

# HISTORY

## ITS KEY PLACE IN OUR FUTURE

### Inaugural Lecture

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‘It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.’<sup>1</sup> Thus the instantly unsettling sentence at the start of one of the twentieth century’s formative texts: ‘It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.’

Those words took shape in our area, the area served by UHI. This gives Yale University historian John Lewis Gaddis an entry to his book, *The Cold War*, published earlier this year. Here’s Gaddis’s opening paragraph:

In 1946 a forty-three-year-old Englishman named Eric Blair rented a house at the end of the world ... It was on the northern tip of the Scottish island of Jura, at the end of a dirt track, inaccessible by automobile, with no telephone or electricity ... Blair had reasons to want remoteness. Dejected by the recent death of his wife, he was suffering from tuberculosis and would soon begin coughing up blood. His country was reeling from the cost of a military victory that had brought neither security nor prosperity ... Europe was dividing into two hostile camps, and the world seemed set to follow. With atomic bombs likely to be used, any new war would be apocalyptic. And he needed to finish a novel.<sup>2</sup>

The novel John L. Gaddis mentions was *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Its author, Eric Blair, is best known by his pen-name, George Orwell. And the house where *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written is called Barnhill. Last week I went there by way of Jura’s one-and-only road, its scanty tarmac giving way to gravel, its gravel to a walkers-only track. And so I walked the last five miles to Barnhill on one of those May mornings – luckily enough – that make up for west coast winters; the sky

without clouds; sunburn a real hazard; each scrap of remnant native woodland choc-a-bloc with signs of spring.

Barnhill, in Orwell's words, is 'extremely un-get-at-able'. But it wouldn't have been when travel in those parts was universally by sea. At the foot of the little strath where Barnhill stands, white-painted and foursquare, there's a bay which opens on the Sound of Jura. Across the sound, its buildings looking near at hand on days like the one I hit upon last week, is Knapdale. That mainland district is part of Argyll, the county to which Jura also belongs and the county where I was born in 1948, the year Orwell finished *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the year, its last two digits swapped around, which provided the book's title.

There's lots of the 1940s in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Though the society described there is more perfectly totalitarian than anything put in place by Hitler, or by Stalin, or by Mao, this society was extrapolated from the world Orwell knew. The country which his tragic hero Winston Smith inhabits – this country of bomb sites and bureaucracy, drab clothes and endless shortages – is recognisably the nation which greeted baby-boom arrivals like myself with ration cards. And just as propaganda, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, comes from a Ministry of Truth, so my ration card, a testament to scarcity, was issued by the Ministry of Food.

Today, because of climate change, our whole civilisation is arguably at risk. But having had things easy, we find it hard to imagine generalised catastrophe. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s first readers didn't have this difficulty. What they'd lived through encouraged them to fear the worst.

Hence my sole memory of the Suez Crisis of 1956. I was eight then, and one Saturday – as British troops, I guess, were landing at Port Said – an uncle, an aunt and two cousins, both male and both roughly my age, came to call. While my cousins and I fooled around outside our door, my uncle and my father watched and talked about the news. I wasn't listening, but Dad's voice suddenly got through. 'It's a blessing,' he said to his brother-in-law; 'it's a blessing the boys aren't older.'

That remark was rooted in things of which I have no inkling. I left home at nineteen and, until I turned twenty-six, I studied history – taking a first degree in Aberdeen, writing a PhD thesis in Edinburgh. Between *his* nineteenth and twenty-sixth birthdays, in contrast, my father was a conscript soldier in a world war that took him through North Africa and Italy by way of killing grounds like Alamein and Cassino; a war that, fastening on his prowess with a rifle, made him at some stage a sniper – and a good one, too, if it's sensible to say you can be good at killing people.

In 1956, my father was ten years out of the army. But like others at that time, I think, Dad half-expected some new, all-embracing disaster. Born in the aftermath of one global conflict, growing up amid slump and depression, reaching maturity in the course of a further carnage, my father's generation, in effect, thought history cyclical. That 'the first war' and 'the second war' would soon be followed by 'the next war' was a 1950s commonplace. Hence my father's relief, as Suez threatened wider fighting, that myself and my cousins were too young to be called up by the military.

When George Orwell, writing in *Jura*, placed Winston Smith in a future locked in ceaseless international conflict, then, he drew on a widespread apprehension. Equally widespread, when Orwell lived at Barnhill, was an expectation that Britain's recent victory over Germany and Japan would be marred, as its 1918 counterpart had been, by economic hardship of the sort which, in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, appears to have gone on forever.

