefacts] are in fact outcomes of their present lives' (Holtorf, 2002: 55). The 'reality' of prehistory is thus an accomplishment of fieldwork rather than having a prior, indeterminate form. The outcome here is a portrait of the islands as steeped in the distant past,

an imaginary of the Hebridean landscape as the cradle of antiquity. And there is of course a productive slippage between prehistory and the present, a desire for this Celtic past to be meaningfully related to the 'traditional' Gaelic life of North Uist in the 1950s. Indeed, the true significance of the crofters-as-fieldworkers is that in digging for a Celtic past, the researchers call up the no less fragile Gaelic oral tradition. This too is an act of construction, privileging some stories as authentic oral culture over others. While these narratives were thought to be a worthy subject for scholarly enquiry, there was still some uncertainty about what might constitute an appropriate approach to their study, this being a departure from the ordinary (positivist) business of field archaeology. Megaw was eager to point out that his notes on the oral tradition were the result 'of a purely casual and amateur interest' (Megaw, 1957: 488). With the coming of the rocket range, however, he felt 'a case might be made for a more intensive study of folk tradition on the island' (Megaw, 1957: 488). As we shall see, others were to present this case more forcefully.

Folk nation: the School of Scottish Studies

Of the many controversies that we call 'the cultural Cold War' – contests over art, literature, film and music (e.g. Caute, 2003; Saunders, 1999) – the politics of folklore have been comparatively neglected. And yet the very idea of 'folk' with its image of organic political community was an important symbolic resource for both Communists and conservatives alike. For instance, Richard Dorson, the purported 'father of American folklore', implored the US Senate to invest in folklore research claiming that 'through ignorance [we are] playing directly into the hands of the Communists' (Dorson, 1976: 19). The American Christian Right were certainly worried about the insidious socialist influence of folk musicians ('Marxist minstrels') on impressionable youth (Noebel, 1974). And at least some of this anxiety was well-founded as the Anglo-American Communist Parties provided a receptive environment for the 'Folk Revival' of the 1950s (Porter, 1998; Henderson, 1998). In Scotland, this movement saw a revaluation of the

ordinary knowledges and customs of two distinct rural language groups: Gaelic-speaking Highlanders and Hebrideans on the one hand, and the 'Doric' communities of North East Scotland on the other. These groups became aligned in part through the folk collectors at Edinburgh University's School of Scottish Studies whose work I want to examine in more detail as, of all the stories considered here, it represents by far the largest research undertaking in the Uists.

The School of Scottish Studies (hereafter 'the School') was conceived as a salvage operation from its inception in 1951. It was established for 'the collection of material, particularly in those fields where it is in most immediate danger of disappearing unrecorded', while any analytical project was endlessly deferred ('the detailed work of analysis and assessment of results follows later').[19] That the School should take a keen interest in the development of the rocket range in the Uists is unsurprising as, for the folklore collectors, the range seemed like a disaster. Stewart Sanderson, the 'secretary-archivist' of the School, argued that 'the disintegration of the old way of life will be rapidly accelerated by the Government's plans to site in the heart of this culture a guided missile range manned by large numbers of troops, maintenance staff and their families, coming almost entirely from an alien culture'.[20]

In marked contrast to the geographers and archaeologists, their first instinct was to join forces with the opposition campaign, largely working behind the scenes. Professor Angus MacIntosh, one of the founders of the School, enlisted various friends in high places – the Canadian industrialist Sir James Dunn, the English media baron Lord Beaverbrook and the Conservative MP Viscount Brendan Brackon – to put pressure on the British Government. Writing to Seamus Delargey, the chairman of the Irish Folklore Commission, MacIntosh lamented that 'any such invasion is the *doom* of one of the absolute centres of one of our oldest and finest bits of civilisation, quite quite irreplaceable'[21]. Delargey himself agreed that 'imported labour from the Lowlands will bring not the best but the worst forms of "civilisation" and will destroy what the civilised world should feel a duty to protect'.[22] Another prominent folklorist, Professor Magne Oftedal, who

held the chair of Celtic languages at the University of Oslo, made known his view that

> the Uist plans, if carried through, will be regarded by future generations *as an act of barbarism and a crime against the loyal and industrious population of the Outer Hebrides*, who will be deprived of their cultural heritage, lose the assurance and feeling of independence that it gave them, and, in very many cases, reduce them to half-cultured, rootless individuals[23].

