


Institution: University of the Highlands and Islands		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 26 Modern Languages and Linguistics		
Title of case study: Moving beyond token words: establishing new approaches to Gaelic in Scotland's National Museum		
		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Hugh Cheape Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart	Professor Senior Lecturer	2007-present 2007–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Romantic Highland imagery dominates worldwide perceptions of 'Brand Scotland', despite being discounted as mere 'invented tradition' by academics and public alike. Provoking fresh debate by tracing this iconography back to authentic Gaelic culture, this research from the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) materially shaped the National Museum of Scotland's (NMS) major 2019 exhibition on the subject, <i>Wild and Majestic / Fìadhaich Glòrmhor</i>. Never before had a leading Scottish institution made such extensive use of Gaelic language and perspectives, changing institutional policy and practice and setting a precedent being adopted by other Scottish museums. Its success has heightened awareness of the value of Gaelic culture and scholarship, and marks a significant advance for the Gaelic community.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Scottish Highland history, landscapes, and culture played a crucial role in inspiring the worldwide Romantic movement. Although Romanticism reached its highpoint two centuries ago, it still exerts an immense cultural influence in literature, music, and visual arts. Sublime landscapes, heroic clans, tartan, bagpipes: romantic 'Highlandist' iconography encapsulates Scotland for outsiders and Scots alike. In our globalised world, the romantic Highlands represent a billion-dollar brand. But its very ubiquity, popularity, and apparent triviality discourage academic analysis. Existing scholarship on Highland romanticism stems from English-language perspectives, neglecting its indigenous roots and language, routinely describing it as the quintessential exemplar of 'invented tradition'.</p>		

Underpinning research was carried out in Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMO), the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture, UHI. Between 2007 and 2020, Cheape and Stiùbhart developed innovative interpretive frameworks drawing upon indigenous literature, oral tradition, and material culture. This approach was inspired by Cheape's interdisciplinary research on tartan, a productive synthesis of dye analysis and Gaelic-language testimony [3.1]. Drawing upon both material culture and texts, offering fresh insights into Highland identity and community memory, it fundamentally transformed the field. It depicts a dynamic, open, self-confident Scottish Gaelic culture, open to outside influences, partaking of wider European cultural currents – a portrayal strikingly different from older, more entrenched academic representations of a backward peripheral region mired in tradition.

Cheape and Stiùbhart debunked assertions that core symbols of Highland romanticism were invented by late eighteenth-century outsiders and subsequently passed off as authentic to the credulous. Paradigmatic here is Cheape's re-examination of tartan. Rather than a cynical eighteenth-century sham, as claimed by an influential account of Highland tradition, this garment of courtly display was in fact long established in Gaeldom [3.2].

Stiùbhart has uncovered roots of Romanticism in early modern Gaelic culture. Proto-romantic imagery – commonplace in Gaelic song from the late seventeenth century – blends indigenous motifs with themes from British commercial street balladry. James Macpherson fused this new imagery with traditional Gaelic heroic ballads to create his Ossianic prose epics, so exerting an enduring, wide-ranging influence on world literature [3.3].

This body of UHI research suggests Romantic Highlandism was catalysed through the confrontation and engagement of two very different neighbouring cultures: Highland extravagant display, and Lowland renunciation and simplicity – caricatured in Gaelic poetry by clerical black cassocks and hats [3.3]. The research also demonstrates that some apparently 'traditional' aspects of Gaelic culture are best understood against a continental background. For Cheape, much bagpipe light music represents indigenous variations on European baroque traditions [3.4], while Stiùbhart suggests that Second Sight, typically perceived as an emblematic Highland belief, may in fact be better assessed as part of a broad European repertoire of vernacular prophecy and divination, with a name appropriated from medieval learned epistemology [3.5].

The research directly informed NMS's major summer 2019 exhibition, *Wild and Majestic: Romantic Visions of Scotland*, with exhibits, texts, talks, and tours giving unexpected voice and agency to Gaelic speakers hitherto overlooked in older accounts of Highland Romanticism, both as inspirers and adapters of Romanticism's themes and tropes, and as cultural brokers for the ensuing tourist economy [3.6]. The Romantic movement affected not only indigenous intellectuals and literati, but also Gaelic-speaking individuals – guides, ghillies, pipers, proprietors – and entire Gaelic communities, Highland and diaspora alike. *Wild and Majestic* offered an excellent opportunity to highlight the value and interest of their stories for professional curators and historians, and the widest possible public.

