

Institution: UHI (University of the Highlands and Islands)
Unit of Assessment: 28
Title of case study: Rediscovering and Repatriating Lost Cultural Heritage
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p><i>Cuairt Mhic'IlleMhicheil</i> is a BBC radio series tracing the life and works of the major folklore collector Alexander Carmichael, researched, scripted, and presented by Dr Stiùbhart, and recorded on location throughout the Gàidhealtachd. Restoring valuable, newly discovered cultural capital to marginalised communities, making crucial connections between the past and living Gaelic tradition, <i>Cuairt</i> proved a striking success with listeners and the BBC itself. The series enabled Dr Stiùbhart to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with Highland communities, enabling his research to support local cultural activities and to enhance public awareness of, and engagement with, a rich, complex, and endangered heritage.</p>
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>The underpinning research was undertaken by Dr Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, lecturer and course leader at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig UHI from 2006. Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912), the subject of the project, is one of the most significant, and controversial, figures in late nineteenth-century European folklore and ethnography (4, 5, 6). The research focused upon Carmichael's manuscript archive, held in Edinburgh University Library, a collection of international importance, the product of a lifetime's assiduous recording throughout his native Highlands, especially in the Outer Hebrides where he worked as an exciseman for nearly twenty years.</p> <p>The first two volumes of Carmichael's <i>magnum opus</i>, <i>Carmina Gadelica</i> [1900], represent a major ethnographic and artistic achievement of the turn-of-the-century Celtic Revival movement. At a popular level, this bilingual compendium of charms, blessings, and prayers proved highly influential as a representation of so-called 'Celtic spirituality', and a principal inspiration for the contemporary Celtic Christianity movement. In scholarly circles, however, Alexander Carmichael's legacy came to be regarded as hopelessly compromised, mired in doubts over its authenticity; the chaotic state of his archive and his near illegible hand discouraged further investigation (5).</p> <p>Dr Stiùbhart's research, in an ongoing series of papers and articles, offers a decisive intervention in heated disputes that 'provided Scottish Gaelic studies with its liveliest debate of the century, a debate akin in many ways to the Ossianic controversy 200 years before' [Ronald Black (ed.), <i>An Tuil</i> (Edinburgh, 1999), 711]. Over several years Dr Stiùbhart was able to identify and analyse 23 original field notebooks; in collaboration with archivists at Edinburgh University Library, he catalogued nearly 4,000 separate items in the notebooks, and investigated the family background and biographies of 272 named individual informants (1, 3, 6). Using these previously unknown field recordings in conjunction with crucial contextual details, we can, for the first time, properly assess the authenticity, or otherwise, of the polished items Carmichael printed in <i>Carmina Gadelica</i> (5).</p> <p>The research offers insights into three broad subject areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • oral literature: it allows access, for the first time, to a remarkable, hitherto unknown store of oral literature and ethnology, gathered 'in the field' in one of the richest areas for popular

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culture in western Europe (1–3);

- **the collector:** it allows us to trace in detail, and to re-evaluate, Alexander Carmichael's life, career, collecting and editing practices, and underlying motivations (1, 3, 5);
- **the informants:** it allows the compilation of outstandingly detailed biographies of Carmichael's informants, drawing on the *Scotland's People* online demographic database and knowledge from local genealogists and historians (1–3).

The novelty of the research, the high quality of the material unearthed, the unusually precise contextual information accompanying it, considerably beyond contemporary ethnographic norms, and the inherent human interest of Alexander Carmichael's story inspired, shaped, and underpinned the subject of this impact case study, the series of 8x30min programmes for BBC Radio nan Gàidheal, *Cuairt Mhic'IlleMhicheil* [*Carmichael's Journey*]. In cooperation with producer Flòraidh Maclean, Dr Stiùbhart identified key contributors, compiled the scripts, and recorded the programmes on location throughout the Scottish Gàidhealtachd.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

The following selection of academic articles illustrates the variety and depth of potential approaches to Alexander Carmichael and his collections:

1. * 'The Making of a Charm Collector: Alexander Carmichael in the Outer Hebrides, 1864 to 1882' in James Kapaló, Éva Pocs, and William Ryan (eds), *The Power of Words: Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe* (Budapest: Central European University, 2013) 25–66.
2. 'Murder in Barra, 1609? The killing of the "Peursan Mór"', *Béascna*, 8 (2013), 144–78.
3. * 'Alasdair MacGilleMhicheil: Fear-cruinneachaidh òran ri linn nan 1860an' ['AC: A song collector in the 1860s'], in Ruairí Ó hUiginn (ed), *Foinn agus Focail: Leachtaí Cholm Chille XLI* (Maynooth, 2010), 109–50.
4. 'Alasdair MacGilleMhicheil agus Cultar Dùthchasach' ['AC and Material Culture'] in Richard Cox (ed.), *Dualchas agus an Àrainneachd* (Clann Tuirc: Bridge of Turk, 2009), 135–60.
5. * 'Alexander Carmichael and *Carmina Gadelica*' in Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart (ed.), *Alexander Carmichael: Life and Legacy* (Islands Book Trust: Ness, Isle of Lewis, 2008), 1–39.
6. 'Uses of historical traditions in Scottish Gaelic', in John Beech et al. (eds.), *Oral literature and performance culture (Compendium of Scottish Ethnology vol. 10)* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2007), 124–52.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Cuairt Mhic'IlleMhicheil is a BBC radio series of 8x30-minute programmes, researched, scripted, and presented by Dr Stiùbhart, tracing the life and works of the major Gaelic folklore collector Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912), broadcast thrice over the past five years. As a result:

- new insights from academic research were reinterpreted for a popular audience;
- significant, hitherto undiscovered cultural capital was returned to marginalised minority communities in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd;
- a foundation was laid for sustained, mutually beneficial collaboration with individuals and groups within the region.

