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‘Folklore Reminiscences’ of John Lorne Campbell

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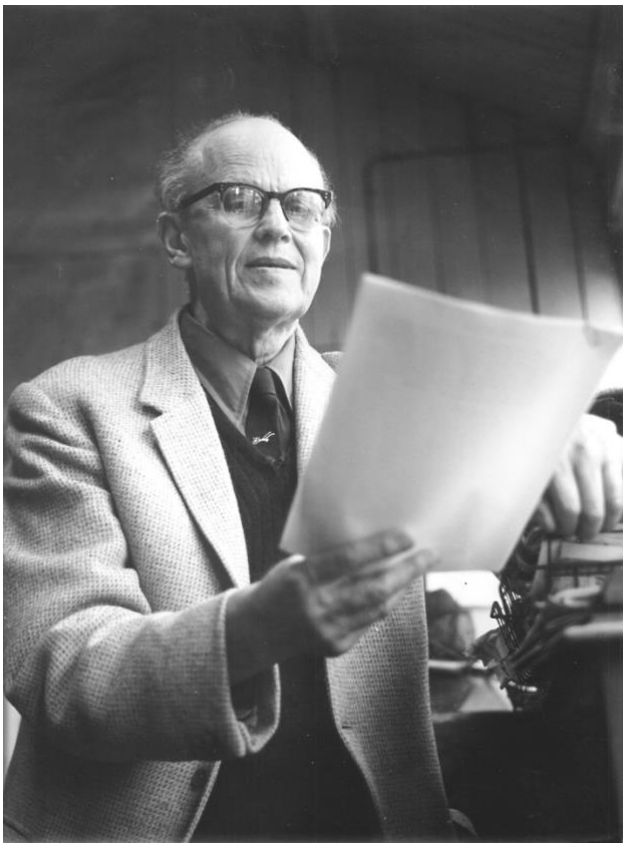
Fear Chanaidh

Dr John Lorne Campbell, scholar, folklorist and farmer, was born on 1 October 1906 and died in Fiesole in Italy in his ninetieth year on 25 April 1996. He was the eldest son of Col. Duncan Campbell of Inverneill, the laird of the estates of Inverneill and Taynish on Loch Fyne, and this rural patrician background formed in different ways an important part of his upbringing, for example, imbuing him with expectations of succeeding to his patrimony.[1] Campbell’s mother was Ethel Harriot Waterbury, of Morristown, New Jersey, offering a maternal link with the United States. Buying the islands of Canna and Sanday in 1938, Campbell adopted the old tacksman style of *Fear Chanaidh*, a traditional mark of identity in the Gaelic world.[2]



John Lorne Campbell, Canna House, 1971. (Photo: by courtesy of Tom Weir)

John Lorne Campbell was one of the leading Gaelic scholars of the twentieth century and a fieldworker who pioneered the use of mechanical and electrical recording equipment in the Hebrides for exclusive purposes of scholarship and advocacy for the Gaelic language. He dedicated his career to the recording, transmission and publication of the Gaelic song, literary and linguistic record of Scotland, eventually extending this work to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and the North American Gàidhealtachd. He wrote and edited more than two dozen books of seminal importance for Gaelic literature and history, as well as a long list of scholarly articles in the learned journals of his disciplines. In addition, he published significant essays on the people and places of his subject area in journals and magazines with a wide circulation, intentionally laying his research before a wider readership.[3]

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[1] His expectation was frustrated by his father’s sale of the estate in 1928; but while this was a matter of regret, it effectively set him on his alternative career as Gaelic folklorist; see Ray Perman, *The Man who gave away his Island* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2013), 18–19, 30–31.

[2] The spelling ‘*Canaidh*’ was Campbell’s preferred spelling of the island’s name, and the one that he himself used. ‘*Canaigh’* is now the standard Gaelic form; see Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba (AÀA) – Gaelic Place-names of Scotland, https://www.ainmean-aite.scot/.

[3] E.g. the following articles which he wrote for *The Scots Magazine*: ‘Highland links with Nova Scotia’(October 1953): 29–32; ‘Duncan of the Stories’, (September 1954): 473–74; and ‘Songs of the Hebrides: a reappraisal of Marjory Kennedy Fraser’ (January 1958): 307–14.

‘Reminiscences’

John Lorne Campbell’s interest in Scottish Gaelic developed in his late teens in his home district in Argyll. He described being drawn to listening to four lads from the islands speaking fluent Gaelic at the Oban Games in 1925, and in 1926 he began to learn the language from Hector MacLean, a Tiree man who was his father’s Ground Officer on the Taynish Estate. Despite his experience of Gaelic being limited at the time to songs sung at ceilidhs and weekly Gaelic services in the Tayvallich Church of Scotland, Campbell became determined to learn the language. As he declared in an interview towards the end of his life, *‘thuirt mi siud an rud bu chòir rium a bhith agam!’* (‘I said, that’s what I should have!’).[4]

Dr John Shaw first stayed with Campbell and his wife, Margaret Fay Shaw, at their home in Canna in the summer of 1961, and became good friends with both of them thereafter.[5] Although Campbell later remarked that ‘few non-natives have become really fluent in Gaelic’, he listed a handful whom he judged to have succeeded in doing so, including Carl Borgstrøm, K. C. Craig, and John Shaw of Harvard. Campbell himself undoubtedly had a hand in Shaw’s success. Understanding that time spent in the Gàidhealtachd was the key to learning the language, Campbell recalled that ‘we arranged with the parish priest of Bornish to find a suitable family who would take him in and speak nothing but Gaelic to him’, adding that he himself had ‘followed this course when I stayed with John MacPherson, the Coddy, at Northbay in Barra between 1933 and 1935’.[6] In addition, Campbell provided letters of introduction to an informal network of Gaelic contacts in South Uist and Barra.

Given that John Shaw’s name appears in the opening pages of one of John Lorne Campbell’s principal notebooks titled ‘Folklore Reminiscences’, some extracts from the ‘Reminiscences’ are offered to John as insights into Hebridean trends and events in ‘folklore’ in the twentieth century. Consideration is given here also to the term ‘folklore’, to Campbell’s understanding of it, and to his development as a folklorist and field worker.