Such statements reveal a great deal about the dominant academic model of culture or 'folk' that underwrites epistemological questions about how, or indeed if, it could ever be saved. To be 'half-cultured' under this archetype, is a regrettable, sub-standard condition. There is no sense that all cultures are, in the words of Edward Said, 'involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic' (Said, 1993: xxix). Rather, culture here is fragile; it is bounded; and its moral value rests on its singularity. In this model, the custodians of Hebridean tradition have no direct political agency — they will simply be 'deprived of their cultural heritage' by even the presence of outsiders.

The very idea of folk culture in operation here is arguably less a product of the Gaelic bard than of the academic urban sophisticate. As Terry Eagleton has suggested, it is an ideology which can represent the primordial Other to cultivated intellectuals as a means of 'revitalis[ing] their own degenerate societies' (Eagleton, 2000: 24). More specifically, Malcolm Chapman has observed that 'the folk that are in possession of the kind of knowledge that an academic [like those at the School] might choose to call "folklore", have no … idea that within somebody else's discourse their knowledge is so peculiarly marked' (Chapman, 1978: 122). He notes that, as it is a 'categorical requirement' of folklore that it should be the 'pre-rational memories of former days and ways', then 'any attempt to restore to "folklore" an epistemological status equal to the knowledge that, say, a folklorist has, will be impossible, however good the intention' (Chapman, 1978: 122). The folklorist is thus in a position of particular power. Through the process of rescue or recording, he – the pronounced gender

of the folklorist is itself notable – has the singular authority to authenticate 'folk' as genuine. Indeed, the measure of his expertise is precisely this ability to act as a broker between the knowledge systems of Gaelic culture and those of academia. The embodiment of this tension can be found in the remarkable figure of Calum Iain Maclean (1915-1960), a research fellow at the School and one of the outstanding, if often neglected, folklorists of the twentieth century (figure 4). And Calum Maclean's salvage fieldwork in the shadow of the rocket range is interesting for our discussion here in that it helps us think more closely about the politics of epistemology.

Calum I. Maclean and the epistemology of 'folk'

Maclean was born on the inner Hebridean island of Raasay into a family steeped in the Gaelic oral tradition (his brother Sorley was the famous Gaelic poet; another brother, Alasdair – the GP in South Uist – was also a noted folklorist). After undertaking Celtic Studies at the University of Edinburgh and subsequent work on Early Irish at University College Dublin, Maclean was eventually employed as a folk collector for the Irish Folklore Commission under the direction of Seamus Delargey. Sending him initially to Connemara, Delargey ultimately despatched Maclean back to Gaelic Scotland believing that the Outer Hebrides in particular were a cradle for '*our* [i.e. Irish] language, religion and civilisation'.[24] Maclean's dedication was absolute. His entire professional life was founded on the belief that the object of his enquiry – the oral Gaelic tradition – was in terminal decline and that the pathos of this historical shift carried with it the responsibility for saving whatever was left. At the outset of his career, he wrote to his brother Sorley that 'it is absolutely essential to gather in every remnant of the *daoine* [the people] – and that as soon is possible'.[25] Moving to the School in 1951, he described his work there as rescuing the stories and songs 'from the stagnant waters and return[ing] them to the clear stream of living tradition' – all of this, 'before it becomes too late' (Maclean, 1957: 27). So it is clear that Maclean was set on a rescue mission long before the advent of the
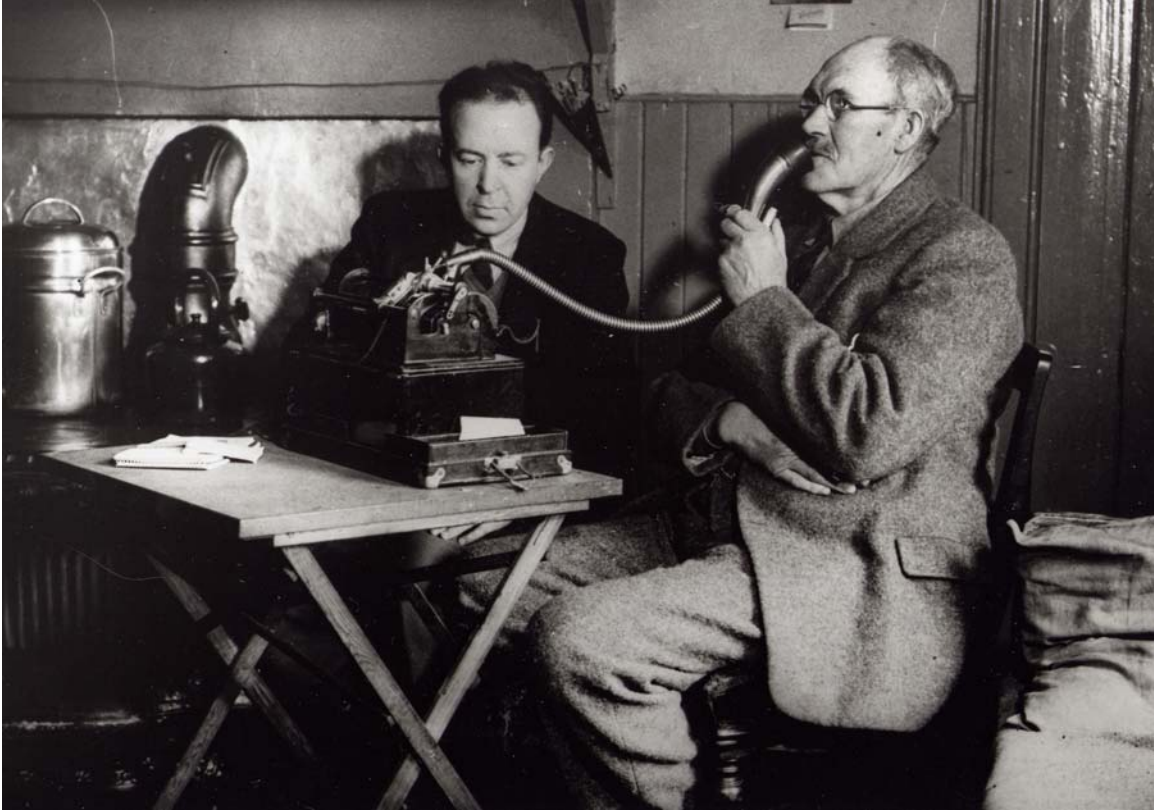
Figure 4. Calum I. Maclean (left) conducting fieldwork on Benbecula in May 1949; he is pictured using the Ediphone dictating machine to record Angus MacMillan, 'Aonghas Barrach' of Griminish, from whom he collected his longest ever story — 9 hours or 58,000 words. Source: Cailean Maclean, private collection.