In the event, post-1945 fear of recurrent world war and renewed financial chaos proved misplaced. Far from collapsing, the western world's capitalist economy embarked on a twenty-year boom. Soon, as a result, a British prime minister could declare that his country had 'never had it so good'.<sup>3</sup>

Had George Orwell's wife not died and had he not been dying, might Orwell have discerned, when at Barnhill, the beginnings of this upturn? And might the all-pervasive bleakness of his *Nineteen Eighty-Four* been modified as a result? Perhaps. Perhaps not. What's clear is that late-1940s *Jura*, the late-1940s Highlands and Islands generally, provided George Orwell with an ideal setting in which to discount all hopeful possibilities.

For two centuries in advance of Orwell getting there, *Jura* – like the larger region of which it's part – had been losing people to emigration. In *Jura*'s case, the outflow began in 1739 when several families from the island joined an emigrant party whose destination was the Cape Fear River country in the then British colony of North Carolina. Over ensuing decades, those pioneers were joined by others; from Argyll in the first instance; increasingly from the rest of the Highlands and Islands. Because I've written extensively about such emigrants, and because it's been my practice to seek out and talk with their descendants, I've made several visits to the Cape Fear River country. Once, on a sweltering North Carolina afternoon, I stood in a graveyard which, judging by tombstone inscriptions, contains more *Jura* folk than there are people now on *Jura*. That American cemetery, I reflected the day I walked to Barnhill, could be the last resting place of men and women whose lives began where Orwell much, much later came to write. There's no way of being sure of this, admittedly. But there is the suggestive circumstance that, in 1754, a *Jura* man by the name of John Shaw purchased five berths – for himself, his wife and their children presumably – on a ship bound for the Cape Fear River. John Shaw came from Knockintavill. This is an anglicised version of *Cnoc-an-t-Sabhail*, a township where eleven families had their homes. Today there's just a single house there. This house's name is a translation of the Gaelic *Cnoc-an-t-Sabhail*, meaning Barnhill.<sup>4</sup>

When looking at *Cnoc-an-t-Sabhail*'s unused and rush-infested fields, it's tempting to treat outward movement from our area as having had only negative effects. But today, I'm anxious to avoid this error. After all, our UHI Centre for History here in Dornoch, the centre of which I'm director, owes its existence to a modern equivalent of *Cnoc-an-t-Sabhail*'s John Shaw. Dennis MacLeod, our guest of honour this evening, grew up not far from here in Helmsdale. But much of Dennis's life has been spent overseas. His having provided the £150,000 which got the Centre for History up and running is indicative of Dennis's enduring – and open-handed – commitment to Sutherland. But Dennis MacLeod's generosity to us, it needs stressing, would not be possible but for his career in mining having exemplified the extraordinary extent to

which our people, from the eighteenth century to the twentieth, found success in other countries far away.

Dennis, I know, feels strongly that not enough is made of emigrant achievement. That's also my belief – one reflected in the space I've given in my writings to individuals such as Alexander Mackenzie, John Macdonald and Donald Smith. Between them, those three arguably created Canada, the country where Dennis MacLeod now lives. Mackenzie, a Lewis-born and Montreal-based fur trader, was the first European to make an overland crossing of North America. Macdonald, the Glasgow-born son of a man from Rogart, became the Canadian federation's first prime minister in 1867. Following in Mackenzie's footsteps, John Macdonald set out to ensure that Canada – initially reaching no further west than the Great Lakes – would become, like the US, a transcontinental nation. To make his vision a reality, Macdonald needed a 3,000-mile long railway linking Ottawa and Toronto with Vancouver. The funding for this railway was found by John Macdonald's close collaborator, the Strathspey-born financier, Donald Smith, afterwards Lord Strathcona. At a time when, as I'll underline, Highlanders were commonly portrayed as useless, Smith, Macdonald and Mackenzie showed what Highland enterprise could do if given the opportunity. Their legacy is one of the world's largest and most attractive countries.

And yet, for all the positive story that's to be told of the Highlands and Islands contribution to Canada, to the US, to Australia and New Zealand, when tracking emigrants from this area in those and other countries, I've never quite been free of anger that the people in charge hereabouts, throughout the last three centuries, happily presided over, often indeed encouraged, the export of so much human capital.