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

3.1 Hugh Cheape with Anita Quye, 'Tartans, dye analysis and Highland dress', report on NMS Dye-analysis Project submitted to the Economy, Energy and Tourist Committee of the Scottish Parliament, April 2008: a summary of the project's relevance for cultural heritage, at the invitation of the Scottish government.

https://archive.parliament.scot/s3/committees/eet/inquiries/tartan/TB6_HughCheape.pdf

3.2 Hugh Cheape, 'Gheibhte breacain chàrnaid ("Scarlet tartans would be got ..."): the reinvention of tradition', in Iain Brown (ed.), *From Tartan to Tartanry: Scottish Culture, History and Myth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 13–31 [paperback 2012]. [peer-reviewed; REF 2014 submitted]. ISBN 978-0748664641

3.3 Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, 'Highland rogues and the roots of Highland romanticism' in Christopher MacLachlan (ed.), *Crossing the Highland Line: Cross-Currents in Eighteenth-Century Scottish Writing* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2009), 161–93. [peer-reviewed; REF 2014]. ISBN 094887788X.

3.4 Hugh Cheape, *Bagpipes: A National Collection of a National Instrument* (Edinburgh: NMS, 2008), with CD-ROM. [REF 2014]. ISBN 978-1905267552

3.5 Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, 'The invention of Highland Second Sight' in Julian Goodare and Martha McGill (eds), *The Supernatural in Early Modern Scotland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 178–203. [peer-reviewed; REF 2021 submitted]. ISBN 978-1526134424.

3.6 *Wild and Majestic: Romantic Visions of Scotland / Fiadhaich is Glòrmhor: Seallaidhean Romansach air Alba*: NMS summer exhibition, Edinburgh, 26 June–10 November 2019 <https://www.nms.ac.uk/national-museum-of-scotland/things-to-see-and-do/past-exhibitions/wild-and-majestic/>; including

- a) Gaelic-perspective bilingual interpretive panels by Cheape and Stiùbhart: Gaelic-perspective bilingual text in Patrick Watt and Rosie Waine, *Wild and Majestic: Romantic Visions of Scotland* (Edinburgh: National Museums Scotland, 2019), 18–19, 32–3, 56–7, 62–3, 88–9; and
- b) Hugh Cheape and Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, *Gaelic Pathways* booklet, NMS (2019).

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

The research shaped the content, tone, and use of Gaelic in the NMS annual exhibition, influencing public perception and institutional policy, and stimulating Scottish museums and galleries to implement Gaelic-oriented linguistic and curatorial strategies.

