

University of Stirling presentation 19 Oct 2016 **Documenting 1930s' Scottish Highlands and Islands Life: MEM Donaldson, Jenny Gilbertson and Margaret Fay Shaw**

Slide 1 Margaret Fay Shaw Oyster Catcher chick c.1930

Thank you to University of Stirling Film and Media Department and Dr Sarah Neely for inviting me to speak at today's research seminar. This is research in progress – I would like to thank my own institution of GSA for awarding me Research Leave for 3 months at the end of last year which allowed me to visit all the archives and begin writing – I am aiming for a book and exhibition. I would also like to thank the generous support of other women in particular researching in this area – Shona Main, in first year PhD here who is working on Jenny Gilbertson, and Sarah Neely, who has set the bar high in her exemplary work on Margaret Tait and others – also Magda Sagarzazu and Fiona Mackenzie, past and present archivists at Canna House, where Margaret Fay Shaw's archive is. All of our research, along with others, begins to bear witness to the work of early women film-makers and photographers in Scotland. The hive mind of connections that forms around these women through individual dedication and research will always illuminate more as we all see from a slightly different angle.

Slide 2 (Jenny on car roof with camera)

In this 35 minute presentation, by looking at examples of Jenny Gilbertson, M.E.M. Donaldson and Margaret Fay Shaw's work from the inter-war years, I will explore if these three women offer a different reading on the landscape and communities of the North from their better known male contemporaries. Through archival sources, alongside their film, photography and literature outputs, I will present their aims, methods and examples of their work. Here we have an image of Shetland filmmaker Jenny Gilbertson filming, on top of a car, using her tripod and camera as her compass.

Slide 3: Eggs by the three women

These women are not grouped together purely because of their biological gender. None were native to the rural communities they photographed or filmed, with only Gilbertson being Scottish by birth. [2] All chose independently to move to, and live over a substantial period of time with the rural communities they were documenting. M.E.M. Donaldson left England to build her own home on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula; Margaret Fay Shaw, an American, moved from New York to live with the sisters Peigi [1874-1969] and Màiri MacRae [1883-1972] for six years at their croft at North Glendale, South Uist; and Jenny Gilbertson (née Brown) went as a single woman to live on a croft in Shetland, in order to make films, then settled there following her marriage to a crofter. None were formally trained in photography or filmmaking. All taught themselves. All three had independent means [3], allowing them a freedom of movement unusual for middle or upper class women for their time. It should be noted that whilst women in the UK over 30 were given the vote in 1918, the age limit was only lowered to that of men in 1928. Gilbertson, Donaldson and Shaw had initially gone against their families wishes to move away and work independently.

SLIDE 4: (Portraits of all the women)

Unlike contemporaries such as Mary Field [1896-1968], Evelyn Spice Cherry [1904-1990] or Kay Mander [1915-2013] who co-produced and collaborated on films for governmental agencies or production companies like London Films, Shell Film Unit, Paul Rotha Productions, Strand Film Company or Realisr Film Unit, neither Donaldson, Gilbertson nor Shaw was working within an institutional system. Gilbertson, wrote about herself, '*My films in Shetland and Canada have always been a one-woman job – camera work, wild track sound, lighting, directing, script-writing etc.*'. All were independents, either trying to sell individual works (films, photographs or essays for publication in magazines) in the cases of Shaw and Gilbertson, when they could, or making publishing opportunities (Shaw and Donaldson). There is no hard evidence that the three women knew each other, or each other's photography or film work, in particular in the 1930s'.

These are the similarities. This talk will also look at each one's motivations for making the work that they did; and how they represented the subject in front of their camera. I will conclude with summarising further lines of enquiry I am making.

Slide 5 (Two parts: Rugged Island and Eskimo language)

Jenny Gilbertson

Jenny Gilbertson's career as a film maker was in two parts; the first in the 1930s' filming aspects of Shetland life. She made one film '*Prairie Winter*' (1934) with Evelyn Spice Cherry in Canada. In the second part, she recorded the lives of remote Inuit communities in the Canadian Arctic. Her CV notes the reason for the lengthy break being that during WW2: '*She sold her Eyemo camera. She had two children to bring up and her husband was invalided out of the army. She began teaching and taught for twenty years. In the 1960s' she began filming again.*' [6] What makes Gilbertson's achievements even more noteworthy are that her career break meant she had to learn two different systems as technology expanded from cinema to broadcast. From making early connections with John Grierson, the 'father' of the British Documentary movement; she then latterly had to navigate television companies for her work to be shown via UK and Canadian Broadcasting Corporations.

