

GSA presentation 28 Oct 2016 **Alternative Readings of the Scottish Highlands & Islands: MEM Donaldson and Margaret Fay Shaw**

Slide 1 Margaret Fay Shaw Oyster Catcher chick c.1930

Thank you to my GSA colleagues Dr Frances Robertson and Dr Nicky Bird for organising 'Through a Northern Lens: Women, Picture, Place'. Frances and Nicky are both key researchers at GSA and are great purveyors of collegiality. Their events and collaborative approach really provide the social and research glue of solidarity and enterprise in this academic community. This presentation is of research in progress. I would like to thank 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 working towards a book and exhibition. I would also like to thank the generous support of other women in particular researching in this area, two of whom are speakers today – Shona Main, in first year PhD at University of Stirling & GSA, 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. I am so pleased with a further turn of the Research Rubik's cube that Dr Mervi Lofgren is here today also.

Slide 2 (Jenny on car roof with camera / Robert Moyes Adams)

By looking at examples of Margaret Fay Shaw and M.E.M. Donaldson's work from 1920s'-1930s', this 35 minute paper will assess if these women offered a different reading on the landscape of Scotland from their better known male contemporaries. Through archival sources, alongside their photography and literature outputs, I will present their aims, methods and examples of their work. I will also refer to film-maker Jenny Gilbertson (1902-1990), who moved to Shetland from Glasgow to live on a croft, producing her first film 'A Crofter's Life in Shetland' (60 mins) in 1931. In order to contextualize Shaw's and Donaldson's approaches to the Scottish Highland & Islands landscape and its communities, I will compare their outputs to others including Werner Kissling, John Grierson, Paul Strand, Robert Moyes Adam and Alasdair Alpin MacGregor. I will use this to illustrate how Donaldson, Shaw and Gilbertson captured the changing face and fate of remote Scottish communities. I will conclude with looking at the work of Shaw and Donaldson through the lens of Fife-born, Edinburgh photographer Violet Banks (1896-1985) who journeyed through the Hebrides in the 1920s and 30s.

Here we have an image of Shetland filmmaker Jenny Gilbertson filming, on top of a car, using her tripod and camera as her compass. We also have Robert Moyes Adams, personifying a trend set by the Kearton brothers, Richard and Cherry, in their 1897 book 'With Nature and a Camera', of doing whatever it took for the picture, even if it involved cliffs and rope.

Slide 3: Eggs by Shaw, Donaldson and Gilbertson

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As a proviso I should say that in this research these women are not grouped together purely because of their biological gender. None were native to the rural communities they photographed or filmed. Shaw and Donaldson, like Gilbertson, 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 as Shona will / has mentioned, Jenny Gilbertson went as a single woman to live on a croft in Shetland, in order to make films, then settled, following her marriage to a crofter. None were formally trained in photography or filmmaking; although Banks had been educated at Edinburgh College of Art and in 1927 was a senior Head Mistress at a private school in Edinburgh. Shaw, Donaldson and Gilbertson taught themselves. It is known that Donaldson, Shaw and Gilbertson 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.

As Gilbertson wrote in later autobiographical notes:

'In fact, when I think of it, this independent streak was probably developing the hard way all through my teens. My mother struggling to keep the Victorian idea of total obedience in a daughter.'

Donaldson states a family lack of support, the strongest: *'As regards to my literary and photographic efforts, they received every discouragement... I had no influence whatever – nor have I yet – to help me along and indeed in this and every other department of my interests... I have had to fight alone with my back to the wall.'*

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 Realist Film Unit, neither Donaldson, Gilbertson nor Shaw was working within an institutional system. Only Banks moved into the commercial sector, in 1935 establishing her own commercial photography studio in Edinburgh. 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 Shaw, Donaldson and Gilbertson knew each other, or each other's photography or film work, in particular in the 1930s'.

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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.

Slide 5 (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 6 (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 7: 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 8 Shearing Sheep MFS

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Shaw recorded the domestic and working life of these sisters and their neighbours. Here, the woman, Mairi Rae, is central to the field of vision, and in the arrangement of the other figures arrange themselves naturally around the key figure. Shaw focuses on women's labour and domestic work, much like later photographer Franki Raffles, in her series like Women of Lewis, or journeys through Russia and China in the 1980s.

Slide 9: MFS Mairi MacRae sything

Like Shetland film maker Jenny Gilbertson, who was commended by John Grierson on '*living with [the crofters] 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...*, through her six years 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 10: 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 11 (Isobel Bonus on rock)

MEM Donaldson

MEM Donaldson was the oldest of the four women Gilbertson - 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 was tireless in her coverage of the 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 12 (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 13 (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 14: (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 15 (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 16 & 17: (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 17** 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 18: (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 19 (oft-photoed and filmed inhabitants)

Let's look at language and representation of the islanders and highlanders as '**primitive**'. The women were not the only people to be photographing locals, as we see here with 'Margaret MacDonald the oldest inhabitant of St Kilda', captured between 1909 and 1930 by three different people – including Paul Robello & Bobbie Mann, and Margaret Fay Shaw herself. Whilst a number of other films of the period such as '*St Kilda Britain's Loneliest island*' (1923/28) directed by Robello and 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. With primary her aim to educate, she stated: "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". '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 20: 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 21: (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

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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 22: 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 23: 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 24 (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 25 (St Kildans photographed since c. 1860)

Needs something re the image: Both Margaret Fay Shaw and Alasdair Alpin MacGregor separately visit St Kilda in 1930 in its last summer. For Shaw, this was an independent and fortuitous journey. As Magda Sagarzazu, retired archivist of Canna House mentioned, Margaret Fay Shaw had the ability to be in the right place at the right time. For Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, he was the official photographer, also correspondent for the Times.