In the ‘Reminiscences’, Campbell follows the mention of successful learners with further comments on his early experience of the learning process:

> The difficulties of acquiring colloquial Gaelic are considerable. People do not wish to converse with a stranger who is obviously not a native speaker. The local idioms abound with expressions, words, pronunciations and grammatical forms unknown in the literary language, and only mentioned, if at all, in MS collections of folklore from the Hebrides or in papers in out-of-the way journals. Native speakers rarely can read their own language, which is not standardised, and it is useless to ask them how a word is spelt. Very slight deviations from the traditional pronunciation will render a non-native speaker unintelligible or ridiculous. …. I do not pretend to have done more than learn to use ordinary conversation and understand folksongs and folktales and write them down from dictation. I would certainly hesitate to speak or sing publicly in Gaelic unless

[4] ‘Fear Chanaidh’, BBC Alba, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00w4bfm. See also Hugh Cheape, ‘Cuir siud sa’ Ghàidhlig: toradh na h-obrach aig Fear Chanaigh’, in *The Carrying Stream Flows On. Celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of the School of Scottish Studies,* ed. Bob Chambers (Kershader, Isle of Lewis: The Islands Book Trust, 2013), 96–97.

[5] John Shaw, ‘A visit to Canna, South Uist and Barra in 1961’, *West Highland Free Press,* 17 December 2021, 17.

[6] This article draws on John Lorne Campbell’s notebook entitled ‘Folklore Reminiscences’, CH2/1, in the Canna House Archive, National Trust for Scotland. Other sources include extended personal conversations with Dr Campbell between 1992 and 1996, and a holograph six-page manuscript, ‘J. L. Campbell & Gaelic Studies’, also in the Canna House Archive.

> the audience were a half-baked one and I would not dare to do so in the Outer Isles where such performances are very critically judged.[7]

'Folklore'

The term 'folklore' emerged as a neologism in the mid-nineteenth century with the foundation of The Folklore Society in London in 1878. The Society's purpose was to bring together those interested in the study of vernacular culture, including traditional song, music and narrative, drama and dance, custom and belief, and arts and crafts with the objective of promoting the collection of information, specimens, objects and books, and the publication of such finds in learned journals. Then, as now, the subject and its development drew on a range of disciplines so that the term 'multidisciplinary' described much of the folklorist's activity. When Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm began to publish their volumes of oral folk narratives in 1812, they described their work as *Volkskunde*; and this term, adopted by the English-speaking world as 'folk-lore', replaced earlier phrases such as 'popular antiquities'. John Lorne Campbell understood the term 'folklore' to include storytelling, oral traditions, and verbal arts or oral literature of all types, and embraced it as a definition of his core work; he would readily and customarily describe himself *inter alia* as a 'folklorist'.

In Europe, the term *Volkskunde* later broadened to include the study of the folk cultures of European peoples beyond the explicitly spoken and sung traditions. This expanded definition in turn gave rise to the term *Folkliv* in the Scandinavian academic context, a term which then seems to have been borrowed into English as 'folklife' to reflect growing interest in the development of folk- and open-air museums. Since the late twentieth century, the terms *Folkliv* and 'folklife' have tended to be replaced by 'ethnology', a concept that embraces material as well as oral traditions.[8] While Campbell did not pursue 'ethnology' in its wider sense, he drew attention to its potential in analysing and interpreting folksong; for example, he suggested that conventional terminology in the songs is noteworthy for evoking the culture of seventeenth-century Hebridean society.[9] Principally, therefore, his use of the term 'folklore' in his 'Reminiscences' defines an intellectual pathway and a relative fixity of purpose.

Beyond the model of The Folklore Society, the scope of John Lorne Campbell's 'folklore' can be defined in terms of the culture of song and story and the example of the Folklore of Ireland Society and its journal *Béaloideas – The Journal of the Folklore of Ireland Society*, both established in 1927, whose Irish founders drew inspiration from European and Scandinavian models, especially those developed at the time by Carl Wilhelm von Sydow of the University of Lund in Sweden, and by Reidar Thoralf Christiansen of the University of Oslo.[10] Both von Sydow and Christiansen strongly supported the subsequent establishment of the Irish Folklore Commission (IFC) in 1935, a development that put Irish 'folklore' on a more secure and permanent footing.[11] Swedish principles shaped the work of Séamas Ó Duilearga (James Delargy), whose six-month sabbatical study of folklore archives in Lund and Uppsala in 1928 greatly influenced the

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[7] It should be added that the learning environment has improved in every way since Campbell recorded his views.

[8] The semantics of these terms and their application are usefully summarised in Richard M. Dorson, *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972) and in Alexander Fenton, 'The Scope of Regional Ethnology', *Folk Life: A Journal of Ethnological Studies* 11/1 (1973): 5–14.

[9] J. L. Campbell, *Gaelic Folksongs from the Isle of Barra* (London: The Linguaphone Institute for the Folklore Institute of Scotland, [1950]), 9–11.

[10] Bo Almqvist, *The Irish Folklore Commission: Achievement and Legacy* (Comhairle Bhéaloideas Éireann, 1979).

[11] Patricia Lysaght, 'Swedish ethnological surveys in Ireland 1934–5 and their aftermath', in *Tools and Traditions. Studies in European Ethnology Presented to Alexander Fenton,* ed. Hugh Cheape, (Edinburgh: National Museums Scotland), 22.

founding of the IFC; they also informed the work of Ó Duilearga’s colleague Seán Ó Súilleabháin, whose *Láimhleabhar Béaloideasa* (1937) and subsequent *Handbook of Irish Folklore* (1942) shaped the work of the IFC and the disciplines of Irish folklore for many years. Guided by its Scandinavian models, the Irish Folklore Commission developed a holistic approach, ranging from settlement and dwelling to popular belief and practice, that defined folklore in terms of the totality of human culture from material to spiritual.

