

Centre for History News



Welcome to our Autumn 2020 newsletter which finds us and our students still working and studying from home.

We've been hugely impressed by how people have continued to open doors and embrace new ways of doing things, with the result that the 'pandemic months' have been a surprisingly productive and creative period for the Centre, as we hope this newsletter reveals.

Our staff do not currently enjoy the view above, but we chat on video conference regularly, get to know each other's pets (and their habits...) and discuss weightier matters at regular online meetings.

We are confident in our ability to teach, research and supervise to a very high standard and are proud of the way our amazing students have adapted to the changes, but we know that it hasn't been easy for anyone over the last six months.

This newsletter celebrates our fifteenth birthday and is dedicated to our students and staff for their tenacity and determination.

Hats off to you all.

Autumn 2020

The Centre for History has been part of the University of the Highlands and Islands since 2005 and is internationally renowned for our research and teaching in Highland, Scottish and wider world history.

We are normally based in the cathedral town of Dornoch, Sutherland, but during the Covid-19 pandemic we are proudly operating from spare bedrooms, studies and living rooms across Scotland.

You can find out what we do by following us on Facebook or Twitter **@UHIHistory**

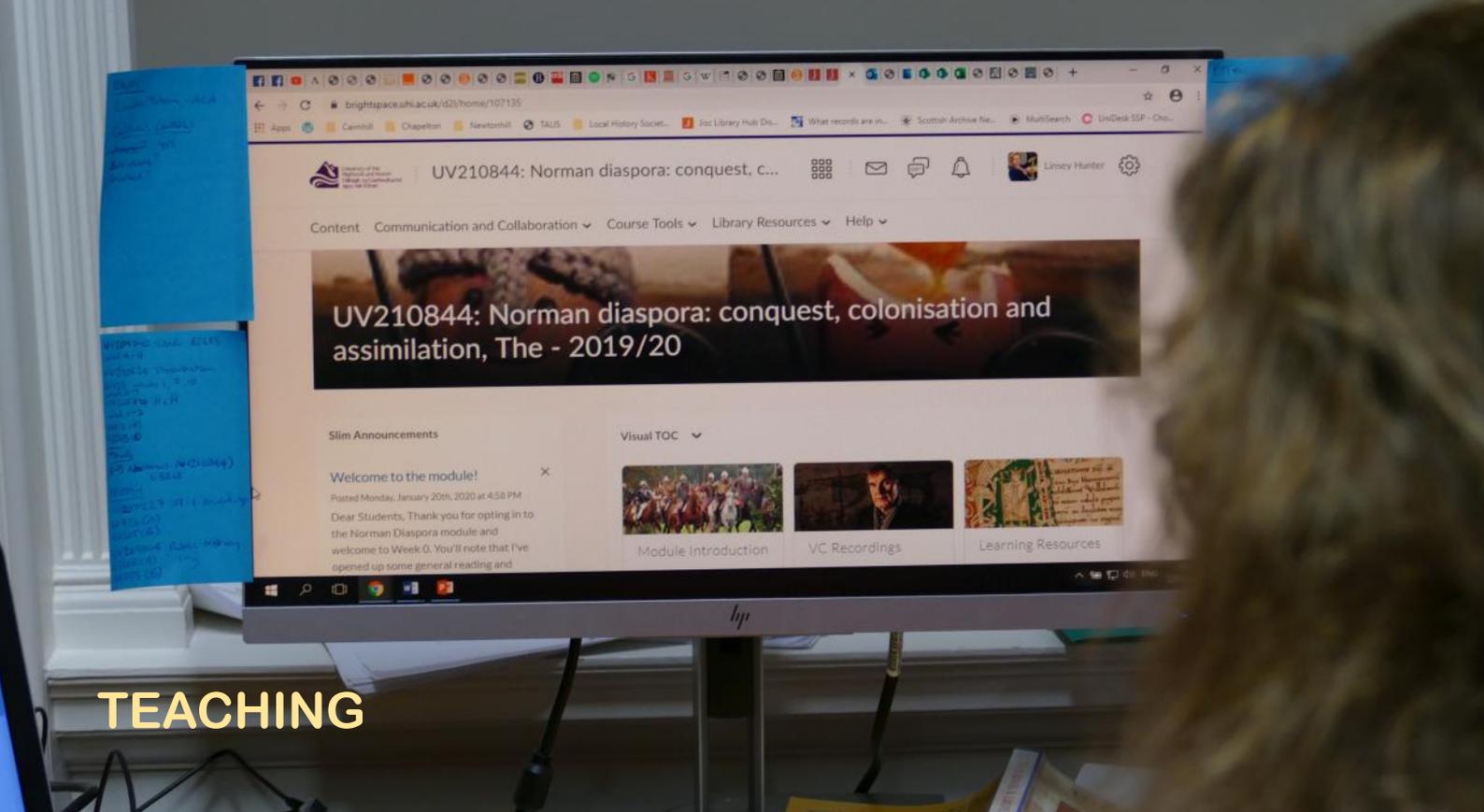
Visit our website to find out more about our undergraduate history degrees and online masters courses www.history.uhi.ac.uk