rocket range. But this development gave him a new urgency. It was, he said, 'a menace of the first magnitude', cautioning that 'we may very soon learn to our cost that we cannot at the one and same time serve the God of Gaelic culture and the Mammon of English imperialism' (Maclean, 1957: 27). And yet Maclean had little appetite for a public battle, leaving the organisation of the School's opposition efforts to colleagues in Edinburgh so as not to be distracted from the business of collecting.

The architect of the School's campaign was Stewart Sanderson, the curiously titled 'secretary-archivist', who, having failed to engineer a controversy that might derail the range entirely, later opted for the more politically pragmatic approach of trying to secure funding for a rescue folklore programme. In this

respect they were inspired by the modest success of R. J. C. Atkinson's salvage archaeology. But there was nothing modest about either the scale of the School's request to the Secretary of State for Scotland for a £25,000 grant, or its claims for the significance of such work (School of Scottish Studies, 1957). Introducing their proposal – comprising some back-of-the-envelope costs and a list of key research themes – Sanderson wrote that 'the data to be recorded, the traditions to be rescued could make an incalculable impact on the whole development of our civilisation'. The proposal asked for three years of funding to pay for several fieldworkers on oral tradition, folk music, material culture, social anthropology and museum work, with some further time allocated for transcribing, writing-up and archiving. Notably, however, the analysis and publication of results was uncosted, being considered a luxury too far given the absolute urgency of rescue. The tone of the document is plaintive and occasionally desperate: 'a systematic investigation must be started at once: even a twelve or eighteen months delay would be disastrous'. One suspects that, given the obviously nationalist momentum behind the proposal, it would not have been difficult for Lord Maclay, the Unionist Secretary of State for Scotland, to turn it down. This he did, and without hesitation. Nor did an appeal to the celebrity archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler and other 'European experts' yield a better outcome, leaving the School to save Gaelic culture within its existing budget and relying on its own indefatigable community of folklorists.

Calum Maclean's opposition to the range was unequivocal. However he not only felt uneasy with aspects of the School's campaign, but also with the categorical distinction, perhaps paralleled by a class distinction, that 'folklore' seemed to make between the implicitly urban academic researcher and the rural native research subject. In one sense he was both of these figures. As one colleague said in his obituary, Maclean 'stood in the midst of the stream of that tradition, was part of it, was in many ways just as much a bearer of tradition as a collector' (Nicolaisen, 1962). If these competing identities were not always easy to reconcile, his loyalties lay squarely with the tradition-bearers. Maclean certainly harboured disdain for some of his academic colleagues – Stewart Sanderson and

his old boss Seumas Delargey in particular – on account of what he saw as their aloof and urbane scholasticism. 'The School of Scottish Studies should shut up about Uist' he complained to his friend and colleague Hamish Henderson in a letter shortly after Sanderson's proposal became public; 'they ought to pay Donald John [MacDonald, a local informant] more and Sanderson less and be done with it'.[26] He even accused Delargey of being interested in the Uists primarily as a site for a fishing holiday[27]. And writing in *The Scotsman*, Maclean made the rather acid comment that 'the academic, scholastic types who regard the tradition bearers of South Uist as "mere guinea pigs" are much more of a menace to these courteous and generous people than any Army personnel' (Maclean, 1959c).

