

# The European Ethnological Research Centre

## Outputs and projects

The European Ethnological Research Centre (EERC) was founded by Prof Alexander Fenton CBE in 1989. Initially housed within National Museums Scotland the EERC has, since 2006, been part of Celtic & Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. The EERC conducts research into Scottish life and society following an ethnological approach. The results of that research are published in a variety of outputs: [Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology](#); Flashbacks; Regional Flashbacks; Sources in Scottish History, Review of Scottish Culture and other occasional publications.

## The Flashbacks Series

The [Flashbacks](#) series provides first-hand accounts of lived experience from those who live and have lived across Scotland. These accounts are from a variety of presentation: diary; memoir; correspondence and recorded interviews. The *Regional Flashbacks* draws from the Regional Ethnology of Scotland Project in providing these first-hand accounts. From work to family life, town to village and the external to the inner world of the contributors, readers gain an insight into life and society across Scotland.

## Sources in Local History

The [Sources in Local History](#) series was created

by Professor Fenton. His aim was to publish and promote research into diaries, account books, journals and other documents containing information about everyday life and society in Scotland. Professor Fenton had long advocated their value for the study of the country's ethnology and history, and before the series was established, he had included part-transcriptions and associated articles in the *Review of Scottish Culture*. Six volumes were published in the original *Sources in Local History* series.

The series was revived in 2015 as part of the Regional Ethnology of Scotland Project. With this relaunch, it became a free-to-access, digital resource. It also broadened its scope to include documents produced by societies as well as by individuals; and a new 'Scots Abroad' strand was introduced in order to capture the experiences of the many Scots who left these shores either as emigrants or sojourners, or in the course of duty. To date, 31 volumes of transcribed and edited documents have been produced in the new series.

## Regional Ethnology of Scotland Project (RESP)

Following completion of the 14-volume 'Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology', the EERC launched the Regional Ethnology of Scotland Project (RESP), in 2011. The aim of the Project was to enhance the Compendium by facilitating the collection of primary source material that would illustrate everyday life and society in Scotland, past and present. After an initial scoping study, Dumfries and Galloway was chosen as the first research

area and it was determined that the Study would have two distinct parts: the spoken word and the written word. From the outset, key objectives included i) the involvement of local partners and volunteers and ii) implementing a process which would allow the research materials generated by the Project to be shared as widely as possible.

### **RESP: The spoken word**

EERC staff worked with local organisations and partners and held events to promote the RESP and recruit volunteer fieldworkers and potential interviewees. Fieldworkers were subsequently given training in all aspects of collection, from practical equipment operation to ethical guidance. They were given ongoing support from EERC staff which began with detailed feedback on initial interviews and included the provision of a shared reflective diary (where fieldworkers were encouraged to reflect on their own practice and share their thoughts on what they had learned from each interview). Fieldworker gatherings were also arranged, where participating fieldworkers were encouraged to reflect on the material they had collected. During the active years of the Dumfries and Galloway RESP (2011-2018), around 60 volunteer fieldworkers made recordings with nearly 250 interviewees, amounting to hundreds of hours of new fieldwork research.

The decision to recruit local volunteer fieldworkers was central to the Project and had a number of beneficial outcomes. Most importantly, the Project sought to gather a body of source material which would represent the priorities and concerns of the region. By training

the fieldworkers and then allowing them decide who to interview and what questions to ask, it was hoped an unmediated impression of local experience could emerge. In addition, by including local partners and volunteer fieldworkers, the EERC were able to maximise the work that could be achieved during the study period. This led to a dynamic and invigorating experience for everyone involved.

In the introduction to Volume One of the *Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*, Dr Margaret Mackay includes this quote from Sandy Fenton, a guiding principle of the RESP:

[Ethnology] is a subject that relates to each and every one of us and there is no one who cannot be a practitioner. It is one in which personal roots, the home and environment within which the researcher is brought up, become part of the research apparatus of national identity (I:26).

In addition to the active collecting, a small number of items and pre-existing collections were donated to the Project, thereby ensuring wider access to these materials and ongoing care and security of this valuable legacy resource. This included the first materials added to the RESP Archive, a series of interviews carried out between 1999 and 2016 comprising 42 recordings made with 46 contributors made by members of the Stranraer and District Local History Trust. This rich body of material resulted in the first publication to be generated by the RESP, the *Regional Flashback Stranraer and District Lives: Voices in Trust* (2017). Another donated item, a recording made by Ian Blacklock in 1975 with his 100-year-old granny, takes us back to memories of seeing Queen

Victoria at the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894.

The RESP model has developed over time and is currently active in East Lothian with smaller projects in other parts of the country, such as work with the Harris Tweed Authority in the Western Isles, supported on a smaller scale and over a shorter time-frame.

To date, almost 300 fieldwork recordings have been added to the East Lothian collection. This includes both ongoing original fieldwork and donated material.

### **The RESP Archive Project**

As mentioned above, a key principle of the RESP from the outset was to make the resources as widely accessible as possible and this commitment led to the establishment of the RESP Archive Project and the collaboration with the Centre for Research Collections at the University of Edinburgh, where the RESP fieldwork recordings are now held. As a born-digital collection, the RESP recordings were already cleared for digital release and so, in 2018, work began on building the resource which would become the RESP website <https://collections.ed.ac.uk/eerc/>

This website is accessible to anyone and provides access to the entire RESP collection. Each recording has been screened in order to comply with GDPR regulations, and redacted as appropriate. The recordings each appear on a dedicated page alongside any available visual resources, a detailed summary of the interview contents and full transcriptions. In this way, the RESP team have sought to make the recordings

as accessible as possible. The resource continues to be added to with both original fieldwork recordings and legacy materials and, now that the website is up and running, the RESP archive team is moving focus more towards outreach and engagement in order to promote the resource and encourage wide engagement with this unique collection.