For other enquiries please email the team at history@uhi.ac.uk



University of the
Highlands and Islands
Centre for History

Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd
agus nan Eilean
Ionad Eachdraidh



TEACHING

Sharing and caring

Live online teaching by video conference to a dispersed student community is what the Centre for History has been doing for more than a decade. Over the summer we had requests from other universities and history departments asking us how we teach online, how we do it so well, and how we use online technologies to bring history alive for our students.

UHI's aim has always been to put the student at the centre of our teaching and to make our resources available as widely as possible. This process has been accelerated by the pandemic, with several new initiatives being introduced by Centre staff.

Dr Lucy Dean set up a very popular 'student common room', an online video conference space where undergraduate students can drop in and chat amongst themselves – providing a much-needed (and Covid-free) alternative to the post-lecture coffee!

As one of our undergraduates told us:

"I really think UHI are doing a fantastic job of making everything accessible (and felt this last year, before COVID)..."

The pandemic has definitely got its silver linings, because for mature students such as myself, who are always going to be working remotely, all these tech updates will benefit us."

Online undergraduates

In normal times our undergraduate programmes are taught by a mix of online and face-to-face teaching. But this semester (our busiest ever) we moved to online teaching for everyone.

All our undergraduate modules include weekly two-hour classes of live interactive teaching by video conference, backed up by self-directed learning using resources, readings and discussion boards in the university's virtual learning environment. Lecturers and students have enjoyed using the chat facilities, breakout rooms and other new learning tools, as well as the many comic interruptions caused by being at home!

Student engagement in class has been very high, although some students are understandably finding it more complicated to complete and submit their assignments while studying from home.

Global postgraduates

We've seen a steep rise in students joining us to take a masters' degree. Our postgraduate taught degrees have always been online so we expect to see students from around the world, but this year more people from North America, in particular, have chosen to study with us. The online discussion boards for these courses are lively places, with students communicating with one another across geographical boundaries.

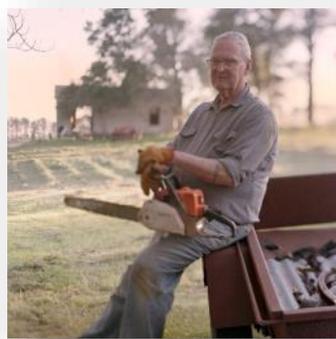
STUDENT NEWS



PhD success down under

One of our first MLitt Highlands and Islands History students has just been awarded a PhD from Federation University Australia. **Dr Graham Hannaford** joined the MLitt from his home in Canberra and came over to Scotland for his graduation ceremony in 2015. The Centre's **Dr Elizabeth Ritchie** co-supervised his successful PhD thesis *A Good Sheep Run: Letters from New South Wales in Scottish newspapers between 1820 and 1850 with potential to influence decisions on emigration*.

Graham very kindly credits his present academic success to the encouragement and sound training in historical studies given by the Centre. We think he is being too modest!