Side 26 (Finlay MacQueen with puffin; Donald John Mackinnon AAM)

Slide 27 (Hirta on the eve of evacuation AAM)

Slide 28 (The last post AAM);

Slide 29(The last cow AAM)

Slide 30 (Approaching St Kilda, MFS)

Slide 31 (Boat coming to ship, MFS)

Slide 32 (Sweets, MFS) These two images by MFS are, in a sense, archetypal photographs of the landscape of St Kilda which had been documented, as a curiosity, since YEAR.

However, in these second two images they document the intrusion and the frenetic activity of an island's last summer, and as MFS hints at the end of the typescript I will read from, '*On the 29th of August the St Kildans left their island. It was said they were defeated by Nature, but she was not wholly to blame.*'

Slide 33 (Spinning Wheel, MFS)

MFS 'On the 29th of August the St Kildans left their island. It was said they were defeated by Nature, but she was not wholly to blame.'

Slide 34

Robert Moyes Adams, a botanical illustrator from Edinburgh, is the photographer who visits Mingulay both before and after the evacuation of Mingulay, with visits of one week in June 1905 [2] and then 1922. I would like to compare his works to MFS's visit in 1931. He went to Mingulay on the first visit with his brother James and Charles Waterson, the latter who is photographed by Moyes fowling on the cliffs, or mountaineering in other Scottish Photographs. Whilst Adams' was in a party of three, it puts Gilbertson's own stay, solo, in the Isle of Stennis, to film seabirds, into perspective.

Slide 35 (Interior, return, pier RMA)

The majority of photographs from his 1905 visit relate to ornithology and botany, given his training, to be expected. A small number of the photographs show Village Bay and some of the inhabitants, including a group of children, and a peat cutter.

Slide 36 (Village Bay Deserted RMA)

It would be unfair to expect urgency, when looking at his photographs, as it has been a decade since the islanders left. However, to look at his works is very interesting. There is no trace of sentimentality, ten years after the island is uninhabited, or approach to capture that story of an evacuation. Indeed, in two establishing shots of village bay, here, we see two people in the foreground.

Slide 37 (RMA, wild carrots)

His camera is still very much led by a botanist's eye – he captures streamside vegetation, peers into rock pools at the initial landing point; he photographs rock plants, cliff flora, holly and wild carrots.

Slide 38 (The Chapel)

A modern digital approach, seen in the contemporary work of both Dr Nicky Bird or Chris Leslie, would be to introduce archive as overlay, to show the difference of scene and history to amplify the absence. Given the uniqueness of Adams' position as a photographer, who has visited Mingulay before and after, there appears no connection with the recent history that Adams sees through the lens. However, there is one landmark, the Chapel House, photographed in both 1905 and 1922.

Slide 39 (Mingulay MFS)

Let us move to Margaret Fay Shaw's photographs of Mingulay. Remembering the time line, her visit to Mingulay occurs nine months after she witnesses the last summer of St Kilda. MFS then visits Mingulay in 1931, as a cook for two weeks in May on a farm run by the island's new owner Mr John Russell (1930). They also, as I read from her diary, capture the atmosphere of this evacuated island, bearing in mind she had experienced the last month of St Kilda the year before. I read from her diary: **CHMFS/1/4/1/4: Diary - South Uist, Mingulay, Oxford 1931**

May 10, 1931

'I wander away to the deserted village - to look for cairns and fields and feel again that strange sorrow that can only be found here - the green sea rolling in across the sands, the gulls and oyster catchers screaming - running at the edge of the foam. The nettles growing thick and fast - the wild iris leaves and in the dips of the little streams, primroses - that little mound of graves - with crude stones and wretched remnant crosses barren, crumbling - not a name to be found - and not a roof on the houses rapidly filling with sand. Starlings hissing cackling on the stones.

Slide 40 (sheep clipping, Mingulay MFS)

Margaret Fay Shaw's photographs however as well as the evacuation, capture the changes of the island, with the labour of the shepherds. She also shows the domesticity of the life on the farm with intimate readings of the shepherds as individuals.

Slide 41 (Mingulay Shepherd)

This strikes me as a very important one of the woman photographer. The female gaze is seen as a shadow on the belly of the male subject, as is the shadow of her camera.

Slide 42 (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 43 (Map)

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. Also, whilst mapping the journeys across Scotland of Donaldson, Shaw and Gilbertson, 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.

Slide 44

This includes her photograph of MEM Donaldson's house in Sanna, Ardnamurchan, so paths are beginning to cross. Here is Donaldson's photograph of Sanna Bheag. **Slide 36** And here is an album page from Violet Banks, labelled 'House at Sanna by MEM Donaldson', **Slide 37** (detail).

Slide 45

And here is Shaw's photograph of 'Eriskay Telegraph Office'; and **Slide 39** Violet Banks' 'Eriskay Telegraph Office'. Veronica Fraser in her essay 'The Violet Banks Collection' in 'Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group 2008-9', describes the building of interest as follows: 'Modernisation in a traditional context is illustrated with a view of the telegraph and post office on Eriskay, with a telegraph pole mounted on a traditional thatched house'. Just as Gilbertson did not strand the crofters from the changes that are occurring to wider society, both Shaw and Banks are individually drawn to photograph this same landmark which subtly demonstrates these changes to traditional symbols of 'remote' life.

Slide 46: [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 47 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 48 VB, woman looking into cave

I shall finish with the curious photographer looking in the cave. There is more research to be done.