**Innovation:** Being part of the wider Centre for Research Collections has meant that the EERC and the RESP Archive Team have been able to call on the expertise of a varied team of experts. The Project has also provided a unique testing bed for the team working within the CRC on digital preservation: allowing them to realise significant developments in this important area of archive work.

A key strength of the RESP model is that it is simple and agile. It has therefore been possible to respond to opportunities as they arise and to direct resources wisely to achieve the best impact. One recent development has been to move into film production as a way of using in-house expertise to develop resources which can reach a wide audience, encourage more participation in the RESP and create a resource that can be used in future and beyond the time the RESP is active.

RESP outputs so far include:

**Printed resources:** Four books, including one edited by the volunteer fieldworker who conducted the research (*Whithorn: An Economy of People, 1920-1960* ed. Julia Muir Watt) and one joint-edited with a volunteer (*Lochmaben:*

*Community Memories*, eds. Isabelle C Gow and Sheila Findlay).

The provision of written articles about the work and content of the RESP is an area under development at the moment and includes:

iPRES paper: 'A Tartan Rather than a Plain Cloth': Building a Shared Workflow to Preserve the Regional Ethnology of Scotland Archive, delivered by Sara Day Thomson, Digital Archivist, CRC, at iPRES22, in Glasgow, September 2022.

SRA paper: 'The Regional Ethnology of Scotland Project: Archive and Research in Partnership' based on a paper given by Caroline Milligan and Lesley Bryson at the Scottish Records Association conference in 2022, this paper has been submitted and is awaiting publication.

David Hannay paper: David Hannay donated his fieldwork collection to the RESP (75 recordings made over his lifetime) and this material, largely concerned with the communities of Carluith and Creetown, is explored in a paper currently being prepared for publication.

**Visual Resources:** *The Past is Still with Us:* A 19-minute film about East Lothian fisherman, Charlie Horne, which was shown in local venues and is now available on the RESP Archive website. *Musselburgh Mills:* A 42-minute film which brought together the recollections of the main mills in Musselburgh: the paper mill, the wire mill and the net mill. This film, a collaboration with the John Gray Centre in Haddington, was launched in Musselburgh to an audience of

over 170 people, many of whom had their own memories of the mills to share and discuss. The film was shown several times in 2023 with more screenings planned in 2024, and will also be available on-line in the future.

**Future plans:** In 2024 the RESP will continue to be active in East Lothian and will be working with colleagues at the John Gray centre on a film which focuses on life in Haddington. This film will combine material from the RESP Archive with visual resources from the John Gray Centre collection. The overall focus of the Project will be on maximising our resources and working in partnerships to preserve, promote, celebrate and encourage engagement with the RESP Archive recordings and the people who contributed to their creation.

## **EERC and Project staff**

**Lesley Bryson** has been Project Archivist at the Centre for Research Collections, University of Edinburgh since 2007 and the RESP Project Archivist since 2018. Lesley is responsible for resource development, workflow planning and also coordinates and undertakes cataloguing of the RESP Collections.

**Colin Gateley** has worked in audio visual production and digitisation for museums, galleries and education for over 27 years. He has been an AV assistant to EERC since 2017, including the editing and production of film output and the digitisation of audio content. More recently he has been involved in producing and editing videos using RESP audio recordings.

**Dr Neill Martin** is Senior Lecturer and Head of Celtic and Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. He studied at the universities of Stirling, Dalhousie, McGill and Edinburgh. His undergraduate and Masters degrees were in English and Music, later developing an interest in ethnology and folklore before competing his PhD in the field of ritual and language in Celtic-language societies. His publications extend across festive culture, oral poetry, ballads and traditional belief. He has been Director of EERC since 2020.

**Caroline Milligan** is Archives Assistant with the RESP Archive Project and Research Assistant and editor with the EERC. Caroline was involved in the initial RESP pilot study. As well as preparing the finding aids for RESP resources being added to the Project website, she has an active role in supporting the work of the RESP in the community and has edited a number of EERC publications including two in the Regional Flashback series, *Stranraer and District Lives: Voices in Trust* (2017) and *Border Mills: Lives of Peeblesshire Textile Workers*, Ian MacDougall, (2023)

**Mark Mulhern** is Senior Research Fellow at the EERC. He was one of the editors of *Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology* and is currently responsible for management of 'Spoken Word' strand of the *Regional Ethnology of Scotland Project*. In addition, he is General Editor of the *Flashbacks* and *Regional Flashbacks* series. With a background in bio-medical research and Scottish history, Mark has worked at the EERC since 2003.

**Dr Kenneth Veitch** has been a researcher with the EERC since 2001. A former editor of the *Review of Scottish Culture* (2003-2012), he manages the Written Word strand of the Regional Ethnology of Scotland Project. This includes the *Sources in Local History* series, a freely accessible, online collection of transcribed and edited documents that can be used to study the everyday lives of Scots from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century.

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/celtic-scottish-studies/research/eerc>

The Director of EERC is Dr Neill Martin  
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