One could read this as simply a clash of personalities but I think there is more to it than this. A related spat about the terms 'ethnography' and 'folk-life' is similarly instructive in that it also points to the awkward relationship between academic theory on the one hand and appropriate behaviour in the field on the other. The controversy over 'ethnography' arose at a three-day symposium at the School in 1959 on 'the scope and the methods of folk-life research'. Iowerth Peate, a Welsh folklorist and another fierce opponent of the rocket range, reported in his journal *Gwerin* that as some delegates at this meeting felt uncomfortable with the specific cultural meanings that had accrued to the term 'folk', they no longer considered 'folk-life' to represent 'the complete community' (Peate, 1959: 143).[28] The concept they offered in its place was 'ethnography', of which Peate disapproved on account of its 'hard scientific ring unacceptable to the folk whom we study'. Continuing the tautology, Peate reported that 'the most vigorous defence of the term came [folk] from the Highlands where folk has retained its meaning' – almost certainly a reference to Calum Maclean. For Maclean, any move to rest the oral tradition away from the nationalistic context of 'the folk' was unwelcome. 'Gaelic songs, stories and legends may be collected and recorded for one of two reasons' he once wrote. This could be 'for the purposes of purely academic, scientific study on the one hand or, on the other, as part of a definite policy to save a vital and integral part of the nation'. There were thus 'two

approaches: the scientific and the aesthetic or nationalist, and of the two I think the latter more important' (Maclean, 1957: 27).

In what sense then are these differences represented in Maclean's own salvage fieldwork? And how does Maclean's conduct in the field differ from the other rescue projects by the geographers and archaeologists? Of his few published works, one paper on 'Hebridean traditions' in *Gwerin* provides some insight here (Maclean, 1956; see also 1959). It is less about the stories themselves than about the performance of telling and the perceived demise of the social context – the 'cèilidh' – in which this oral culture was transmitted. Maclean made it plain that he not only approached his informants with respect but with something akin to awe. 'Every folklore collector must be prepared to efface himself' he wrote, 'and approach even the most humble tradition-bearer with the deference due to the high and the exalted' (Maclean, 1956: 26). And yet, at the same time, his method is to display the familiarity of an ethno-linguistic equal, one whose intimate access has already been secured by birthright. On meeting Seumas MacKinnon of Barra, Maclean's native Gaelic fluency is immediately rewarded:

> "You have the Gaelic in any case", said he, "and you are welcome. Far too many English-speaking beasts come this way now". The first barrier had been swept aside. Hebrideans nowadays always assume that the stranger is English-speaking. I had taken the old man by surprise (Maclean, 1956: 26).

When Maclean, from the island of Raasay, reports this dialogue it becomes a statement about belonging and a shared Hebridean experience, as much, if not more, than about an adequate theory of knowledge. And it is the liminality of Maclean's position as native fireside companion and urban academic that authorises his research enterprise as a folklorist.

Problems of transmission

Maclean was systematic in his search for stories and storytellers, even using the first community meeting of opposition to the rocket range, held at Iochdar, to scout for prospective tradition-bearers (Maclean, 1959b; see also Maclean, 1959c). But in other respects he had little in common with the other fieldworkers we have considered. He was not like the geographers, simply after information – or 'fact finding' as Caird put it (Caird, 1958b); nor did his interest unexpectedly alight on some colourful narratives, as happened to Vincent Megaw. One might say that Maclean wanted to try and capture island voices. In the early days of his career, he had transcribed every word of a story by hand as it was being told. However, the advent of portable recording equipment – in particular the bulky 'Ediphone dictating machine' – had not only transformed the nature of fieldwork but also shifted its primary product from the written word to the spoken word (see figure 4). Towards the end of his life, when he had lost an arm to cancer, the more portable 'Stuzzi' made fieldwork less of a physical burden. But what is notable here is that the School was renowned for spending four times the average cost of recording apparatus in order to secure the most authentic and faithful renditions of dialect words, tonal stresses, ballad tunes and ballad texts (Dorson, 1953: 22). Why should such exacting fidelity to the original have been so important if the words and tune – which were in any case to be transcribed – could still be gleaned from an inferior recording? To put it another way: what was it, *exactly*, that Calum Maclean was trying to save? His fieldwork was about more than recording words, tunes or stories; more even than about saving the meaning of a song or story. It is about bringing to life the 'sound-event' of telling or singing – a performance that would always exceed any description of its language, meaning, content, music, tone, rhythm or accent. And for Maclean, this vocal sound-event was social life in its most precious form, which only an 'aesthetic approach' could properly preserve. As Mladen Dolar has recently argued:

> We are social beings by the voice and through the voice; it seems that the voice stands at the axis of our social bonds, and that voices are the very texture of the social, as well as the intimate kernel of subjectivity (Dollar, 2006: 14).

Maclean's fieldwork is thus epistemologically productive in a number of ways. In the first instance, we might argue, following Chapman (1978), that 'folklore' is essentially an academic construction in that it delimits certain modes of speech or song from the more quotidian elements of vocal life. By thus marking this discourse as 'folk', it brings into being both the category and its eligible content, which in turn will privilege and perpetuate some cultural forms over others. Stories and songs may have had a long prior history, but this must be seen as a quite separate matter from their validation by an external expert − the 'folklorist' − as culturally authentic 'folklore'. Secondly, folklore is brought into being through the practice of fieldwork. It creates the appropriate stage for the transmission of oral culture – the cèilidh – and it solicits particular types of performance. For instance, Maclean felt that as the authentic practice of 'cèilidhing' had effectively died out, the role of the fieldworker was to foster an analogous event for the benefit of the microphone. Describing his time recording Seamus MacKinnon of Barra he observed that 'the neighbours usually crowded in to hear him recording his stories' but that 'most of the young people did not know that Seumas could and did tell stories' (Maclean, 1956: 27). 'The "cèilidh" has gone in any case' Maclean lamented. 'It was so different over sixty years ago, when he was a youth' (Maclean, 1956: 27). This apparent demise of the céilidh was presented as a problem of transmission: the songs and stories may be 'alive' but the mechanism by which they could be passed on to successive generations had been ruptured by modernity. And the only fix was afforded by the technics of this same modernity. The oral traditions of the islands were to be thus entrusted to chemical storage − wax cylinders and, later, analogue magnetic tape − as more scientifically reliable repositories of folklore.

It is clear that this is less a case of eavesdropping on the ordinary sound of island life than of Maclean bringing to life a new 'folk' event; using the latest technology to mark out this performance as culturally special; and creating a new sound archive capable of surviving the missile-induced breakdown of Hebridean society.

This, then, is folklore in the making. Writing of his first encounter with another well-known informant, Duncan MacDonald of Peninerine, Maclean observes that 'there was little heard about folklore or the like in Scotland on that day in spring 1947 when I first met Duncan' (Maclean, 1954). Folklore is thus the product of such encounters rather than having an existence that is philosophically anterior to fieldwork.

In the case of the geographers and archaeologists we have considered, the practice of fieldwork was designed to rescue certain aspects of Hebridean culture and, in so doing, to instruct a new generation of fieldworkers in the techniques of their discipline. But for Calum Maclean the business of folk collecting was too weighty and too urgent for it to be readily entrusted to assistants, at least in the Uists. It is not that there were no research assistants to help but that their role was rather more circumscribed than their counterparts in the other disciplines. The concern was that the assistants – unless, like Calum, they were 'native' – might impede rather than assist. One research assistant at the School, Donia Etherington, recalled in a letter to her fiancé at the time how 'Calum [now weakened by cancer] hurt his shoulder while trying (stupidly) to lift his machine and he may have lost some working time over this, so Basil [Megaw, the Director of the School] is worried in case I slow his pace'.[29] Maclean had plainly felt encumbered by such assistants in the past. For all that the collector needed to 'efface himself', the division of labour *between* the researchers observed strict hierarchies. As Etherington remembered of her work with the collectors at the School:

> '[they] had the contacts and knowledge, and my role in the field was mainly being friendly, and alert to the material, keeping the whisky out of the recording equipment, and getting informants and/or colleagues back to base to take their shoes off and lay a blanket over them'. [30]

The gender politics of the encounter is itself part and parcel of the Scottish folk tradition, about which more needs to be written (although see Kodish, 1987). But one final anecdote from the same source casts further light on the epistemological

status of the folklorist. Recalling one recording scene in South Uist in January 1960 (just six months before Maclean's death), Etherington describes how

> for the first ¾ hour I thought that Calum's evening was going to be hampered throughout because ... F_____ [a young tradition-bearer from the township] had a tape recorder too, and at the end of every song when Calum had to play back to make sure it was ok, he would play back too and arse around trying to synchronise his track with Calum's, which is almost impossible to do of course. So we had to put up with two soundtracks at different speeds and roars of laughter from F_____. In the end ... I went over to F_____ on a pretext of examining his machine, and eventually asked him, as tactfully as I could, to let Calum do the play back alone, though of course <u>he</u> should record too whenever he wanted. I made the point as gently as I could that although the evening was fun for everyone else, for Calum its bread and butter [...] F_____ made up for an unimpressive start by complying for the rest of the evening without any grudge[31].