If ‘material culture’ as such was not prominent on John Lorne Campbell’s scholarly palette, the notion of a unity of tradition between Ireland and Scotland and an institutional base for folklore collecting was in the forefront of his thinking. He was of course conscious of the achievements and influence of his namesake, John Francis Campbell of Islay, on Ireland’s folklore studies from 1859. He was in close touch with Ó Duilearga, who had become Director of the IFC and editor of *Béaloideas*, and who had contributed significantly to the development of Irish folklore studies in these years. Ó Duilearga was in effect the first professional Irish folklorist, and not only did Campbell study Ó Duilearga’s work closely in the mid-1930s, but Ó Duilearga developed a reciprocal regard for Campbell’s efforts. When Campbell sent the IFC a copy of *Sia Sgialachdan*, a collection of six stories from South Uist and Barra that Campbell had printed privately in 1939, Ó Duilearga informed Campbell that this had roused the Commission to the fact that the Gaelic oral tradition was still alive in the Hebrides. Calum Maclean, who at the time was working for the Irish Folklore Commission, was subsequently sent home to Scotland to record oral materials on behalf of the IFC.[12]

As a ‘modern folklorist’, Campbell espoused a highly individual and pioneering approach, drawing on the disciplines of philology, lexicography, etymology, literature, history, sociology, and the sciences; in addition, as an active farmer in Canna, he moved readily between agriculture, silviculture and entomology. His technical acumen in handling recording machinery meant that he kept up with the technology as it developed. He charted his career as folklorist and field worker through the technology he employed and through the publication of scholarly editions of Gaelic texts. As a scholar, his concern with the academic content of his subject was paramount, and he was robust and outspoken in his contribution to the published record.[13] He avoided the then-current debates over folktale origins, archetypes and versions, rarely mentioning von Sydow’s theoretical examination of international *Märchen*; by contrast, his approach revealed a humane focus on the tellers of tales and the singers of the twentieth century in their respective communities. In this respect, his methodology seems to have been sharpened by a stance in conscious opposition to that of many university-based scholars.

A vigorous commentator and critic, Campbell was unusual: he was outside the institutional framework of a university and vocally – sometimes fiercely – independent of the universities. He contended that the systematic study of the popular culture and traditions of the British Isles had rarely found a place in the universities, and he described the prevailing attitude in Scotland as ‘blatantly uninterested and reprehensibly negligent’.[14] The wealth of material was known, he suggested, but ignored by academics, who may have felt that it was tainted by the romanticism of James Macpherson’s

[12] J. L. Campbell, *Sia Sgialachdan* (T. and A. Constable Ltd., 1939), 7; Cailean MacGhilleathain “‘A’ beothachadh na cuimhne aosda” – Calum Iain MacGhilleathain (1915–1960): bho Alba gu Èirinn’, *Béaloideas* 79 (2011), 9. A copious correspondence between Campbell and Ó Duilearga is preserved in the Canna House Archive, e.g. CH2/2/2.

[13] As a memorable example, his 1933 introduction to *Highland Songs of the Forty-Five* stressed the integrity of the Gaelic voice; and when the book was republished in 1984, he did not soften his depiction of the British State’s ‘genocidal campaign against the religion of many and the language of all Highlanders’; see J. L. Campbell, ed., *Highland Songs of the Forty-Five,* 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1984), xiv.

[14] J. L. Campbell, letter to author, 10 November 1994.

'Ossian' and the works of Sir Walter Scott. Campbell also commented freely on the orthodoxies of university-taught history, regarding what he called its 'pro-whig and anti-Highland bias', devoted to a Calvinist rigidity and accepting of the unequal union of Scotland with England after 1707, as having cast a shadow over the university study of Celtic and Scottish History.[15]

Campbell also felt that the teaching of Gaelic in the context of Celtic Studies over-relied on the Gaelic Bible, and argued that the influence of Macpherson and Scott, though inspiring curiosity and interest in Gaelic history and traditions among many students, had to be recognised for the skewed cultural force-field that it had created. He maintained that the study of grammar and comparative philology had reigned supreme to the exclusion, he felt, of spoken Gaelic and its dialects, songs, stories, and demotic forms. In arguing that more attention should be paid to the spoken language, Campbell followed the precept of his teacher and mentor at Oxford, Professor John Fraser, who had advised him to 'study a good spoken dialect with a notebook in hand to put down words and expressions which you haven't heard or read. Book Gaelic is too often artificial.' For Campbell, this principle was canonical. As he wrote in his introduction to the stories of John Macpherson, 'the Coddy':

> The process of getting inside the tradition itself was by no means easy. First the local dialect had to be learnt; here 'book Gaelic' was an actual obstacle. All spoken Scottish Gaelic dialects differ from the literary language, in some respects consistently: the dialects of the Outer Hebrides are, in fact, more vigorous than the modern literary language, and contain many words and expressions that are not in the printed dictionaries.[16]

A Bharraigh – To Barra

Campbell's arrival in the Outer Hebrides on 4 August 1933 was a defining moment for him and the beginning of what was to become his life's work in the recovery and transmission of the Gaelic song, literary and linguistic record. He recalls in the 'Reminiscences':

> I had settled in Barra in August 1933, extending a visit of 3 weeks eventually to nearly five years. Having studied Gaelic at Oxford with Professor J[ohn] Fraser and having published Highland Songs of the '45 in the spring of 1933 but being still deficient in knowledge of the colloquial language, I went to live in the house of the Coddy (John MacPherson) whom I had met in 1928. Coddy was a most excellent Gaelic speaker and persevering teacher but unfortunately his house was usually full of English-speaking visitors. However, I was able to get outside help from Mr Neil Sinclair, school master, who took me at various times to spend evenings with Alasdair Aonghais Mhóir, while the Coddy took me at times to see Seumas Iain Ghunnairigh – both storytellers, and the latter particularly good. Also Miss Annie Johnston, whom I first met in August 1933, was very helpful. I also got to know Carl Borgstrøm of Oslo who was then working on his famous study of the Barra dialect – now Professor Carl Borgstrøm.[17] Mr Roderick MacNeil, 2 Ardveenish, was then Compton Mackenzie's host, and his father-in-law, Murchadh an Eilein, was a monoglot Gaelic speaker and another of my conversationalists.[18]

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[15] J. L. Campbell, ed., *Tales from Barra. Told by the Coddy,* 2nd edn (Edinburgh: W. & A. K. Johnston, 1961), 22.
[16] Campbell, *Tales from Barra*, 23–24.
[17] Carl Hjalmar Borgstrøm (1909–1986), Norwegian scholar of linguistics, visited Barra in 1932, 1933 and 1934; see Carl Hjalmar Borgstrøm, *The Dialects of the Outer Hebrides* (Oslo: Norsk Tidsskrift for Sprogvidenskap, 1940).
[18] CH2/1.