4.1 Shaping exhibition content

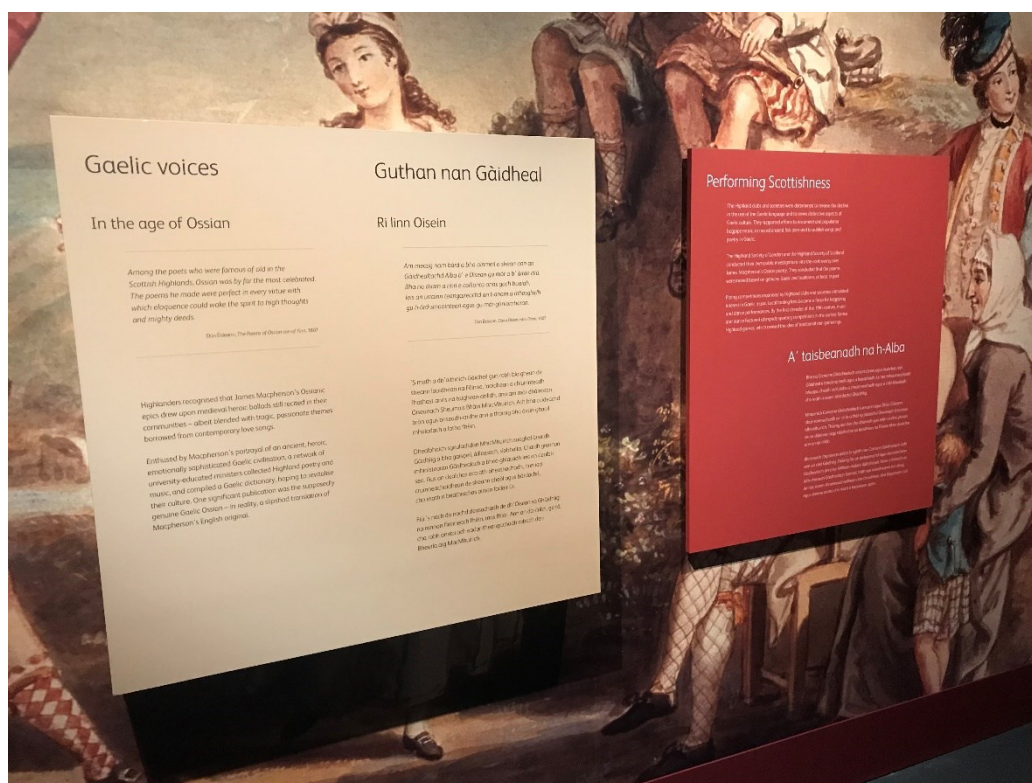
In July 2018, Stuart Allan, Keeper of Scottish History and Archaeology, NMS, approached Cheape and Stiùbhart at SMO for expert input into the 2019 summer exhibition, *Wild and Majestic: Romantic Visions of Scotland* [5.1]. NMS is the most popular UK visitor attraction outwith London, attracting 2.2 million visitors in 2018. The summer exhibition is their national and international showpiece.

Cheape and Stiùbhart were consulted because of their innovative research synthesising indigenous Gaelic-language sources [3.2, 3.3, 3.5] and Highland material culture [3.1, 3.4]. The 2017 NMS exhibition – *Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobites* – had aroused significant controversy, with Gaelic input, perspectives, and presentation perceived as lacking: see <https://tinyurl.com/u464qkk>.

The collaboration produced the following outcomes:

- prominent bilingual Gaelic-English panel texts throughout the exhibition, presenting unfamiliar indigenous perspectives [3.6a];
- a bilingual booklet offering 'Gaelic pathways' highlighting exhibits with specific Gaelic resonance [3.6b];
- filmed Gaelic-language interviews of Cheape and Stiùbhart;
- four public guided tours offering Gaelic perspectives;
- the prestigious annual Sabhal Mòr Lecture, jointly delivered at NMS by Cheape, Stiùbhart, and Allan, summarising scholarly approaches informing the exhibition and outlining future collaborative pathways [5.2]

The exhibition (26 June–10 November 2019) attracted 21,167 visitors. Tickets cost £10; concessions, £7.50/£8.50.



4.2 Changing public perception

Successfully shaping exhibition content and tone, the research has changed public perceptions throughout Scotland and beyond. From visitors' comments books and independent evaluation, public response was overwhelmingly appreciative. Gaelic language and perspectives had never been so integrated in a major national exhibition. This revealed unexpected cultural horizons for visitors: 'great to see so much Gaelic information on show. This greatly added to the integrity of the exhibition' [5.3].

Wild and Majestic resonated strongly with Gaelic audiences, particularly young people unused to encountering their own language, culture, and history in high-status institutional settings. Focused discussions with Gaelic-medium schoolchildren demonstrated that they valued the exhibition, wanting more: 'diofraichte bho thaisbeanadh eile a chunnaic mi' ('*different from any other exhibition I've seen*'); 'tachartas gun samhail' ('*a unique event*') [5.9]. Subsequent consultations with participating teachers demonstrated that their classes' experience at the exhibition highlighted the need for additional Gaelic-language history resources and for specifically Gaelic historical perspectives.