Lockdown in the Highlands

Another of our former masters' students is using his research skills to change our understanding of the present. **Neil Bruce** has been looking at 'lockdown' restrictions in the Highlands during the First and Second World Wars and finding some fascinating parallels with the present day. His research featured in an article in *The Scotsman* newspaper and you can read more about what he discovered in these [three Historylinks blog posts](#).

Double prize-winner

Silja Roethinger's outstanding dissertation *The Scottish Highlands and the British Empire during the 1920s and 1930s: a case study of Sir Alexander MacEwen* has won the James Hunter Dissertation Prize for 2019/20 as well as the Highland Society of London's prize for the best dissertation on a Highland theme.

Silja (pictured above) finished her undergraduate dissertation during a difficult period of lockdown and Covid-19 restrictions, making it an even more impressive achievement. She is now studying on our online MLitt British Studies. You can read [Silja's and previous prizewinning dissertations](#) on our website.

Black Lives Matter

Jack Shehata, one of our 2020 graduates and now a member of the executive of the university's student association (HISA), has been instrumental in HISA's impressive response to the Black Lives Matter movement.

We have been proud to see how history has been used to inform HISA's statement on BLM, and to see Jack appearing on a BBC Alba documentary about the Highlands and slavery in November. He also initiated blogs and lectures during Black History Month.

Well done Jack!

**Black
History
Month**

1st to 31st October



STAFF NEWS

Out and about

We may be restricted from travelling and meeting people face-to-face, but our knowledge exchange and public engagement activities have been as busy as ever. We've been giving online talks, editing journals and working with many cultural and heritage organisations.

Here's a snapshot of the last few months:

Dr Nicola Martin appeared on BBC TV's history series *Blood of the Clans* talking about Jacobitism, in August.

Dr Katy Turton appeared on BBC TV's *Royal History's Biggest Fibs with Lucy Worsley* in November, talking about the role of women in Russia's 1917 February revolution.

Dr Linsey Hunter featured on the *Scotichronicast* [podcast](#) talking about her love of Scottish charters and what they reveal about medieval private life.

Dr Jim MacPherson edited the latest issue of *Northern Scotland* featuring articles from the 1919 Land Act conference (organised by **Dr Iain Robertson**). Jim has also been working with the Clan Macpherson Museum on an ambitious funding bid to create new exhibition material.

Dr Iain Robertson gave a talk for the West Harris Trust based on his research into land seizures on Trust land in the 1920s. You can see a [recording here](#).

Dr Alison Chand gave a highly topical History Talks Live account of her [oral history research](#) into the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on young families.

Dr Kathrin Zickermann became editor of the interdisciplinary *Northern Studies*, the journal of the Scottish Society for Northern Studies.

Professor Jim Hunter was in conversation with Angus Mackinnon at the [virtual Islay Book Festival](#) in August.

Professor David Worthington was part of an online discussion about Highland links to slavery at the [Moray Digital Doors Open Day](#) in September.

Dr Katie Carpenter was a guest speaker for the History of Parliament Trust event marking the Queen Caroline affair of 1820. Read her [blog for the Parliamentary Archives](#).

Dr Lucy Dean and **Dr Amy Hayes** took part in the online discussion *What did it mean to be a Queen of Scotland?* for the Society of Renaissance Studies in August and are planning the [Kings and Queens conference](#) for the Royal Studies Network next July.

Professor Marjory Harper published an audiobook edition of her popular *Testimonies of Transition: Voices from the Scottish diaspora*. [See more here](#).

Dr Iain MacInnes will have the first of his five articles on the Scottish Wars of Independence published in *History Scotland* in January 2021.



Sùil air adhart

Tha a' Ghàidhlig fhathast aig cridhe cultar na Gàidhealtachd agus nan Eilean, agus thèid a comharrachadh mar phàirt bhunaiteach de Chnoc a' Chaisteil san àm ri teachd.

The Spirit of the Highlands will also be future-looking, highlighting the ways in which the Highlands and Islands can lead in areas such as green energy, community land development, and cultural growth rooted in local communities.