Campbell’s first six months in the islands were entirely spent learning the language and culture. His conversion of a three-week sojourn to a five-year residence suggests how profound his experience was, and explains his fresh confidence. His enthusiasm for being amongst new friends is palpable in his enthusiastic descriptions of those he met. With regard to language-learning, he believed that any competent student who could spend a winter in a Gaelic-speaking parish could add to our knowledge of the language, in contrast to standard grammars and dictionaries that tended to teem with omissions, rendering the study of the oral tradition and dialects ‘both difficult and interesting’. As regards his fieldwork methodology, Campbell described his own experience with a hint of cynicism:

> I approached Gaelic songs in Barra from the inside. I only started to record them after I had been living there for over three years and they had started to become part of my life. … I was not like a stranger just turning up with a recording machine and a bottle of whisky.[19]

Urged on, as he told it, by the Coddy and by Annie Johnston, Campbell started his collecting work with James MacKinnon (*Seumas Iain Ghunnairigh*) in Northbay, and Murdo MacDonald (*Murchadh an Eilein*) in Ardveenish, writing down what they said to him in a personal version of shorthand. With further help he also recorded and published, in 1936, a collection of Gaelic songs by local bard Seonaidh Campbell (*Seonaidh mac Dhòmhnaill ’ic Iain Bhàin*) of South Uist, to whom he had been introduced in 1934 by John MacInnes (*Iain Pheadair*, 1907–1991) of South Lochboisdale in circumstances described below.[20] In the same year, he also sent four of Seonaidh’s stories to *Outlook,* a monthly magazine published in Edinburgh. These efforts stand as John Lorne Campbell’s first effective exercise in recording for public consumption the oral literature of the islands, and demonstrate his wish to publicise the wealth of the Gaelic oral tradition to a wider Scottish readership.

A further product of this ‘learning’ phase was *Sia Sgialachdan*, the book of six stories from South Uist and Barra that had so impressed the Irish Folklore Commission. Transcribed and privately printed in 1939, the book’s small print run of 250 copies was quickly sold out. What Campbell saw as the imperative to publish and the importance of the spoken word supplied the editorial principle for *Sia Sgialachdan.* His introduction describes his methodology and provides his rationale for the work:

> In writing down these stories, whether from the speaker’s own dictation (for which purpose I used a kind of abbreviated script in order to allow them to talk at their usual pace without regard for me) or from Ediphone records, I have deliberately reproduced the dialects of the speakers.[21] This is in accordance with the method used by contemporary Irish collectors of oral Gaelic literature, for example by most of the contributors to *Béaloideas* (the Journal of the Irish Folklore Society). In my opinion, any attempt to force oral Gaelic literature into the artificial mould of the standardised literary spelling and grammatical forms is a mistake, as it not only actually produces a false impression of the real language of the stories, but also obscures many interesting grammatical points.[22]

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[19] J. L. Campbell, personal communication to author, 1993.
[20] Iain Latharna Caimbeul, *Òrain Ghàidhlig le Seonaidh Caimbeul (Seonaidh mac Dhòmhnaill ’ic Iain Bhàin)* (Dun Phàrlain: I. B. MacAoidh agus a Chuideachd, 1936).
[21] Examples of Campbell’s ‘abbreviated script’ are in the Canna House Archive CH2/1/5/20/5, a notebook with Gaelic stories taken down from Seonaidh Caimbeul, October–November 1935.
[22] Campbell, *Sia Sgialachdan*, 6.

As noted, this book drew the attention of Séumas Ó Duilearga's Irish Folklore Commission to the Hebrides and the vigorous oral tradition surviving there, and they arranged to send over Calum Maclean, who had also had archive training in Uppsala, to carry out recording work on their behalf in Gaelic Scotland.[23] Delayed by the outbreak of war in 1939, Maclean's posting began in 1945 when he was sent to Uist and Barra. Campbell's tactic of sending his publications to Dublin and the Commission's response must have helped to prompt the subsequent establishment of the School of Scottish Studies. As Campbell later hinted: *'S e farmad a nì treobhadh* or 'emulation gets the ploughing done' as background to Edinburgh University's subsequent initiative.[24]

On arrival in Barra, Campbell joined with Compton Mackenzie, then resident in the island, in founding the Sea League, a lobbying group that sought to safeguard the livelihoods of Hebridean fishermen by calling for the closure of the Minch to trawlers and increased fines for illegal trawling. The movement took its title from the nineteenth-century Land League and its philosophy and dynamic from the fishery policies of Norway, Iceland and the Faroes. The story was told in the pages of the *Sea Leaguer* between 1936 and 1939 – a bilingual news-sheet that, Campbell suggested, 'deserves its place among the literature of Highland protest'.[25]

When John Lorne Campbell visited South Uist in February 1934 to discuss the political initiative of the Sea League with John MacInnes from South Lochboisdale, MacInnes told him about his neighbour and close friend Seonaidh Caimbeul, a highly regarded *bàrd baile* ('local bard') whose songs had never been properly written down. (Some had been taken down by Fr Allan McDonald and Dr George Henderson about forty years earlier, but these had been lost, and MacInnes had been writing them down on his own initiative.) Born in 1859, Seonaidh made songs about people, events and topics of the day. As MacInnes wrote in a brief biography of Seonaidh Caimbeul which appeared in Campbell's published collection of Seonaidh's songs in 1936: '*Iomadh rud nach saoileadh feodhainn eile cus dheth dheanadh Seonadh òran dha*' ('Many a thing that some others wouldn't think too much of, Seonaidh would make a song for it').[26] Campbell arranged that if Iain Pheadair were to take his songs down, he himself would try to arrange for their publication and see them through the press. Iain agreed to do this.