Which brings me back to the Highlands and Islands as they were when Orwell came to Barnhill – as they were when I was born in the North Argyll community of Duror. So rampant was depopulation by that point, that many such communities were not expected to survive. This is evident from a Scottish Office policy paper compiled, as it happens, when I was three weeks old. The paper concludes:

In brief, the Highland scene presents a picture of the drift of the younger people to the towns, leaving behind a diminished and ageing population which ... is approaching a position at which it can no longer maintain itself.<sup>5</sup>

Five years later, in 1953, *Picture Post*, then this country's most widely-read magazine, sent one of its journalists to the Highlands and Islands. The region's 'dwindling' settlements, he reported, were symptomatic of the Highlands and Islands having become the United Kingdom's 'most gravely depressed area'. Those Britons who had never had it so good clearly did not include folk living in the northern half of Scotland.<sup>6</sup>

This, to be fair, was recognised politically. Hence, for example, the rural electrification programme presided over by the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board. But neither rural electrification nor the arrival of one or two new enterprises, notably the fast reactor project at Dounreay, could counter the pull of more vibrant economies. Success, it was beginning to be thought in the Highlands and Islands, was something that, by definition, could only be got by moving out – a state of mind

encouraged by the introduction of government-aided entry into higher education. Much was made in my youth of the fact that the Highlands and Islands were – in proportion to the region’s population – the UK’s biggest source of graduates. This, it was implied, proved we were cleverer than everybody else. What it really showed, of course, was that we lacked – as our area had done for ages – employment opportunity at home. To me and my contemporaries, three good Highers and a student grant were the precise equivalent of a place on the ship that took John Shaw from Cnoc-an-t-Sabhail to North Carolina.

In the 1970s, when working for the *Press and Journal*, I interviewed – not long before his death – the pioneer ecologist, Frank Fraser Darling, then as now one of my heroes. We talked of many things that day in Fraser Darling’s final home near Forres. But we talked, in particular, of the years he spent, around 1950, at Kilcamb Lodge in Strontian, Fraser Darling’s base while he worked on his *West Highland Survey*. Commissioned by the Scottish Office which – tragically – ignored its proscriptions, *West Highland Survey* is a remarkable piece of research. It’s also one that pulls no punches. Here’s Fraser Darling on north-west Sutherland, which he described as ‘devastated’:

The population ... in 1951 had fallen to 76 per cent ... of the numbers in 1931. A decrease of population, however small, is usually a matter for concern, but when the loss amounts to a quarter ... in the short space of twenty years, as it does here, the situation is grave indeed.<sup>7</sup>

Next Fraser Darling on Skye:

[Population] decline has continued without a break in Skye since 1841 ... In Sleat the population is down to a fifth of its maximum ... Further decline in population is inevitable.<sup>8</sup>

Such decline duly occurred. At its mid-nineteenth-century peak, Skye’s population was 24,000. By the 1960s, it was under 7,000, and this downward trend appeared set to continue. Instead, of course, the opposite has happened. Today Skye’s population is up by some 50 per cent. The island is awash with new homes. And in Sleat, where Frank Fraser Darling found only dereliction, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, one of UHI’s partner colleges, is delivering degree courses, through the medium of Gaelic and in a splendid campus, to more than a hundred full-time students.

When chairing Highlands and Islands Enterprise, I made a lot of those facts – and of the further facts that follow.

During the last forty years, a period when total Scottish population’s barely changed, the population of the Highlands and Islands has risen by a fifth – with the current rate of increase set to take our total to 500,000 inside twenty years.

Inverness is one of Britain’s fastest growing cities.

Our business start-up rate’s above the Scottish average.

The Highlands and Islands jobless rate, once a multiple of the all-Scotland figure, has for several years been well below it. Recently it's dipped below the UK rate as well.

As compared with the 1960s, we have 50 per cent more people in employment.

But still we've jobs to fill – which is why this area's now attracting so many immigrants from overseas.

When at HIE, my repetition of material like this had one key purpose. By decision-makers in the south, the Highlands and Islands have so long been assumed to be a problem area that, under my chairmanship and since, it's been an HIE priority to get across the magnitude of what's going on here. One man we've convinced is Jack McConnell. Last November, summarising Scotland's progress at a conference in London, the First Minister said:

The Highlands and Islands are leading the way ... We are increasingly looking at the region as an exemplar for the rest of Scotland. That might not sound like much. But it was unthinkable, over the last three centuries, that the Highlands and Islands would [one day] be held up as an example to others – that a lead would be taken from the north of Scotland.<sup>9</sup>

You need no great acquaintance with earlier periods to appreciate the truth of these remarks. For centuries, as Jack McConnell said, it was, in his words, unthinkable that Scots in general should look north for pointers as to what they ought to be about. So what's caused this transformation? What's enabled us here in the Highlands and Islands, after so much failure, to move forward? While other factors are involved, one element in our success, or so it's my belief, has been the re-evaluation of our history. And by *history* I don't mean just the subject matter of the academic discipline of that name. What I have in mind is all that's reached us from the past – our heritage, our culture, in as wide as possible a sense.