Gilbertson said that she: '*...chose Shetland because I had been there many times on holiday, graduating from being a mere tourist in a Hotel to being a real friend of a crofting family and being one of themselves.*' [7]

Slide 6(A Crofters life poster and stills)

The first work she made, on an amateur 16mm Cine-Kodak camera, was '*A Crofter's Life in Shetland*' (1931). This film is not character-led, unlike Robert J. Flaherty's [1884-1951] '*Nanook of the North*' (1922), which follows one protagonist or family. Rather, through an episodic format, utilising title cards to punctuate and set the scene, Gilbertson's camera roams for over an hour, across her subject matter of Shetland people and place; showing different farming methods or different bird colonies, the form of a day's activity on the croft,

the fishing boats bringing in their haul to Lerwick and the subsequent getting the fish ready for market on the quay side. Her film charts a full year of life in Shetland, following the farming seasons. Gilbertson significantly roots the crofter's way of life alongside other events and life there, including a wedding on Fetlar, life in Lerwick, Up Helly' aa rituals and '*the loneliest men in Britain*' at Muckle Flugga lighthouse, the furthestmost point of Shetland.

Slide 7 (4 photographs from a Crofter's Life including Up HellyA)

'*A Crofter's Life on Shetland*' is, in a sense, Gilbertson's magnum opus due to the sheer range of subject matter it covers. Finely observed variation can be seen throughout, whether through the different farming methods on the island or her footage of bird colonies, types of bird, their behaviours, nesting and young.

Slide 8 (Grierson cover letter and foreward)

Gilbertson (or Jenny Brown as she was then), had edited '*A Crofter's Life in Shetland*' in London then hired a studio to show it to John Grierson: "*He was unknown to me, but several people said he was the person to show it to...*" [8] Grierson was impressed by the film, writing for Gilbertson a forward for a programme [9] in 1932, commending her for, '*being a real illuminator of life and movement*'. He went on to comment that '*... [the film] gets down to the life of the crofters and the fishermen and brings the naturalness out of it... In amateur cinema, the people are always standing and staring and failing to be themselves. In commercial cinema the people might as well be standing and staring for all the reality they demonstrate. Miss Brown has already broken through the curse of artificiality.... I think the best thing she did was to go straight to the crofters and live with them.*' [10]

Grierson also recognised that her decision to spend real time in the crofting community in order to capture a more realistic and detailed picture of everyday life: "*She lived with them round the seasons for a year, on the unique assumption that the dramatic unity of a crofter's life could not conceivably be the period of a six weeks' summer holiday... You have to belong if you are to catch the details of the daily round which make up the drama of people's existence*". [11]

Slide 9 (Rugged Island ephemera incl. Johnny Gilbertson, her husband)

On seeing it, John Grierson went on to encourage her to make a film with a narrative. '*The Rugged Island- A Shetland Lyric*' (1932), follows the story of a courting couple in a dilemma as to whether they will carry on in the croft or emigrate. Gilbertson for this film worked with the Shetland crofters she knew, her husband-to-be Johnny Gilbertson and the Clarks who she had lodged with. Grierson went on to buy five of Gilbertson's shorter documentary films for the G.P.O Unit. These films, '*Da Maakin o a Keshie*' (1932, 5 mins), '*Sheep's Clothing*' (1932, 10 minutes), '*A Cattle Sale*' (1932, 3 mins), '*Shetland Croft Life [Peat from hillside to home]*' (1932, 6 mins) and '*Seabirds in the Shetland Isles*' (1932, 9 mins) were all edited from footage Gilbertson had taken from her first film. For '*Seabirds in the Shetland Isles*',

Gilbertson camped alone with a tent and provisions on the uninhabited Isle of Stennis, to capture footage of bird species, including eggs hatching.

Slide 10 (Canadian lecture tour pamphlets)

Gilbertson's motivation was primarily for her films to be educational. She made lectures and talks with her films, touring from the early 1930s' until the end of her life. As well as touring the work through lectures in Scotland and UK, Gilbertson also in 1934 forged her Canadian network, through her first lecture series hosted by National Council of Education in the winter of 1934-5, taking the lecture to '*... Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver, showing 'Seabirds' and 'A Crofter's Life in Shetland', in public halls, to Universities and to schools*' [12]. Interestingly, in reflection of this tour, Gilbertson in later life noted that the invitation occurred due to the migration of many Scots to Canada, giving an appetite for films about Scotland.