It was also on this visit that Campbell records, in passing, that 'I met Miss Margaret Shaw'. Margaret Fay Shaw was staying at the time in the home of Peigi and Màiri Macrae in North Glendale. Campbell's courtship prospered:

> In June 1935 MFS and I were married and went to Norway (the Lofoten Islands) for our honeymoon, returning to Barra by yacht 'Gille Brighde' with John MacNeil (Iagan a' Chruguil) in August. [Coddy's] bungalow was not then available for us and we stayed first on the yacht, then at Lochboisdale Hotel, and then (November) at Taigh Mairi Anndra at North Glendale with Peigi and Mairi MacRae. Seonaidh Caimbeul my fellow

[23] MacGhilleathain, '"A' beothachadh na cuimhne aosda"', 9–10.
[24] J. L. Campbell, *Seanfhocail agus Comhadan. Scottish Gaelic Proverbs.* Highland Information Pamphlets No. 11 (Inverness: An Comunn Gàidhealach, 1968), 3; see also Alexander Nicolson, *A Collection of Gaelic Proverbs* (Edinburgh: MacLachlan and Stewart, 1881), 232.
[25] J. L. Campbell, 'Fields of Battle. Our Barra Years (2)', *The Scots Magazine* (September 1975): 617. Documentation for the Sea League, of which John Lorne Campbell was Secretary, is in the Canna House Archive, National Trust for Scotland, CH2/2; see also Hugh Cheape, 'Taking forward perceptions of identity. The Sea League's campaign to protect maritime communities and the environment', *Angles: New Perspectives on the Anglophone World* 17 (2024). https://doi.org/10.4000/11qj6.
[26] Iain MacAonghuis, 'Beatha Sheonaidh', ann an Caimbeul, *Orain Ghàidhlig le Seonaidh Caimbeul*, vi.

> clansman lived about half a mile away by a rough path which had an exceedingly haunted atmosphere on dark and stormy nights. Here I found my way every evening and began to take down Seonaidh’s tales and revise Iain Pheadair’s transcriptions of his songs with the bard.’

Remains of the bard Seonaidh Caimbeul’s house in North Glendale, South Uist, 2023. (Photo: Flòraidh Forrest)

Seonaidh and his wife Peigi lived in a house built for them by his brother Iain Clachair, with gable-end and chimney of stone and the body of the house framed in timber and clad in corrugated-iron sheeting of a modest style known as a *leth taigh* (‘half-house’).

The preparation for publication of Seonaidh’s songs continued into the following year. Campbell’s preface, headed ‘*Cànail Sheonaidh agus Obair an Deasachaidh*’ (‘Seonaidh’s speech and the work of editing’), is dated 15 May 1936:

> Seonaidh had a beautiful clear diction in Gaelic (he only knew a few words and phrases in English) and unlimited patience to deal with an unpractised transcriber like myself. It was from him I learnt most of all, and from him I took down the first tales I transcribed. Most of these were stories about local history. Some I printed in Sia Sgialachdan. Seonaidh did not care for the old fabulous stories.[27]

In his ‘Reminiscences’, Campbell eulogises Seonaidh as a man of deep faith:

> Seonaidh was a man poor in worldly goods but rich in oral lore and blessed with an exceedingly happy and good-natured temperament. He and his wife Peigi lived in a small house, partly or mostly made of wood, with their dog Craobhag. They had no

[27] CH2/1/15; By contrast, Uist commentary maintains that Seonaidh could speak Gaelic, English and Doric, the latter picked up among East Coast fishermen. Campbell used anecdotes by Seonaidh to supply Gaelic text for the bilingual newspaper of the Sea League, for example, ‘*Mar a fhuair sinn ar riasladh a’ togail nan cliabh’* (‘How we got in a tangle lifting the creels’) printed in *The Sea Leaguer* No. 7 (March 1938) and No. 8 (July 1938).

> children, but his brother Iain Clachair – 'John the Maor' – equally well known as a bard and reciter left a family of whom the best-known today is Mr Angus John Campbell, Lochboisdale. Seonaidh (and I believe his brother Iain) was a man whose life and personality provide an edification – particularly in this materialistic age. Cheerful and good natured in spite of a life spent in continual poverty and hardship as a crofter-fisherman and insecurity (until the coming of the old age pension) he was deeply and sincerely religious and well versed in his faith (Catholic). His type is passing away and the isles will be the poorer for it. Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.[28]

The public treatment of the Gaelic language was a constant concern for Campbell, who commented in his 'Reminiscences' on the 'ridiculous suppression of Gaelic dialect by the BBC' and raised questions about this with the Corporation. It may have been due to his urging that the BBC formed a plan to make a series of recordings of Gaelic dialects, and in October 1935 Campbell arranged to travel to Glasgow, taking Iain Pheadair and Seonaidh Campbell with him, so that the BBC could record some speech in Uist Gaelic. The resulting five-minute recording, in which Seonaidh told an amusing anecdote, was the first sound recording of a Gaelic dialect ever made, and is the earliest recorded item included in the website Tobar an Dualchais.[29]

A' Clàradh – Recording

Campbell pioneered the use of modern technology and the application of scholarly methodology to the study of spoken Gaelic and the culture of Gaelic communities. His recording work advanced in step with contemporary developments in recording equipment, beginning in January 1937 with a clockwork Ediphone Recorder using wax cylinders. An early surviving recording was made in Glen, Barra, in July 1937, of Mrs Ann MacDougall (*Anna Raghnaill Eachainn*, 1875–1949) singing some lines from a waulking song, '*O hùg o, chailleach chrùbach'*, an amusing satire on an old lady. Given its age, the quality of the recording is classed as '*meadhanach math*' or 'middling' but, as Flòraidh Forrest has observed, it 'captured the informality of the moment, with Anna and some other ladies in the background chuckling as they forget and remind each other of the words to the song'.[30]