As mentioned earlier, I graduated from the University of Aberdeen. When I went there, in the 1960s, Aberdeen was – though it sadly is no longer – a leading centre for the study of the history of Africa. And an Aberdeen course in African history, far more than courses on the history of Scotland, shaped the way I think about the Highlands and Islands. But for my being taught something of Africa, for instance, I mightn't have come across that anticolonial classic, Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. To this day, my yellowing paperback edition of Fanon's great book, bought in 1969, falls open at the place where Fanon insists on the need, as he sees it, for colonised peoples to reclaim and reinterpret their own history. Franz Fanon:

Colonialism ... not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip ... turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it ... The total result looked for ... [is] to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness.<sup>10</sup>

All too often, Fanon goes on, this was achieved. In Africa and elsewhere, colonised nations were persuaded to buy into what Franz Fanon calls 'the colonialist theory of pre-colonial barbarism'. Hence the significance of the moment when 'native

intellectuals', as Franz Fanon puts it, started systematically to explore those eras prior to the arrival of colonising powers. Here's Fanon on what those intellectuals found:

It was with the greatest delight they discovered there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory and solemnity.<sup>11</sup>

Fanon goes on:

I am ready to concede that on the plane of factual being the past existence of an Aztec civilisation does not change anything very much in the diet of the Mexican peasant of today. I admit that all the proofs of a wonderful Songhai civilisation will not change the fact that today the Songhais are underfed and illiterate, thrown between sky and water with empty heads and empty eyes.<sup>12</sup>

But this, Franz Fanon argues, is beside the point. By rejecting the colonialist myth that their forebears were benighted primitives; by rediscovering, in Fanon's phrase, the dignity long hidden from them, colonised nations, Fanon says, take a vital step towards liberation. Hungry West Africans may not be less hungry as a result of knowing that their Songhai ancestors administered a great, and African-created, kingdom. But the same West Africans, on learning this, could never again be party to the colonially convenient notion that they were inherently incapable of taking charge of their own destiny. Hence my conviction, implicit in this lecture's title, that getting to a better future involves revisiting the past. For here in the Highlands and Islands as in Africa, a preliminary to progress has consisted – still consists – of challenging externally-imposed, and almost always negative, interpretations of our past.

The Highlands and Islands weren't colonised in the African manner. But throughout the period, from the middle ages forward, when the Highlands and Islands were being deprived of their previously autonomous institutions and incorporated – often forcibly – into first the Scottish and then the British state, the people overseeing this process made it their business, just as their colonising counterparts did elsewhere, to denigrate, devalue and dehumanise our area's inhabitants. This happened here for the reason it also happened in much of the rest of the world. When you extend your rule over others, whether you're an Edinburgh-based monarch looking to control the Hebrides or a London-based minister seeking to justify your country's conquest of India, you naturally want to convince yourself that you're bringing to these places not just a new, but a morally superior, order. Prior to your taking charge, you say, the territories you've seized were steeped in backwardness. Only with your coming was there, could there be, enlightenment.

Extraneous attitudes to people living in the Highlands and Islands were, from the fifteenth century forward, redolent of just such thinking. This being so, it's unsurprising that Patrick Sellar, employed by Lord and Lady Stafford, later Duke and Duchess of Sutherland, to evict hundreds of families from localities like the Strath of Kildonan, should have rationalised his conduct thus:

Lord and Lady Stafford were pleased *humanely* to order a new arrangement of this country. That the interior should be possessed by cheviot shepherds and the people brought down to the coast and placed there in [crofts] under three arable acres ... I presume to say that the proprietors *humanely* ordered this

arrangement, because it surely was a most benevolent action to put those barbarous hordes into a position where they could better associate together, apply to industry, educate their children, and advance in civilisation.<sup>13</sup>

Patrick Sellar articulating the perennial cry of the imperialist – whether in Sutherland or Africa. But there was an essential difference between our Highlands and Islands experience and that of peoples like the Songhai. In the world that imperialism fashioned, we had the advantage of being white. This enabled us – in the manner of Canada’s first premier John Macdonald – to join the governing apparatus of the British Empire. It made, too, for our speedy incorporation into the very army which, in 1746, had burned and looted its way across our area. Thus it came about that, four weeks after Patrick Sellar penned the words I’ve quoted, five Highland regiments helped Wellington win his victory at Waterloo. Paradoxically, then, at the point when Sutherland’s clearances were at their height, the kilted Highland soldier became an enduring symbol of British military prowess.