This minor episode is instructive. Let us note, for instance, that in checking that the recording is okay, a tradition-bearer is asked – politely, discretely, and in the name of the very tradition that he bears – not to let his 'arsing around' get in the way of the folklore. Moreover, there is no indeterminacy here about researcher and research subject; or about whose tape and tape-recorder really matters; or about who, ultimately, is authorised to make folk knowledge. While this is not a case of Calum Maclean pulling rank on a tradition-bearer – a more sensitive collector would be hard to imagine – it still reveals the basic parameters of the research encounter.

Donia Etherington's observations about the work of the School, recorded in her personal correspondence, extend to the final phase of Calum Maclean's life. A few weeks after his death in August 1960, she wrote of hearing 'a bit of Calum's last tape ... that he made in bed in South Uist, getting stories from an old man. His breathing is near the microphone and he interpolates the usual encouraging grunts and agreements and occasional questions, in a voice that's tired and slow but the same unselfish Calum'. [32] And so he worked until the end. His legacy, aside from his extraordinary sound archive, is an influential model of total, almost evangelical, commitment to the imperative of 'rescue'. When Donia Etherington passed on extracts from her correspondence concerning this period to Calum's nephew, Cailean Maclean, she reflected on why she had bothered to record this life of the School in the first place:

> The obsession was that it shouldn't all be lost and gone as if it had never been, when normal memory in time loses hold of so much of the events and details and feel of the times in the past[33].

Truly this is the hallmark of the School's project: that even the *practice* of rescue was itself a culture worth saving.

Elegies of the field

The one word that Calum Maclean insisted be left off his own gravestone was 'scholar'. And one can see why in death he would want to be free from the contradictions of 'folk' that he had struggled to negotiate in life; 'scholar' would have forever engraved his separation from those whom he patiently recorded. That he wanted to be buried in Hallan, South Uist, was a final declaration of his fidelity – to the Uisteachs, to the oral tradition and to the long shadows of Gaelic culture. As his health deteriorated, the Corporal missiles arced high over the South Uist machair and into the Atlantic, each roar representing an expenditure far in excess of the total requested by the School to expand their collecting work. The Corporal became the '£30,000 firework', drawing to the island hundreds of army specialists, soldiers and American GIs.[34] Their influence was telling: even the families of the most celebrated tradition-bearers became drawn to radio and rockabilly. The Corporal thus proved to be the harbinger of a restless age. 'It is all pretty bad' wrote Maclean to Hamish Henderson at the height of the rocket range controversy, 'I'm really afraid that the old Highland spirit is as dead as could be'.[35] As evidence, he noted that 'the young girls love being courted by the airmen, the bitches'. At least magnetic tape might prove more resistant to the ravages of time and change.

Neither the geographers nor the archaeologists had quite these desirous entanglements with island life and culture. But they were no less concerned with

saving the remains of Hebridean society. The geographers were out to salvage information which might mark or memorialize the rapid historical changes taking place in this threatened region. 'True crofting is a modified survival' wrote Harry Moisley in *Transactions*, 'dominant only in those parts least in contact with the outside world' (Moisley, 1962: 93). While he also noted that 'its distribution corresponds closely to that of the survival of Gaelic', the Crofting Survey steered clear of dealing with these linguistic geographies, or with their distinctive cultural forms. Indeed, the leaders of the Crofting Survey – Caird and Moisley – were at pains to keep their project quite separate from any parallel work going on at the School of Scottish Studies. In Paul Merchant's interviews with Caird he draws a clear distinction between the geography and folklore, despite earlier precedents for rapprochement (see Sinhuber, 1957; Buchanan, 1963). 'I don't think either of us were sort of folksy, I don't think so' he tells Merchant. 'Erm, no, we were quite pragmatic ... about it' (Merchant, 2000: 188).[36]