For Gilbertson, her motivation was primarily to educate and to inform about the way of life on Shetland. From a draft of an unpublished essay '*A Fetlar Wedding*' written in 1931, she defines her motivations for making her first film '*A Crofter's Life on Shetland*' (1931) as follows:

"My reason for being in Shetland just now is to make a film of the islands that I may at some later date enlighten the uneducated masses in "the South" who are under the impression that Shetlanders are hardly yet out of the wood and skin stage and that the boat (if there is one) calls at St Kilda first". [23]

'The South' is a phrase used by Shetlanders for anyone residing below Shetland, so includes Orkney, Scottish mainland and England. This spirited comment defines her motivations in opposition to factors that compelled her throughout her filmmaking career – to tell an authentic story about rural communities. Gilbertson wished to give a picture of Shetlanders that was informed rather than sweeping. Her films fairly represented those who lived there, showing people and location carefully, rather than create a hackneyed or romantic view of the enchantment of island life.

Slide 11 (approaching NYC and Approaching St Kilda)

Margaret Fay Shaw

A trained musician, Shaw's primary motivation to move from New York to South Uist in 1929 was to transcribe Gaelic songs at their source. She had spent periods in Scotland as a teenager and in her early twenties [16]. In her own words, she '*... chose South Uist, as the island least visited by strangers and where there would be an opportunity to live amongst a friendly and unprejudiced people not self-conscious of their unique heritage.*' [17]. This methodology was one shared by other folklorists. Zora Neale Hurston [1891-1960], who returned to her hometown Eatonville in Florida, to record her friends' and neighbours, their

stories providing a rich cultural history of this community of Black Americans, from 1928-32, details in her 1935 book *'Mules and Men'*:

'Folklore is not as easy to collect as it sounds. The best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually under-privileged, are the shyest. They are more reluctant at times to reveal that which their soul lives by.' [P.2, *'Mules and Men'*, Zora Neale Hurston]

Slide 12 (Introducing the cottage MFS and MacRaes stayed in)

Early on after her arrival on South Uist, she heard Màiri MacRae, who had been brought in from the kitchen to sing to company at Boisdale House. She was invited by Màiri to learn the song by visiting her at home in Glendale. On making the journey to the croft, which was two miles from any road and easier accessed by boat, Shaw asked if she could lodge there with Màiri, her son Donald and her sister Peigi. Over the next six years, Shaw transcribed the MacRae's songs and those of their neighbours, further learning Gaelic over this period too. Michael Russell in his book *'A Different Country: The Photographs of Werner Kissling'* attributes Shaw's knowledge of Gaelic- *'almost unique[ly] amongst photographers who worked in the Hebrides'* - as a way *'to penetrate Hebridean culture more thoroughly and to get closer to the rhythms of place'*. [18]

Slide 13: Inside the cottage

This intimacy of living in the house is shown through Shaw's typescript kept at Canna House, entitled *'South Uist in Sound'* and carries through to her photographs. Here's an extract from *'Inside the Cottage'*: *'.....noise of children, primus stoves & tilly lamps; clocks ticking, rats scuffling in the walls; cats growling under the dresser; dogs being cursed and told to lie down (in Gaelic), scratching fleas'*.

Slide 14 Shearing Sheep MFS

Shaw recorded the domestic and working life of these sisters and their neighbours. Given my fellow speaker today, I would like to look at the composition of Fay Shaw's work by comparing a photograph from Franki Raffle's *'Lewis Women'* project (subsequently exhibited in 1983), with Margaret Fay Shaw's photograph from 1934, nearly 50 years earlier. Both lives in island communities over a period of time – Raffles with her then husband on a croft on Carinish, Lewis, and Margaret Fay Shaw over a period 1929-35 with the two sisters Mairi and Peigi MacRae. Both were self taught, and photographed their neighbours and the labours of the community.

Slide 15 Franki Raffles

I think it will be helpful to see Shaw's work through the prism of Raffles'. Here in both, the woman is central to the field of vision, and in the arrangement of the other figures arrange themselves naturally around the key figure. Raffles very much wanted to focus on women's

labour, and as Shaw continually focuses the domestic work and work in the fields of the sisters, she does this also.