So like Native Americans, with whom Sellar compared the people he evicted, Highlanders could simultaneously be thought great warriors – and trash. Needless to say, the latter perception usually prevailed over the former when it came to determining how government should respond to the wider Highlands and Islands crisis of which the clearances were the most visible manifestation. And for all their overseas accomplishments, people from the Highlands and Islands found that emigration didn’t always free them from bigotry and prejudice of the kind they so often encountered at home. When, following the Highlands and Islands famine of the 1840s, thousands of our people were shipped to Australia, they were treated much as so-called economic migrants from the developing world are treated in Europe today. By immigration officers in Melbourne, arrivals from the Highlands and Islands were routinely described as ‘indolent’ and ‘dirty’ – one official writing of them that they were ‘as near an approach to barbarians as any [immigrants] I have ever met with.’<sup>14</sup>

Quite apart from its injustice, negativity of this sort is developmentally disastrous. Here in the Highlands and Islands, in addition to their being deprived of any meaningful control over land and other basic assets, generation after generation of our people were told by practically everyone in authority that everything about them – starting with their Gaelic language or with their Shetlandic, Orcadian and Caithness dialects – was inferior, second-rate, of no account. Anticipating Franz Fanon, John Murdoch, a land reformer and another of my heroes, said this in 1883:

The language and lore of the Highlanders being treated with despite has tended to crush their self-respect ... When a man was convinced that his language was a barbarism ... and that the only good thing about him – his land – was, because of his general worthlessness, to go to a man of another race and another tongue, what remained ... that he should struggle for?<sup>15</sup>

As John Murdoch commented, when you have your alleged inadequacies dinned into you day in, day out, you can’t but end up lacking self-esteem. And where there isn’t self-esteem, there can’t be enterprise, initiative, advancement. That’s why policies intended to expand the Highlands and Islands economy work best, as HIE’s long recognised, if accompanied by a commitment to restoring our formerly demoralised population’s sense of worth. Hence our need to encourage both individuals and

communities to take pride in their background; to make people feel good about themselves and their surroundings; to show that the Highlands and Islands, once dismissed as hopelessly impoverished, are actually rich in music, architecture, literature, archaeology and much else; to insist that the Highlands and Islands, so well endowed in those respects, are even wealthier environmentally; to demonstrate that our area, despite its having been so long disparaged, is capable of offering all its people – established residents and newcomers – an exceptionally high quality of life.

In the modern Highlands and Islands, the connection between cultural regeneration on the one side, economic success on the other, was first made in Shetland. There, in the 1940s and '50s, a time in Shetland of mass unemployment and runaway depopulation, the linguistic and other activists clustered around the *New Shetlander* magazine, began to insist that Shetland's greatest asset was its distinctive heritage. The late Bob Storey, then working for Shetland County Council, afterwards on the staff of the Highlands and Islands Development Board, made the point thus:

The isolation that had so far bedevilled them in the twentieth century ... could perhaps be a virtue ... The fact that Shetland was undeniably Shetland, and Shetlanders were so undeniably what they were, could ... be their greatest strength.<sup>16</sup>

On the face of it, Shetlandness – as encapsulated in fiddle music, dialect poetry and the like – might seem an improbable basis on which to build a dynamic economy. But what Bob Storey grasped in Shetland – and he advanced the same idea inside the HIDB – was the way in which, if a people's neglected traditions begin to be treated with respect, greater self-assurance tends to follow. This certainly happened in Shetland. Commitment to cultural renewal was translated into equal commitment to economic transformation. By the end of the 1960s, full employment had been restored and depopulation reversed. When offshore oil came along in the '70s, then, Shetlanders, buoyed up by their achievements, were well positioned to insist on the first-rate deal they extracted from some of the world's most powerful corporations.

Thinking of the *New Shetlander* type – thinking influenced also, as I've said, by people like John Murdoch and Franz Fanon – is implicit in my writings. That's why, for example, I make a great deal of the Book of Kells – perhaps the most significant surviving artefact from Europe's early middle ages. I go on about the Book of Kells, now on display in Trinity College, Dublin, because its having been produced on Iona seems to me to speak powerfully to the Highlands and Islands of today. If nearly fifteen hundred years ago a Hebridean monastery could be an internationally significant centre of learning and of creativity, then it's demonstrably not the case that our area's peripherality is, as often assumed, an unalterable fact of geography. What's marginalised the Highlands and Islands is not their location but the way the world began to be organised in post-medieval times – when power, decision-making and, most of all, people were drained away from here and concentrated elsewhere. Today, thankfully, this process is reversible. In a way that's not been possible since the industrial revolution, new communications and other technologies enable us to envisage a more dispersed pattern both of economic activity and of settlement – a pattern reminiscent, incidentally, of the one familiar to Iona's monks. Nor am I speculating here. Internationally, the most advanced, the most exciting, businesses are beginning to be located in places like the Highlands and Islands – places where people

can both earn a good living and have access to natural environments of the highest quality. Hence the recent success of American regions like the Pacific North West or Colorado. Hence my conviction that, where those American localities have led, the Highlands and Islands can follow.