Relations between these two projects were cordial if slightly cool. Petitioning the Secretary of State for Scotland for 'rescue' funding, Stewart Sanderson originally tried to link the School's work with the Crofting Survey. He wrote to Ronald Miller, then head of the Geography Department at Glasgow, asking if he could 'have your support' by signing 'an appropriate appendix in relation to geographical studies'.[37] The School's explicitly oppositionist stance to the range was, by this stage, well known and quite at odds with the 'neutral' civic science of the geographers. 'I do not think it would be appropriate' replied Miller, 'for me to add an appendix on our project. Our aims and methods are too different, really, to be linked with your work'.[38] In this way, politics were sublimated in epistemology. And when Sanderson's application for funding eventually acknowledged the Crofting Survey, it is with the less than effusive remark that it 'constitutes only small beginnings'.[39] The relationship between the folkorists and the archaeologists was a little warmer – Vincent Megaw's uncle, Basil Megaw, was the director of the School for many years – even if R. J. C. Atkinson's funding for the wheelhouse excavation remained a sore point with the School and its supporters.

Across all the different disciplinary field practices I have discussed, there is a pursuit of what the psychoanalytic writer Adam Phillips has called 'elegiac knowledge', a knowledge that informs who we are and at the same time laments what we have lost (Phillips, 1998: 15). It is a conception of fieldwork as an intellectual mode of rescue or recovery, the redemption of something vital but devalued. The paradox of the salvage paradigm is that it is, of course, a symptom of the very modernity it seeks to assuage. More than this, however, I have argued for a re-consideration of this movement as a generative *creation* of social life under the guise of its rescue or recovery. But it would be disingenuous to pretend that this paper – and indeed the historiography of geography more broadly – has transcended the logic and language of salvage. It has been my intention to revive an interest in the neglected geographies of the mid twentieth century. I am aware too that the renewed interest in histories of fieldwork, of which this paper is a part, is also aligned with a resurgence of field approaches in the service of both historical geography and histories of geography (Gagen, Lorimer and Vasudevan, 2007; DeSilvey, 2006; Lorimer, forthcoming; Lorimer, 2003). Perhaps this contemporary fieldwork is itself a calling up of our disciplinary dead. And what can we make of the general impulse in contemporary geography to 're-animate', 'enliven' or 'activate', among the many other restorative verbs currently in vogue? It strikes me that our present concern with 'dead geographies – and how to make them live' (Dewsbury and Thrift, 2000), suggests a mode of enquiry no less preoccupied with making good our losses than those I have described here. So there is perhaps more to link us to these endeavours than we might like to admit. But then repeating the past is always, as Freud said, another way of remembering it.

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[1] This is an experience by no means unique to the Hebrides: for parallels in Australia and French Guiana see Gorman (2007); for other discussions of Cold War militarism in peripheral regions, see Kirsch (2005) and Farish (2006; 2010).

[2] The original plans were modified to spare North Uist from significant military infrastructure.

[3] Letter from Walter Macfarlane, honorary secretary of the Dundee Central Committee of the SNP to the Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden 15 August 1955, London Public Record Office file AIR 19/723.

[4] John Love, 'Druidibeg NNR – Part I – the early years', *Teachd an Tir / West Highland Free Press*, 16 (Summer 2002), p.2.

[5] Letter from Malcolm K. Macmillan MP to the Minister of Supply, PRO AIR 19/723.

[6] 'Extract from letter of 9th December 1955 from Professor Delargey to Sir James Dunn, Dayspring, St Andrews, N.B. Canada', School of Scottish Studies Archive, Edinburgh.

[7] John Love, 'Druidibeg NNR – Part I – the early years'.

[8] These include the Taylor Commission of Enquiry into Crofting Conditions (1952-1954) and the establishment of the Crofters Commission in 1955.

[9] Letter from James B. Caird to F. Fraser Darling 28th May 1956, UR-SF-40/24/10, Crofting Survey Archive, University of Dundee Archive Services; in an interview with Paul Merchant, Caird refers again to the Crofting Survey as a 'Doomsday survey' and as an 'archive' (Merchant, 2000: 176).

[10] This was a patented data system with printed codes over small boxes covering four edges of a card which could be punched, much like a rail ticket, to produce a permanent and compact archive. It is notable that Darling also saw the *West Highland Survey* as a useful baseline record, later describing the data cards as 'a Domesday of the crofting townships in a moment of time that has already past. Letter from Frank Fraser Darling to Miss Bray, 31 July 1959, West Highland Survey Fraser Darling File, D4/1707, Public Record Office, London; this description notably post-dates the Crofting Survey.

[11] Letter from James B. Caird to F. Fraser Darling 28th May 1956, UR-SF-40/24/10.