The innovative structure of the University of the Highlands and Islands is one of the ways the area has already shown how it can pioneer new ways of living, working and learning.

RESEARCH

Spirit of the Highlands

We've been researching areas which reveal historic Highland agency or 'the spirit of the Highlands' and working closely with the Inverness Castle project. The image above shows hoardings around Inverness Castle, for which **Professor Worthington** was text advisor.

Research Excellence Framework

We've been very busy over the last six months finalising our submission for REF 2021. This is the process by which UK's universities rank and assess the quality of research. REF 2021 analyses aspects of our research over the last seven years and its assessment will have a big impact on how much revenue we receive and how well our research is viewed in the world.

We're also planning our research strategy for the next REF in 2028. Our ambition is to double the number of books authored by individual staff members and to substantially increase applications for funded research.

History Talks Live

In May we launched a new online series of live research talks from the Centre, and by Christmas we will have held nine interactive talks. Talk subjects currently reflect the research interests of our staff. To watch the recordings go to [History Talks Live](#).



Black Lives Matter

Over the last few years we've been working hard to decolonise our curriculum and have sought to unravel the historical entanglements of exploitation, slavery and the legacies of Empire in the Highlands and Islands.

In response to the Black Lives Matter movement **Dr Jim MacPherson** produced an important virtual collection for the journal *Northern Scotland*, bringing together articles from previous issues which highlight the region's participation in the activities of Empire. It's [free to read online](#) until the end of 2020, thanks to the good folk at Edinburgh University Press.

The 'Black Lives Matter' specially-themed collection includes **David Alston** on slave plantations and the Highlands, **Stephen Mullen** on how one Highland planter amassed enormous wealth from his Caribbean plantation, as well as reflections on how the work of non-white scholars can change the way we see our own histories.

Meanwhile, **Professor David Worthington** gave an online talk attended by around 300 people in The Edge/History Talks Live seminar series on *Sugar, Slave-owning and the Scottish Highlands before 1707*, the recording of which has received over 2000 views.

David's 2019 article on the same theme has also become the most widely-read ever published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Dutch Crossing*.

You can watch a [recording of his talk](#) and read his online article in [Dutch Crossing](#).



Fifteen years of history

We're celebrating fifteen years of existence this year and thought you might like a potted history of the Centre...

The Centre for History was the inspiration of Dennis Macleod, a crofter's son from Helmsdale who made a fortune from mining in Canada and South Africa. He wanted to see Highland history being studied in his home county of Sutherland and gave the initial funding for the Centre in 2005. Jim Hunter took the idea forward, setting up a small office in Ross House, Dornoch and employing the first lecturer and administrator.

We quickly outgrew the single room we occupied and moved in 2009 to the nearby Coach House. Previously used as summer accommodation, the Coach House was famous for its extreme temperatures and the bath which doubled as a filing cabinet!



Centre staff in 2008 (L-R): Dr Elizabeth Ritchie, Dr David Worthington, Dr Karly Kehoe, Dr Karen Cullen, Professor Jim Hunter.

By 2010 our increasing undergraduate and postgraduate courses required more space for staff and access to video-conference teaching rooms, so we moved into a wing of the newly refurbished Burghfield House, also in Dornoch (see above picture).

Now we have eighteen members of staff (full time and part time) and teach to more than 350 students every year. Our research is recognised as world-leading and our graduates are working in all parts of the world.

We're very proud to be a fundamental part of the University of the Highlands and Islands, described by some as 'a jewel in the crown' of the organisation.

Happy Birthday to us!

In November we celebrated our birthday with thirty of our former students and some of our earliest staff members in an online birthday drinks and quiz evening. It was a wonderful opportunity to catch up with people's lives in a relaxed and informal atmosphere and was much enjoyed by all who attended.

One former student told us how the 'history degree changed me as a person... it taught me how to think logically, how to challenge what I read and to look at the bigger picture.'

If you're a Centre for History alumni and would like to be kept in touch with our activities, why not join our History Events mailing list? We'll send you our newsletter and details of lectures and talks.

Email historyevents@uhi.ac.uk