If, as I've acknowledged, my books have a more than academic purpose, this is because I'm lucky enough to have been involved with the practicalities, as well as the theory, of Highlands and Islands policy-making: as director of the Scottish Crofters Union; as a campaigner for community ownership of a kind now commonplace; as chairman of Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise; as chair of HIE; as one of the people who, for more than fifteen years, have been trying to bring into existence a University of the Highlands and Islands.

In 1992, on behalf of Barail, a Sabhal Mòr Ostaig think-tank, I organised the Portree conference at which the UHI project's founding figures – Val McIver of Highland Regional Council and Robert Cowan of the HIBD – first explored in public how a University of the Highlands and Islands might work. The late Bob Cowan:

A Highland university ... will not be like a manufacturing inward investment project where ... [gains] are relatively confined and tangible. I would liken it more to a blood transfusion ... Benefits [will] spread to all parts of our society and those benefits [will] only partly be quantifiable by the rather pedestrian techniques of the economists who will have to evaluate the expenditure involved.<sup>17</sup>

This superb dismissal of bean-counting approaches to economic appraisal should be engraved over the entry to each UHI campus. So should Bob Cowan's further comment:

We [must] break the mould. We have to eschew conventional thinking. We have to aim for something radically different and of supremely high quality.<sup>18</sup>

That's what we're looking to do at the UHI Centre for History. During its first twelve months, and including Dennis MacLeod's initial gift, the Centre for History raised more than £500,000. With this, we've launched a research programme. Next year, as well as adding to that programme, we'll be offering an honours degree in history.

Our success is down to lots of people; Dennis MacLeod and our other funders obviously; also Rosemary Thompson, principal of North Highland College, her board and her senior staff, from all of whom we've had tremendous backing – just as we've had from Bob Cormack and his staff at UHI's Inverness headquarters. Equally important are my immediate colleagues. There would be no UHI Centre for History without, in reverse alphabetical order, Fiona Watson, Mairi Stewart, Andrew Perchard, Rob Macpherson, Stephen MacKay, Raymond Lamb, Cathel Hutchison and Karen Cullen. Beyond them, and drawn from the wider UHI network, are members of the team – this team led by Karen Cullen – working on our planned degree.

This degree will have regional, national and international dimensions. In other words, while dealing in detail with the Highlands and Islands, it will root our area's

history in the history of the wider world. That's essential. As I've already emphasised, the Highlands and Islands past cannot be understood in isolation. Our degree course, then, will utilise linkages between this area and others: taking advantage of the way our history overlaps with that of Ireland; stressing the extent to which the medieval Earldom of Orkney, indeed the Viking period generally, connects the Highlands and Islands with Scandinavia and with the broader North Atlantic rim; capitalising on the fact that our countless emigrants provide entries into histories other than our own.

In Nagasaki there's a monument to Ranald MacDonald who, in the 1840s when the country was still closed to foreigners, entered Japan illegally. There, as his Nagasaki monument records, Ranald 'became the first person to teach English conversation to Japanese'.<sup>19</sup> Among his students was Einosuke Moriyama who afterwards helped bring about the political and other changes which turned Japan into one of the twentieth century's most powerful nations.

Ranald MacDonald's mother, Koale'xoa, was Chinook – the Chinook being an Indian or Native American people whose territories occupied the Pacific coast of what's now Washington State in the US. Ranald's father, Archibald, was a Hudson's Bay Company fur trader born, in 1790, at Inverigan in Glencoe.

In 1813, when employed by the Earl of Selkirk, a Scottish philanthropist, Archibald McDonald from Glencoe visited the Strath of Kildonan to offer refugees from Patrick Sellar's clearances a chance to make homes in a settlement Selkirk aimed to found in the Red River district of present-day Manitoba. McDonald and more than a hundred Kildonan people got to Red River in 1814. There they established the community that's grown into the city of Winnipeg.

Next, Archibald McDonald joined the Bay Company – going west to spend many years in the area comprising today's Washington State and British Columbia. McDonald's correspondence survives in the BC archives in Victoria, the Vancouver Island town that's home, as it happens, to Dennis MacLeod.