[12] Letter from Professor Alan Moisley to Monseigneur Neil McKellaig, Father Morrison, Father MacLean, Rev. John Smith, Rev. Murdo Macdonald 12th September 1956, UR-SF-40/24/10.

[13] Stig Jaatinen, 'The Human Geography of the Outer Hebrides: with special reference to the latest trends in land-use' *Acta Geographica* 16.2 (1957) 1-107.

[14] In the interest of strict accuracy it is worth noting that while Searight et al's study can be said to be the first anthropological study of the Hebrides, the work of the social anthropologist Frank Vallee on Barra was appearing in the mid 1950s, having finished his doctorate at the LSE in 1954 (see Vallee, 1955). Preceding his work, however, are similar fieldwork-based community studies by the geographer William A Hance (Hance, 1951; 1952; 1953).

[15] Letter from H. A. Moisley to Miss Hankay, 30th April 1957, UR-SF 40/24/10.

[16] Letter from H. A. Moisley to honours students, 14th September 1956, UR-SF 40/24/10.

[17] Lord Polwarth debate on the Hebrides guided Missile range, House of Lords 27th October 1955. *Hansard*, p. 90f.

[18] Lord Haddington, debate on the Hebrides guided Missile range, House of Lords 27th October 1955. *Hansard*, p. 90f.

[19] School of Scottish Studies, *Report by the Committee of the School of Scottish Studies*, Unpublished paper of the University of Edinburgh, undated, Appendix C. For an extensive review of social science, folkloric and ethnographic work on Gaelic from that of the School of Scottish Studies to contemporary analytical approaches, see McEwan-Fujita (2010).

[20] Ibid.

[21] Letter from Angus MacIntosh to Seamus Delargey, 10th March 1956, Archive of the School of Scottish Studies; my emphasis.

[22] Extract of letter from Professor Seamus Delargey to Sir James Dunn, 9th December 1955, Archive of the School of Scottish Studies.

[23] Magne Oftedal quoted in Iorwerth C. Peate, 'Editorial notes', original emphasis, p.147.

[24] My emphasis; this quotation with its implicit sense of Scottish Gaelic as being essentially Irish cultural heritage is evident in: Seamus Delargey, Letter to John O'Leary, 9th March 1956, School of Scottish Studies Archive.

[25] Letter from Calum I. Maclean to Sorley Maclean, 27 November 1944 (NLS MS. 29535), from manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Correspondence to Sorley Maclean (MSS. 29532-29556).

[26] Letter from Calum Maclean to Hamish Henderson c/o Betty Hill Post Office 11 November 1957. This letter was part of Henderson's private correspondence shown to me by his biographer Timothy Neat.

[27] In a letter to Seamus Delargey dated 4th March 1960, Maclean ailing under terminal cancer, wrote: 'your interest in the tradition and tradition bearers of South Uist would have hardly inspired anyone. Your main interest was in your own pleasure, viz fishing, and, what is all the more discreditable, fishing without having to pay for it'. This letter was found among Hamish Henderson's private papers and I am grateful to Timothy Neat for drawing its contents to my attention.

[28] For more on Iowerth Peate see Gruffudd (1994).

[29] Excerpts of letters from Donia Etherington to her fiancé, 1958-1960, chiefly relating to Calum I. Maclean and the School of Scottish Studies and transcribed for Cailean Maclean; accessed by kind permission of Cailean Maclean, Aird, Bernisdale, Isle of Skye, p. 22; hereafter 'Donia Etherington letters'.

[30] 'Donia Etherington letters', p. 14.

[31] 'Donia Etherington letters', p. 36.

[32] 'Donia Etherington letters', p. 62.

[33] Letter from Donia Etherington to Cailean Maclean 28th February 1993; Donia Etherington letters.

[34] This phrase is found in: Anon, Getting their hand in on 5-ton guided missile, *Morning Advertiser* 7 June 1961, p. 1.

[35] Letter from Calum I. Maclean to Hamish Henderson, c/o the Betty Hill Post Office 11th July 1957; private correspondence, courtesy of Timothy Neat.

[36] Their pragmatism did not however extend to conducting fieldwork in Gaelic, unlike Fraser Darling who employed a Gaelic-speaker for work in the Gaidhealteachd.

[37] Letter from Stewart Sanderson to Professor Ronald Miller, 30th August 1956; UR-SF-40/24/10 Crofting Survey Archive, Dundee.

[38] Letter from Ronald Miller to Stewart Sanderson, 3rd September 1956; UR-SF-40/24/10 Crofting Survey Archive, Dundee.

[39] School of Scottish Studies, *Report by the Committee of the School of Scottish Studies*, Unpublished paper of the University of Edinburgh, undated.