Slide 16: MFS the sisters sything

Like Shetland film maker Jenny Gilbertson, through the prolonged period of time spent living on a croft, Shaw was also highly aware of its seasons and cycle. She records both in her diary, her transcript '*The Outer Hebrides*' and subsequently in her life work '*Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist*' (1955):

The spring work of the croft began in February, when seaweed, used as fertilizer, was cut with a saw-toothed sickle called a corran on the tidal islands of the loch at low water of a spring tide'. [19]

The year closes with: '*All the harvest work done, the women wash and card the wool and start the spinning wheels. It is the season for the fireside and the ceilidh, the rough weather and the short days.*' [20]

Slide 17: Mairi MacRae and Queenie

Whereas Paul Strand was later to take single photographic portraits of South Uist islanders over three months in the summer of 1954, Shaw over her six years there, focussed on this single community and recorded it in detail. This rich material would be published in 1955 in her significant work '*Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist*'. She also during this period made trips to St Kilda, the Aran Islands and Mingulay, all of which she photographed. Her essay '*Hunting Folk Songs in the Hebrides*' was published in National Geographic Magazine, whilst '*St Kilda and the Last Summer*' was printing in Scots Magazine in 1980. Following meeting the folklorist John Lorne Campbell [1906-1996] at Lochboisdale Hotel, they married and she moved to Barra where he lived, in 1935, and then to Canna House on the Scottish island of Canna by the end of the decade, where their home and archive is still maintained by National Trust for Scotland. Shaw also took film of South Uist and Barra with her cine camera, but it remained unedited by her, to be shown to those in the South Uist community and her networks.

Slide 18 (Isobel Bonus on rock)

MEM Donaldson

MEM Donaldson was the oldest of the three women - in 1930 she was fifty-four. Born in England and brought up in Surrey, Donaldson travelled to Scotland repeatedly, to write the first of her travel books, '*Wanderings in the Western Highlands and Islands*' (1921), and '*Further Wanderings- Mainly in Argyll*', (1926). Her photographs were illustrations for her books. She moved to her home which she designed, then had built in Sanna in 1927, on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula. The house was complete with photography studio and she lived there until 1947. In the 1930's there were two further books, '*The Country of Clan Ranald*'

(1931) and '*Scotland's Suppressed History*' (1935); the latter a diatribe on Presbyterianism in Scotland. Donaldson's photographs over this 1930s' continued to be of the landscapes from her walks, stones, crosses and other landmarks, crofters from the Scottish locations she visited and those from the Ardnamurchan community. Donaldson also photographed those closest to her such as Isabel Bonus, other friends and the ghillies and guides who accompanied her on many of her walks.

Donaldson out of the three women, covers the widest range of Scottish landscapes and locations. Island locations include Eigg, Skye, Oransay, Colonsay, Islay, Jura and Iona. From the Highlands there are photographs of Kintyre, Kintail, Wester Ross, Appin, Arisaig, Glen Affric, Lochaline, Loch Linnhe, Ballachuilish, Kingussie, Glen Affric, Roy Bridge, Knapdale, Morvern, down into the Trossachs.

Slide 19 (tinkers)

As I referred briefly to at the beginning of the talk, all the women had gone against the norm to make their work. MEM Donaldson felt that she had '*always had a hard life, for I never was one who could fall into any conventional sort of moulds*'. In a letter to Marion Lochhead dated 'St Columba's Day' 1929, Donaldson writes, '*My fervent desire in those days was to be a boy who could run away and be a gypsy, always living in the open*'.

Slide 20 (Sgurr of Eigg)

Her work is held by two archives, here at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, who hold her landscape photography and the National Library of Scotland who holds her portraiture photographs. Donaldson's landscape photography mirrors West Cults author Nan Shepherd's [1893-1981] writing, [in particular I am thinking of Shepherd's book 'the Living Mountain'] where the experience of the landscape is a physical and psychological journey 'into' (in Shepherd's case, the Cairngorms) rather than merely a simple passage over. Donaldson's landscapes are not composed as passive views to be looked at; they are to be journeyed into. The photographs circle lochans, dip into glens and cross plateaus. In particular '*In Glen Carrich*' has a sequence of photographs that show the terrain unfolding. The eye traces the route in front of the camera, spotting the gap in the stones in the foreground, cutting round the corner of a rocky mound, tracking left around the hill with the three trees to the hidden landscape beyond. In others, a device such as a meandering burn, an intermittent path or rough track takes you further into the photograph.