When in the West, Archibald of the Bay Company was in touch with Finnan McDonald who, in 1784, had emigrated with his parents from their home at Munial in Knoydart to Glengarry County, Ontario. Finnan, another fur trader, was one of the earliest whites to cross the Rocky Mountains and to venture down the Columbia River to the sea.

Also present in the early-nineteenth-century Columbia country was a further trader, Angus McDonald, who came from a now-deserted township near Diabeg in Wester Ross. Related both to Finnan and to Archibald, Angus, like Archibald, married into an Indian people – in his case the Nez Perce. As was common in the nineteenth-century West, the Nez Perce were to fight an unequal war with the US military – this war ending in 1876 when a Nez Perce remnant, led by Chief White Bird, crossed the US-Canadian border to take shelter in the camp of the Sioux leader, Sitting Bull, who, despite his great victory over America's General Custer, had himself been obliged to retreat into Canada. At White Bird's side in Sitting Bull's camp was the Nez Perce chief's close relative, Duncan McDonald, half-Nez-Perce son of Angus and cousin of Ranald MacDonald whose monument stands in Nagasaki.<sup>20</sup>

In 1993, during the first of several trips I've made to the Flathead Indian Reservation in Western Montana, I was told about Duncan McDonald by his nephew, the late Charlie McDonald – born in 1897 and, when I met him, the Flathead Reservation's leading tribal elder. As I talked with Charlie in his kitchen, others joined us – word of my enquiries having got about what its inhabitants call the Rez. An early arrival was Charlie's niece, Eileen Decker. With her, Eileen brought a wooden box which she emptied on to Charlie's table, covered by now with coffee cups and doughnuts. 'These belonged to the old Scotchman,' Eileen said of the spilled-out photographs and documents that took me into the family history I've just outlined. Among this material were letters sent to Angus McDonald in the 1840s from his sister Margaret, then in Dingwall. Next to these was a picture showing a lean young man in full Indian regalia. This turned out to be Duncan McDonald, Angus's son and Charlie's uncle. In 1877, I would learn, Duncan, new back from Sitting Bull's camp, wrote up the story of his Indian kinsfolk's flight from America's soldiers. Nearly two hundred years earlier, I would also learn, Duncan McDonald's great-great-great-grandfather, John or Iain by name, fled in much the same way from those other soldiers a Scottish government sent, in 1692, to massacre the MacDonalDs of Glencoe.

A quotation now from *Culture and Imperialism*, written by Edward Said, a Palestinian and thus a member of one more of the many groups who, like the Nez Perce, like Glencoe's MacDonalDs, like Palestine's Jewish neighbours, have had to witness the destruction of much precious to them. Said:

No-one today is purely *one* thing ... No-one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separateness and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about ... It is more rewarding ... to think ... sympathetically ... about others than only about 'us'. But this also means not trying to rule others, not trying to classify them or put them in hierarchies, above all, not constantly reiterating how 'our' culture or country is number one.<sup>21</sup>

In those words, a rider to this lecture's theme. Yes, the history, the heritage, of the Highlands and Islands must be central to the work of UHI – just as, on the Flathead Reservation, Indian history, Indian heritage, are at the heart of the teaching mission of the Salish-Kootenai College as developed by its president, Dr Joe McDonald, great-great-grandson of a man from Wester Ross and one of the first Native Americans to gain a PhD. But in a world riven, as ours is, by the perpetually conflicting politics of identity, it's essential that we, who were once oppressed but are oppressed no longer, don't aspire to dominance in our turn. Sure, what we call our Highlands and Islands heritage – this hotch-potch of Irish, Scandinavian and other influences – is as good as anybody else's. But, as Edward Said reminds us, it's no better.

One of the things I like about the Highlands and Islands is the fact that this is now a place where, for the first time in centuries, more people are moving in than moving out. Those new arrivals bring with them their own histories. They may come – I hope they will – to value ours. But we, on our side, ought equally to honour theirs. If, at the UHI Centre for History, as I've tried to do this evening, we can relate the experience of the Highlands and Islands to the experience of people universally, then we'll contribute to this necessary process.

Out there, beyond where we happen to be, is the world in all its enticing diversity. We must engage with this diversity. Which is why, I hope, the UHI Centre for History will one day be just as well known for its expertise in, say, the history of Asia or Africa as it's known for its commitment to the Highlands and Islands.

Ambitious? Of course, but why not?

Thirty years ago, I went to Skye to interview Iain Noble, a banker and businessman who'd bought an estate there. Iain took me to the site of one of his prospective ventures. This site was dominated by broken-down farm steadings – their crumbling walls and sagging roofs surrounding a puddled courtyard which was strewn with wind-blown slates. 'What I'd like,' Iain Noble said, 'is to turn these buildings into a college, perhaps a university, certainly the first real centre of learning in the Hebrides since the Vikings burned Iona Abbey.'