That autumn, John Lorne Campbell and Margaret Fay Shaw took the recorder and a car to Canada, and in September and October made recordings in Cape Breton and Antigonish County. The linking of Scotland and Nova Scotia was another facet of Campbell's innovative approach to Gaelic Studies. He had made a brief visit to Cape Breton in April 1932 when he had set up his 'Unofficial Gaelic Census' by parishes.[31] Having begun productive recording work in Barra and South Uist, he wanted in particular to record the Gaelic oral tradition in eastern Canada among the descendants of eighteenth-

[28] CH2/1/17. The record of Seonaidh's family's achievements has recently been brought up to date with a collection of the poetry and songs of three generations, and it includes an illustration of a letter to Seonaidh from J. L. Campbell written in Gaelic from New York on 14 December 1937; see Jo NicDhòmhnaill agus Màiri Anna Chaimbeul, *Bho Ghinealach gu Ginealach: Taghadh de na h-Òrain aig Caimbeulaich Taobh a Deas Loch Baghasdail* (Dalabrog: Ceòlas Uibhist Earr., 2015).

[29] Flòraidh Forrest, 'Tobar an Dualchais: Seonaidh Caimbeul – a lost recording of a Uist bard', *West Highland Free Press*, 1 September 2023, https://www.whfp.com/2023/09/01/tobar-an-dualchais-seonaidh-caimbeul-a-lost-recording-of-a-uist-bard/. 'Naidheachd Iain agus Dhomhnaill' can be heard on Tobar an Dualchais, Track 41039, https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/41039?l=gd.

[30] 'O hùg o, Chailleach Chrùbach', Tobar an Dualchais Track ID 40457, https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/40457?l=en. See also J. L. Campbell, *Gaelic Folksongs from the Isle of Barra* (London: The Linguaphone Institute for the Folklore Institute of Scotland [1950]), 6, 42–46; also Forrest, 'Tobar an Dualchais: Seonaidh Caimbeul' as above, n. 29.

[31] J. L. Campbell, 'Scottish Gaelic in Canada', *An Gàidheal* (Am Màrt 1948), 69.

and nineteenth-century emigrants, particularly those of the period c.1770–1830 from the west-coast areas of Lochaber, Moidart and Arisaig, South Uist and Barra and the Small Isles. The significance of Cape Breton for Gaelic tradition was, in his own words, as ‘a Highland community where there are no lairds’.[32] Here he benefited from local guidance from Cape Breton Gaels such as Jonathan G. Mackinnon, the founder of the *Mac Talla* newspaper.

Leaving Canada in the autumn of 1937, Campbell visited New York where he bought a Presto Disc Recorder – state-of-the-art equipment at the time – before returning to Barra in January 1938. In the ‘Reminiscences’ he writes of having made ‘outstanding recordings of Ruairi Iain Bhàin [renowned Barra singer Roderick MacKinnon, 1858–1944], some with the help of Gordon Marsh (US)’.[33] On a subsequent visit to the USA in January and February 1948, Campbell again stopped in New York, where he bought a Webster Wire Recorder. He recalled the difficulties of getting the Webster through the (for him) excessive bureaucracy of Customs: the machine was detained for six months. In November 1949, however, Campbell used it to record Angus MacLellan (1869–1966) of Frobost, South Uist; and that same year the importance of his task was recognised by the Leverhulme Foundation, which awarded him a two-year grant of £250. By the winter of 1957–1958, magnetic tape recorders had become the norm, and Campbell was using a Grundig; four years later, in 1962, he had purchased a Phillips Portable Recorder, a lighter machine that made fieldwork easier.

Facilitated by steady improvements in technology, Campbell’s post-war fieldwork was especially successful. He recorded a full portfolio of material from Angus MacLellan and his sister, Marion Campbell (*Bean Nìll,* 1868–1971), whom he had first met in 1948 when they were in their eighties. To demonstrate to the outside world how a single talented storyteller could sustain a vast and varied repertoire, Campbell translated and published a selection of Angus’s material, including a variety of story types, in *Stories from South Uist* in 1961.[34] He also recorded from Angus a version of *Conall Gulbann*, ‘one of the greatest, if not the greatest of the romantic tales that were popular with traditional Gaelic storytellers in Scotland and Ireland’.[35]

Stories from South Uist included a section titled ‘The Storyteller’s Own Story’, a feature that Campbell later developed into a full-length autobiography, published in English in 1962 as *The Furrow Behind Me*. In 1967, Campbell noted in the ‘Reminiscences’ that he had heard from Norwegian linguist Magne Oftedal, professor at the University of Oslo and editor of the journal *Lochlann.* Oftedal understood that the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society had decided not to publish the original Gaelic narrative of Angus’s autobiography, and asked Campbell if he could publish it in *Lochlann*, of which he was the editor. The Gaelic text of *Saoghal an Treobhaiche* was duly published, filling the whole of volume 5 of *Lochlann.* Campbell was flattered, commenting ‘I have been able to publish my work, at no expense to myself, in London, Oxford, Dublin, and now in Oslo, but never in book form in Scotland!’[36]

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[32] J. L. Campbell, *Songs Remembered in Exile*, 2nd edn (Birlinn), 19–20; also John Shaw, ‘Brief beginnings: Nova Scotian and Old World Bards compared’, *Scottish Gaelic Studies* XVII (1996), 343.

[33] In his ‘Reminiscences’, Campbell credited Gordon Marsh of Columbia University as being another competent learner; the two eventually fell out of touch.

[34] J. L. Campbell, *Stories from South Uist told by Angus MacLellan* (London: Routledge, 1961).

[35] J. L. Campbell, ‘Conall Gulbann, Son of the King of Ireland’, *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 44 (1965): 153–92; see also MacLellan’s recording of this tale on Tobar an Dualchais, Track ID 98040, https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/98040?l=en.