4.3 Print and broadcast, digital and social media coverage

Coverage across print and digital media outlets was widespread and favourable, with 4- and 5-star reviews. Gaelic usage was often commended: 'contemporary Gàidhealtachd voices are not neglected – a Gaelic voice is heard throughout the exhibition' [5.8a]; '[w]e were particularly struck by the inserted 'Gaelic voices' segments ... a welcome reminder that there are very different ways of looking at the story of Scotland' [5.8b]. Just as significant was reviewers' grasp of Cheape and Stiùbhart's main argument that, contrary to a still-influential strand of historiography, Highland Romanticism was 'never a matter of pure invention' [5.8c]. For one prominent reviewer, Duncan Macmillan of the *Scotsman*: '[p]erhaps this show is timely ... we can recover those missing people and our real past and lay to rest these sentimental ghosts that hijacked our identity' [5.8d]. The exhibition and its prominent use of the language secured generous coverage on Gaelic media, with Cheape and Stiùbhart disseminating their research and perspectives for news reports and daytime chat shows.

4.4 Museum reactions and policy

Institutionally, NMS was exceptionally satisfied with the partnership: exhibition content was 'very high quality', 'add[ing] considerable value' [5.4]. The collaboration's success heightened awareness of Gaelic culture and perspectives, and how these might contribute to institutional objectives of strengthening collections, knowledge and research, and participating in social outreach and KE for new audiences [5.4]. Policy commitments include:

- more prominence for Gaelic and specific, non-tokenistic Gaelic perspectives integrated in relevant future exhibitions, using the language to enrich visitor experience, and embracing more comprehensive historical scholarship;
- ensuring Gaelic plays an integral part in the scheduled redisplay of NMS permanent exhibitions;
- improving Gaelic content in educational provision, including an NMS *Gaelic Reader*;
- establishing a new strand of NMS's Contemporary Collecting Programme, a community-based outreach initiative to acquire contemporary objects illustrating Gaelic language and culture. Cheape and Stiùbhart are project consultants, assisting in engaging fresh audiences in Gaelic schools and communities [5.4, 5.5].

Scottish Government feedback was extremely favourable: the 'excellent' exhibition complemented official efforts 'to improve the status and recognition of Gaelic' and 'placed both the Gaelic language and the history of the [Gaelic] community back where it belongs as a central and fundamental aspect of Scottish history and cultural life' [5.7].

The success of the *Wild and Majestic* partnership led to other institutions consulting SMO regarding Gaelic content development: the National Galleries of Scotland; Kilmartin Museum (Argyll); Museum of the Isles, Armadale, Skye; and the Clan Macpherson Museum, Newtonmore [5.6]. Cheape and Stiùbhart were also invited to advise *Ar Dualchas*, a significant new online network for Gaelic-speakers working in the heritage sector [5.6].

The success of *Wild and Majestic* sets a positive, productive precedent for employing Gaelic texts, voices, and perspectives in Scottish museums and galleries, far beyond tokenism. These developments bring Scottish artistic and heritage institutions into line with international standards for best practice in bilingual interpretation, and formalise appropriate – and long overdue – institutional recognition for the role of Gaelic language, history, and culture.

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

5.1 Website of the exhibition <https://www.nms.ac.uk/national-museum-of-scotland/things-to-see-and-do/past-exhibitions/wild-and-majestic/>

5.2 Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, 'Sabhal Mòr Ostaig Annual Lecture 2019' (<https://tinyurl.com/vpsreui>); *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig Annual Lecture 2019 Programme*.

5.3 Visitor feedback from NMS regarding *Wild and Majestic*.

5.4 Exhibition outcomes and influence on NMS strategic thinking.

5.5 Letter from Stuart Allan, Keeper of Scottish History and Archaeology, NMS. Corroborates impact of research on policy discussion and development at NMS regarding Gaelic language and perspectives, 23 November 2020.

5.6 Influence of exhibition on other museums and galleries.

5.7 Scottish Government endorsement.

5.8 Media reviews of *Wild and Majestic* highlighting Gaelic and Gaelic perspectives.

5.9 'Fiadhaich Glòrmhor – Ais-mholadh': feedback from Donna Màiri MacIver, history teacher, James Gillespie's High School, and the S3 Gaelic-medium history class, 4 December 2019.