Dutifully, but sceptically, I jotted down these words. And what, I asked, is this place called? 'Well,' said Iain, 'in its heyday as a farm, it had an English name. But that name didn't stick, not like the local one. Of course,' said Iain Noble, 'this local name is Gaelic. Maybe I should spell it for you to make sure you get it right.'

Which was when I first heard the words, *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig*.

To me, what's been achieved at Sabhal Mòr – once a ruin, now a flourishing academic institution – is emblematic of all the many changes for the better which have taken place in the Highlands and Islands in my lifetime. And more than anything else, I guess, it's the Sabhal Mòr story that convinces me we'll make a go of Dornoch's UHI Centre for History. After all, if there's one lesson Sabhal Mòr Ostaig teaches, it's this: in today's Highlands and Islands, absolutely nothing is impossible.

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- <sup>1</sup> G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, (Penguin), London, 1969, 5.
- <sup>2</sup> J. L. Gaddis, *The Cold War*, (Allen Lane), London, 2006, 1.
- <sup>3</sup> The phrase was first used by Harold MacMillan in a 1957 speech.
- <sup>4</sup> The details given here about Barnhill and John Shaw are drawn from, P. Youngson, *Jura: Island of Deer*, (Birlinn), Edinburgh, 113, 280.
- <sup>5</sup> National Archives of Scotland (SEP12/118): Highland Panel paper, June 1948.
- <sup>6</sup> J. Hunter, *The Highland Fund*, (Highland Fund), Glasgow, 1991, 1.
- <sup>7</sup> F. Fraser Darling, *West Highland Survey*, (Oxford), 1955, 100, 140.
- <sup>8</sup> *West Highland Survey*, 141.
- <sup>9</sup> Jack McConnell speaking at the 'Values of Britishness' event, London, 28 November 2005.
- <sup>10</sup> F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (Penguin), London, 1969, 169.
- <sup>11</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 169.
- <sup>12</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 168.
- <sup>13</sup> P. Sellar to Lord Advocate Colqhoun, 24 May, 1815: R. J. Adam (ed), *Papers on Sutherland Estate Management*, (Scottish History Society), Edinburgh, 2vols, 1972, II, 156.
- <sup>14</sup> D. Charlwood, *The Long Farewell: The Perilous Voyages of Settlers Under Sail in the Great Migrations to Australia*, (Burgewood Books), Warrandyte, 1998, 80, 93; E. Richards, 'The Highland Scots of South Australia', *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, IV, 1978, 56-8.
- <sup>15</sup> *Evidence Taken by Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the Condition of the Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, (Neill & Co), Edinburgh, 4 vols, 1884, IV, 3083.
- <sup>16</sup> E. Thomason, *Island Challenge*, (Shetland Times), Lerwick, 1997, ... ?
- <sup>17</sup> R. Cowan, 'A University for the Highlands and Islands', in, J. Hunter (ed), *A University for the Highlands and Islands: Prospects and Possibilities*, (Sabhal Mòr Ostaig), Isle of Skye, 1992, 17.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> F. L. Schodt, *Native American in the Land of the Shogun: Ranald MacDonald and the Opening of Japan*, (Stone Bridge Press), Berkeley, 2003, 279.
- <sup>20</sup> This McDonald story can be traced in: J. M. Cole, *Exile in the Wilderness: The Life of Chief Factor Archibald McDonald*, (University of Washington Press), Seattle, 1979; M. McLean, *The People of Glengarry: Highlanders in Transition, 1745-1820*, (McGill-Queen's University Press), Montreal, 1991; D. McDonald, 'Through Nez Perce Eyes', in, L. Laughy (ed), *In Pursuit of the Nez Percés*, (Mountain Meadow Press), Wrangell, 1993; J. Hunter, *A Dance Called America: The Scottish Highlands, the United States and Canada*, (Mainstream), Edinburgh, 1994; J. Hunter, *Glencoe and the Indians*, (Mainstream), Edinburgh, 1996; J. M. Cole (ed), *This Blessed Wilderness: Archibald McDonald's Letters from the Columbia, 1822-44*, (University of British Columbia Press), Vancouver, 2001; Schodt, *op. cit.*, 2003; I. S. Macdonald, *Glencoe and Beyond: The Sheep Farming Years, 1780-1830*, (John Donald), Edinburgh, 2005.
- <sup>21</sup> E. W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (Chatto and Windus), London, 1993, 407-08.