[36] CH2/1/223. *Saoghal an Treobhaiche* fills the entirety of *Lochlann*, vol. 5 (1972); it was eventually published in Scotland in 1974; see J. L. Campbell, *Saoghal an Treobhaiche le Aonghus Mac ’illFhialain MBE (‘Aonghus Beag’) air a recòrdadh ’s air a sgrìobhadh le Fear Chanaidh* (Inbhirnis: Club Leabhar, 1974).

In August 1959, Calum Maclean told *The Scotsman* of having witnessed the first missiles being fired from the rocket range on the Gerinish machair in South Uist. He added wryly that, while it was said that the 'Corporal' missile was already obsolete, in Uist 'there is something which is still not obsolete, even after a thousand years'. He was referring to the epic story of Cú Chulainn, which he had recorded from Angus MacLellan a few weeks earlier:

> On the 11 June I saw Angus MacLellan of Frobost uncover his head in honour of Cu Chulainn and then proceed to tell the heroic saga of Cu Chulainn's first feat, his exploits in warding off those who came to take forcible possession of the Donn Ghuailleann, and his death after he had slain Fear Diad Mac Deafain.... [37]

Campbell celebrated Angus MacLellan's storytelling career in a detailed appreciation in *Scottish Studies*, including the citation for the award of MBE 'for his extensive contribution to the preservation of Gaelic oral literature'.[38] In a heartfelt elegy in the 'Reminiscences', he noted Angus MacLellan's passing:

> March 19 [1966] St Joseph's Day came the sad news of the death peacefully in his sleep, of Angus MacLellan MBE in his 97th year. *Fhuair thu aois Aonghuis agus fhuair thu cliu agus bha daoine ciatach coir timcheall oirbh mu dheireadh ged a bha am beatha agad cruaidh gu leor aig uaireannan reimhe sin. Tha mi gle thoilichte gun d'fhuair na leabhraichean agad rudeiginn air do shon. Tha eagal orm nach fhaic sinn fear do d' leithid tuilleadh. Fois is sith dod anam 's tusa thoill iad.*[39]
>
> [You attained age and fame Angus and there were decent generous people around you at the last, though your life was hard enough at times before that. I am very pleased that your books brought you something to your benefit. I fear that we shall not see your likes anymore. May your soul have rest and peace and it is you who deserves them.]

A' faighinn fiach – Getting recognition

From the mid-1930s, having learnt good island Gaelic and with his recording activities well under way, Campbell advocated vigorously for public and academic recognition of the oral culture of the Scottish Gàidhealtachd. In 1947, he was one of the main instigators of the Folklore Institute of Scotland (FIOS), whose main object was to lobby for official recognition of the importance and value of the Gaelic oral tradition in Scotland, and to argue support for the urgent recording of it by modern methods.[40] As the first President of FIOS, Campbell himself promoted the case for systematic collection of Gaelic folksong on a properly organised basis, preferably by the endowment of a body in Scotland similar to the Irish Folklore Commission.

The efforts of FIOS together with those of other interested parties must have influenced the creation of the School of Scottish Studies in the University of Edinburgh in late 1951, although its academic founders

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[37] Calum I. Maclean, 'Cu Chulainn and the Rocket Range', *The Scotsman*, 11 August 1959, 6. See also Calum I. Maclean, 'A Folk-Variant of the Táin Bó Cúailnge from Uist, *ARV: Tidskrift för Nordisk Folkminnesforskning: Journal of Scandinavian Folklore* XV (1959): 160–181; for Angus's recording of 'Cù Chulainn agus an Donn Ghuaillfhionn', see Tobar an Dualchais track ID 40664, https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/track/40664?l=en.
[38] J. L. Campbell, 'Angus MacLellan MBE ("Aonghus Beag") 1869–1966', *Scottish Studies* 10 (1966), 196.
[39] CH2/1/221.
[40] The papers of FIOS are in the Canna House Archive, National Trust for Scotland, CH2/2. See also Hugh Cheape, '"Tha Feum air Cabhaig". The initiative of the folklore Institute of Scotland', *Scottish Studies* 37 (2014): 53–62.

do not seem to have admitted to any such influence.[41] In spite of contributing copies of more than 300 of his own wire recordings to the founding of this new archive, Campbell expressed disappointment at not being consulted by the School of Scottish Studies regarding its archiving of recorded sound. When ‘the School’ held a conference at the end of May 1952, Campbell refused to attend, commenting in his ‘Reminiscences’ that he felt that those in charge of the initiative were taking advantage of people like himself – amateur enthusiasts with deep contacts and rich local knowledge – and then dropping them once their brains had been picked. His conviction that this was the case was certainly one of the reasons that, as he put it, ‘I refused to have anything to do with the School of Scottish Studies’.[42] The other circumstance that set him apart from the enterprise was what he termed ‘the Lomax affair’.

The Lomax episode, described in brisk language in the ‘Reminiscences’, began when Alan Lomax wrote to Campbell in October 1950, asking for help with a ‘British folksong’ recording project. After consulting Professors Angus McIntosh and Kenneth Jackson, Campbell refused to assist Lomax, arguing that Scotland merited an album of its own – a proposal to which Lomax could not agree. Campbell clearly distrusted the Lomax project.

In March and April of 1951, Campbell made a recording trip to the Outer Isles with Francis Collinson, only to later discover that Lomax had followed in May, had sought out the identical reciters and had paid them to record material for him. How Lomax had learned of Campbell and Collinson’s itinerary was ‘a mystery’, and Campbell was furious, since such information was normally handled with discretion. He suspected that Ó Duilearga might have sent Lomax to communicate with Calum Maclean, bypassing Campbell and Collinson; Ó Duilearga, however, later denied that he had had anything to do with Alan Lomax’s visiting Scotland.