Slide 21: (Sanna woman)

Donaldson's portraits also express the figure's relationship to their surroundings, whether photographs of villagers, or those she employed to accompany her over the terrain of the highlands. Whether they either have a long way to go or want to get as close as they can to the landscape, both categories really *inhabit* the land.

Slide 22 (John MacKenzie)

Another photograph shows the ghillie John Mackenzie, lying horizontal on rocks, to drink from the Red Burn. The informality of this photograph, as he lies like Narcissus, is again in contrast to the norm in Victorian photography of people formally seated or standing.

Slide 23 (Robert Moyes Adam, Mingulay children)

Here we have Robert Moyes Adam's photograph of children on Mingulay, several years before the community left in 1912, as an example.

Slide 24 & 25: (Walter Blaikie)

Also here are Walter Blaikie's photographs of Eriskay islanders in 1899. The islanders were asked to 'stage' their labour outside, primarily as much of the activity took place in the dark interiors of home, and no flash was invented at that stage. **Slide 25** In particular in this photograph, you would never naturally get islanders all demonstrating these tasks in the same frame. In comparison to Donaldson's natural portrait of John Mackenzie, we see from her framing, the intimacy of someone literally stepping out of their 'type' with Donaldson's portrait of John MacKenzie.

Slide 26: (Cuillins)

For Donaldson, the photographs, in particular her landscape photography, were linked to the walks themselves, and her need to engage her mind and body in this task. Also, highly religious, Donaldson viewed her walks into the landscape as a way to commune with her Creator. The sharpness in focus of Donaldson's photographs, which she processed herself, encourages a level of active looking. From her photographs in the Cuillins, the lines of the ravines on the flanks of the mountains in the background are as precise as the sheen of the wet stones of the plateau that gently coruscate in the foreground. Nan Shepherd describes a changing the focus of the eye, and the ego, to see the landscape anew: *'As I watch, it arches its back and each layer of landscape bristles... Details are no longer part of a grouping of a picture around which I am the focal point, the focal point is everywhere... This is how the earth must see itself.'* [22] Donaldson's photographs of landscape also encapsulate this shift of the ego from the person to land. Perhaps out of the three women, her work most represents an 'embodied' knowledge, which arises through the physical experience of the terrain.

Slide 27 (MFS Fishy Gift)

Let's look at language and representation of the islanders and highlanders as '**primitive**'. Whilst a number of other films of the period such as *'St Kilda Britain's Loneliest island'* (1923/28) directed by Paul Robello and Bobbie Mann's Glasgow Company Topical Productions refer to primitive 'natives' where the 'machine', the film projector they bring to the island to show the St Kildans' their first film, '... puzzle[s] them', both Gilbertson and Fay Shaw allow for a more nuanced, insightful portrait of islanders and island life. Where Werner Kissling's *'Eriskay – a Poem of Remote Lives'* (1935) re-iterates remoteness, with its

voiceover and titles calling these '*isles of enchantment*' and '*distant*', Gilbertson deftly widens the range of her film by placing crofting life alongside sequences of a more fashionable life in Shetland's capital Lerwick. Kissling prefers to keep a romantic view of the islanders for the film audiences as if the crofters of Eriskay are trapped in time and mist: '*little has changed in this corner of Gaeldom*'. This attraction to mist is echoed by Alasdair Alpin MacGregor in his 1930 book '*Over the Sea to Skye*': '*So this is Eilean a' Cheo, the Isle of Mist; and its children are the Children of the Mist.*' [P.1, '*Over the Sea to Skye*']. In his later 1949 book '*The Western Isles*' (1949), he labels Hebridean islanders as inter-bred (P.197, *The Western Isles*). The earlier '*maids*' he refers to in 1930s' become '*beasts of burden*' [P.241]; the men as lazy.

The narrative that Gilbertson applies is quite different. The language she uses is not placing a reading or presuming to give an overview of the islanders, rather to bring out points of interest for the audience. Sometimes it is a statement of fact, or giving a further bit of information to the visuals such as '*the herring gull – first to lay and first to hatch*' or '*Many girls leave their crofts for a few months to gut fish.*'

Slide 28: The Elspeth

Thinking of Shepherd's emphasis that one is egoless in landscape, in contrast, Kissling's film '*An Eriskay Poem*' begins with him sailing in to the island community on a white yacht, a key protagonist in distinction to the poor islanders. Gilbertson only appears in front of the camera in '*A Crofter's Life*', half way through the film, to be suspended by a rope in order to capture footage of some cormorant's eggs in a nest which lies on a ledge out of reach by normal means.