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BBC Radio nan Gàidheal does not record exact listening figures. The programmes' significance, however, for listeners and the broadcasting institution itself, can be gauged by the fact that *Cuairt* was repeated twice during the time covered by the REF, given a permanent website (G), and enthusiastically endorsed by the then head of Radio nan Gàidheal (C).

Throughout his career Dr Stiùbhart has demonstrated a commitment to bringing research insights to a wider audience, through broadcast media and work with community organisations and societies, especially in vulnerable marginal communities in the Gàidhealtachd whose cultural confidence is fragile, where academic involvement remains relatively uncommon and correspondingly meaningful. Previous engagement with diverse 'communities of interest' in these areas – historians, genealogists, and community animateurs – had already elicited valuable feedback and long-term cooperation, enriching a shared understanding of a complex cultural heritage.

Cuairt thus represented a continuation of Dr Stiùbhart's professional practice. Its subject met BBC Radio nan Gàidheal's established commitment to educate and empower listeners whose formal education had rarely taken account of their own Gaelic culture and heritage, and to challenge prevailing anglocentric cultural values and social assumptions (C).

The series was recorded on location throughout the Gàidhealtachd, in districts where Alexander Carmichael lived and/or collected (C). Despite Carmichael's cultural significance, little was known about the man himself, his controversial achievements, or his involvement with the contributors' own areas (C, D, F). With this in mind, Dr Stiùbhart supplied contributors with contextualised transcripts from Carmichael's unpublished manuscripts in Edinburgh University Library. This new material prompted contributors to make crucial connections between Carmichael's informants and living Gaelic tradition. This led to further dialogue with Dr Stiùbhart, inspired fresh research, and elicited novel interpretative frameworks (A–F, H). Feedback testifies to the diverse impacts resulting from *Cuairt Mhic'IlleMhìcheil* and Dr Stiùbhart's ongoing engagement with series contributors.

Research to be published next year by John MacFarlane, Taynuilt, on the topography, history, and cultural heritage of his native Mid-Lorn – he is the last native Gaelic speaker there – has been greatly facilitated by discussion with Dr Stiùbhart. Collaboration with Dr Stiùbhart enabled Mr MacFarlane to trace the biography of a major local bard, as well as to unearth an associated song for public performance. Mr MacFarlane is presently using material supplied by Dr Stiùbhart concerning a currently endangered holy well in Appin to alert interested parties throughout the world to the threat (E).

Dr Stiùbhart supplied Calum Laing, Alness, with crucial information concerning two great-uncles: the Rev. John MacRury, the most prolific Gaelic writer of the nineteenth century, and his brother Seonaidh. This allowed him to compile his important, recently published bio-bibliography of the former (H), as well as to identify the latter as a hitherto unknown, and still to be fully researched, assistant of Carmichael who supplied him with exceptionally significant charms reworked and showcased in *Carmina Gadelica* (A).

Ongoing work with Alasdair MacEachainn, Benbecula, has clarified the identity of Carmichael's island informants, many of whom have descendants there today. It has also revealed the origins of an internationally significant archaeological find acquired by the folklorist: a Pictish stone from Sunamul, an island once inhabited by MacEachainn's family. This information has been used by the contributor in local lectures and community walks (D).

Sustained collaboration with the *Seallam!* Hebridean genealogical centre has illuminated economic circumstances and factors motivating emigration in the mid-nineteenth century islands. Further results will appear in a booklet about the history of the Harris machair, as well as in on-going research concerning the now deserted island of Taransay and the history of Harris Tweed (B).

Overall, feedback indicates that the various impacts resulting from *Cuairt* continue to enhance

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public awareness of, and engagement with, the region's vulnerable Gaelic heritage, demonstrating its value in restoring cultural confidence and strengthening community identity. Archived versions and further repeats of *Cuairt*, and a follow-on series by Dr Stiùbhart (on the major folklorist John Francis Campbell) commissioned as a result, will maintain and develop collaborative work with these communities in the future (C).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A. Named testimonial, 5 November 2013, Ainess.
- B. Named testimonial, 18 October 2013, Northton, Isle of Harris.
- C. Named testimonial, 30 October 2013, former Head of Radio nan Gàidheal.
- D. Named testimonial, 30 October 2013, Àird, Benbecula.
- E. Named testimonial, 4 November 2013, Taynuilt, Argyllshire.
- F. Named testimonial, 11 November 2013, Skye.
- G. *Cuairt Mhic'IlleMhìcheil* website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/alba/radio/carmina/>
- H. Calum Laing, *An t-Urramach Iain MacRuairidh: A Bheatha agus na Sgìobhaidhean aige* (Inverness: Clàr, 2013)

Note: all testimonials (A-F) are available on request of the UoA Panel and/or the National REF Team from the data audit contact for the University of the Highlands and Islands.