In July of 1951, Campbell wrote to Hugh MacPhee at the BBC in Glasgow to protest about the ‘disgraceful situation’ in which Lomax was receiving the support of the Corporation ‘over the heads of Scottish folksong collectors’. He complained about the ‘recording of Hebridean Folksongs for the BBC by non-native collectors’, commenting, ‘I am interested to learn that the BBC considers ignorance of the Gaelic language no disqualification for undertaking such work’.[43] Campbell’s ‘Reminiscences’ leave no doubt about his intense disappointment with the Lomax situation:

> Atmosphere of islands poisoned by personal disputes – folklore collection supplemented by folklore politics – I decided to retire rather than be made use of and let down. Lomax leaves trail of bad feeling and resentment everywhere.[44]

Campbell rationalised what seems like a fit of pique as retiring from fieldwork in order to work on publishing the wealth of traditional material which he maintained was still part of the fabric of life in the Hebrides – a project that would enable him to honour the singers and storytellers. He must have understood, however, that the objective for which FIOS had worked – the establishment of a ‘recording institute’ – had indeed been attained, even if FIOS and its achievements had received little acknowledgement. Far from retiring from fieldwork, his personal dedication was undimmed, as this note from 1964 makes plain:

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[41] Cheape, ‘“Tha Feum air Cabhaig”’, 60–61.
[42] CH2/1/27 and CH2/1/30. The late Dr John MacInnes commented that John Lorne Campbell was one of the main influences behind the creation of the School of Scottish Studies, thanks in part to his personal friendship with Professor Angus McIntosh.
[43] CH2/2 correspondence with Hugh MacPhee in the FIOS papers.
[44] CH2/1/21-23.

> Thursday, called on Mrs Archie MacPhee at Stonybridge, sister of Seonaid Shomhairle Bhig, and recorded from her *Ach a Mhurchaidh oig ghaolaich* and another waulking song. She is a good singer and ought to be revisited. One could get from her the songs Mrs Kennedy Fraser took down from her mother and published in Vol IV of *Songs of the Hebrides*, and by printing these originals expose the methods of Mrs KF – and her deficiencies. I am afraid Kenneth MacLeod would not come too well out of this either as he contributed a lot of fantastic nonsense to this series.[45]

Marjory Kennedy Fraser (1857–1930), Scottish doyenne of early-twentieth century classical music, had aroused intense interest in Gaelic oral tradition through her art-song renderings of material she had recorded from singers in the Hebrides. When the centenary of Kennedy Fraser's birth was being commemorated, Campbell reminded readers of *The Scots Magazine* that the reception of Kennedy Fraser's works – *Songs of the Hebrides* was published in several volumes beginning in 1909 – had been coloured by the 'fog of the Celtic twilight', and the popular notion that hers was a sufficient record of Gaelic song obscured the work of others such as Francis Tolmie.[46] Campbell and Collinson, in the third volume of *Hebridean Folksongs*, published a chapter headed 'Hebridean Folksongs and Songs of the Hebrides' in order 'to set the record straight' and identify original versions of the 'art-songs'.[47] Importantly for Gaelic studies, he later adopted a more generous tone in assessing the long career of Kenneth MacLeod.[48]

Co-dhùnadh – Conclusion

How do we judge John Lorne Campbell's contribution to Gaelic scholarship in the twentieth century? Campbell clearly occupied a significant and even seminal position, not only in pioneering the mechanical recording of Gaelic for scholarly purposes and the archival preservation of songs (mainly chorus songs or *orain luaidh*) and folktales, but also in his concentration on the Gaelic language, culture, and communities of the Outer Hebrides. Campbell influenced subsequent generations of scholars through his innovative and rigorous approach to fieldwork and recording, his insight that work among Gaelic speaking communities is best undertaken by those with knowledge of idiomatic Gaelic and of its dialects, and his insistence that historians should more fully represent Highland culture by learning to understand it from within. Although he did not live to see it, his archive of sound recordings eventually became a foundational component of the *Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o' Riches* initiative, alongside Gaelic items from the School of Scottish Studies Archives and recordings made for the BBC. This digitised database of traditional materials, launched in 2010, makes the voices of Gaelic traditional singers and storytellers accessible worldwide, and is an invaluable resource for scholars and artists, not to mention the descendants of those who so willingly contributed when asked.[49]

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[45] CH2/1/201 This followed a visit to the South Uist GP, Dr Alasdair Maclean, on Wednesday 29 January 1964.
[46] J. L. Campbell, 'Songs of the Hebrides: a reappraisal of Marjory Kennedy Fraser', *The Scots Magazine* (January 1958): 307–14. A decade earlier, Campbell had contributed to an argument in the letters column of *The Scotsman,* arguing against the public acclaim accorded Marjory Kennedy Fraser's recording work; see 'Better recordings being made', *The Scotsman*, 11 September 1948, 4. Whilst the phrase 'fog of the Celtic Twilight' does not appear in Campbell's *Scots Magazine* article, it was one he often used with me and others when discussing *Songs of the Hebrides*.
[47] J. L. Campbell and Francis Collinson, *Hebridean Folksongs III. Waulking Songs from Vatersay, Barra, South Uist, Eriskay, and Benbecula* (Oxford University Press, 1981), 324–326.
[48] J. L. Campbell, review of *Sgriobhaidhean Choinnich Mhic Leoid. The Gaelic Prose of Kenneth MacLeod,* edited by T. M. Murchison, *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 16 (1990), 197–201.
[49] https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk. Beginning the work of digitisation in 2006, the project was administered

While this account has concentrated on Campbell’s role as a pioneering fieldworker, his published work sets him apart as one of the foremost Gaelic scholars of the twentieth century, with major contributions on the Moidart poet Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, on the papers of the Welsh polymath, Edward Lhuyd, and on the importance of Fr Allan McDonald of Eriskay, whose gathering of oral materials among his parishioners constituted ‘one of the most important local collections of folklore ever made anywhere’.[50] Campbell and Collinson’s three volumes of *Hebridean Folksongs*, a collection of waulking songs published by the Oxford University Press between 1969 and 1981, is today regarded as essential by students of Gaelic song and culture. His crowning achievement, however, must be the fact that he achieved one of the most significant collections of Scottish folklore gathered by a single individual.

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[50] J. L. Campbell, ‘The late Fr Allan McDonald, Miss Goodrich Freer and Hebridean Folklore’, *Scottish Studies* 2 (1958), 178.

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