Slide 29: (Mairi MacRae and lobster)

Brian Winston, in '*The Documentary Film Book*' refers to the ethics of the relationship between subject and object, and the representation of the '*native*' as '*Griersonian victim documentary*' [32]. In particular he coins this phrase, citing the subjects as often not giving their permission, nor understanding what their contribution was or what would occur from the exposure of their lives to a wider audience. Gilbertson, Shaw and Donaldson's approaches would suggest they worked in an alternative way to this approach. Gilbertson records her methods of asking for permissions in her diary. Often word of mouth has reached crofts before she does, on what she is doing. Shaw fastidiously credited in her book '*Folksongs and Folklore in South Uist*', who sang the songs as she transcribed them, and often whom they had learned the songs from. The ownership remains firmly with North Glendale.

Slide 30: The two sisters

Through Margaret Fay Shaw's photography of the MacRae sisters, both in their fifties whilst Campbell was photographing them, she captured women who had key roles in their community. Indeed, looking through the South Uist photographs, capturing them and their neighbours, both men and women, working the land, looking after the animals, then at

leisure, the photographs communicate a non-hierarchical and secure community with men and women represented as equals.

Slide 31: The actual photos and photo album

She portrays men with the same sympathy and sensitivity that she detects in women. Màiri MacRae was a single parent, a potentially difficult path at that time, but her place in her own society is established and a given. She is the main subject of Shaw's photography, with Shaw capturing her in different moods and roles.

Slide 32 (Mairi in group)

Their work is by no means romantic nor nostalgic. Here, Màiri MacRae enjoys a drink in one of the photographs with her neighbours outside or is seen in an informal portrait with her friends and neighbours as part of a group.

Slide 33 (Timeline)

To introduce further areas of research, I am working on placing Gilbertson, Shaw and Donaldson in a wider national and international context [Pick out some points on the timeline].

Slide 34 (Map)

Also, whilst mapping the journeys across Scotland of these three women, I have found a fourth, photographer Violet Banks who went on to set up her own commercial studio in Edinburgh in 1935 but in the 1920s and early 1930s made her own photographs of the Scottish Highlands and Islands, which can be viewed in Historic Environment Scotland Archives. This includes her photograph of MEM Donaldson's house in Sanna, Ardnamurchan, so paths are beginning to cross.

Slide 35: [Christina Broom, Helen Biggar]

I am also aware that whilst comparing their work to their male counterparts to look at differences in methodology, the aim of the research is to be able to view their work through other female contemporaries. Certain questions, such as why their work is not perceived to be political, can be tackled in this way. Dr Sarah Neely writes about Gilbertson, and another Scottish film maker Isobel Wylie Hutchinson (1889-1982):

'... with both filmmakers, it is sometimes difficult, considering their commitment to capturing the rhythms of the everyday, to understand their lack of engagement with wider political and social issues faced by the communities they filmed.' [42]

This comment can be expanded out to Shaw and Donaldson. Their films are located in the everyday, and do not have an overt political message unlike a contemporary such as Helen Biggar, whose films include *'Challenge to Fascism: Glasgow's May Day'* or photographer

Christina Broom who took a series of photographs of Suffragettes and Women's Rights Groups involved in rallies, parades and other events from 1908-1911. None of the women used photography, film or their writing to comment on poverty, or that the rural population in Scotland being affected by the Great Depression which hit Britain during the 1930s'.

Slide 36 Dora Milking Cow

Whilst, as Dr Neely points out, the work of Gilbertson is not political, it could equally be said that the work of Gilbertson, Shaw and Donaldson meets more the feminist maxim of '*the personal is the political*'. This can be seen in the ways Donaldson finds her own emancipation in the landscape, or Shaw documents the strength of women who would likely have been overlooked by wider society, or Gilbertson's films give equality to Shetland islanders through the depth of her portraits of them. To conclude, the power in their work lies in this detail and intimacy of the everyday, where these three women immersed themselves in the communities and places they were documenting, recording an embodied and detailed knowledge of the North.

Slide 37 MFS, shepherd

I shall finish with the shadow the female photographer, MFS, falling on the male subject.