

The Dewar Project

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The Dewar MSS may be described as the outcome of the first oral history project ever conducted in Scotland. They consist of ten stout manuscript volumes written almost entirely in Gaelic, seven of which are in the Argyll Papers at Inveraray, and three in the National Library of Scotland (Adv. MSS 50.2.18–20). In the terminology of the current Dewar Project, the seven Inveraray items are D1–7, and the three NLS items are D8–10. The total number of pages is 7,016. Allowing for blank pages and scribbles by John Francis Campbell of Islay (JFC), there are still around 5,000 pages written by Dewar; the total number of texts is something like 600. Also at Inveraray are twenty slim volumes of English translation made for the duke of Argyll and his son Lord Lorne by the Islay schoolmaster Hector MacLean in 1879–81. These are bound together in six thick tomes. Mackechnie's *The Dewar Manuscripts Volume One* (1963) consists of the first tome, equivalent to two-thirds of Dewar's first manuscript volume.

Briefly stated, the aims of the new project are to produce a transcription of every page and a fresh English translation of all the Gaelic texts, and to publish the whole in ten volumes. These will include supporting material such as biographies of Dewar, MacLean, and – as far as possible – Dewar's informants.

What is the context?

The Dewar MSS are one of half a dozen major nineteenth-century Highland folklore collections, each of which has its own distinct character. We may think of JFC for *Märchen* and hero-tales (Campbell 1860–62), Alexander Carmichael for charms (1900–71), John Gregorson Campbell for superstitions (Black 2005), Father Allan McDonald for the general folklore of a single parish (unpublished, listed Black 2002: 451), Sheriff Nicolson for proverbs (1881) and John Dewar for what JFC called 'popular history'.

In 1859 JFC had launched the pioneering project that led to his four-volume *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (PTWH, Campbell 1860–62). He had been inspired by the brothers Grimm in Germany and the huge efforts then being made to collect Scandinavian folklore, culminating in the influential *Popular Tales from the Norse* (Dasent 1859). He had a team of collectors tramping the Highlands, looking in particular for ancient tales of mythical warriors and the supernatural. One of his most enthusiastic contributors proved to be John Dewar. Through him JFC discovered an entire genre of Gaelic stories which is of greater interest to historians than the mythical and supernatural ones – tales of the not-so-distant past, devoid of supernatural elements, which may be called 'non-supernatural' or 'history' tales.

Who was John Dewar?

Dewar was born in 1802 in Cragganbreck, a house at Craggan, close to the head of Glen Douglas in Dunbartonshire (OPR Row). He may have been related to a family of Dewar ministers and schoolmasters in the neighbouring parish of Arrochar, but for some reason he never went to school. He was the third son in a family of ten children, of whom at least five survived to adulthood. His father Alexander Dewar became a farm manager, probably serving the wealthy Oswalds of Gortan, from whom Oswald Street in Glasgow is named (OPR Arrochar; Mackechnie 1963, facing p. 32).

John Dewar was steeped in oral tradition from an early age. Over and over again he tells us that he first heard a story from such and such a person in 1809, 1810, 1811 or 1812. JFC called him ‘a workman who has taught himself to write’ (NLS Adv. MS 50.2.1(i), f. 8r), and indeed he himself states, in a letter to JFC (NLS Adv. MS 50.1.14, f. 469rv), ‘I did not get the benefit of a school education in my young days, and read near as much of broad-Scotch as I did of English’. It is clear from his spelling that he also read the Gaelic Bible.

Dewar spent most of his life working as a woodsman and sawyer. In 1859 he was thinking of turning to the new trade of photography for a living when the gamekeeper at Rosneath tipped him off that some gentlemen were looking for stories. So he started writing down traditional tales for James Robertson, a Perthshire man who was Argyll’s chamberlain at Inveraray, Robertson sending them on to JFC for *PTWH* (NLS Adv. MS 50.1.14, *passim*). Robertson describes him at age 57 (NLS Adv. MS 50.1.14, f. 393Arv):

Dewar is really a clever old man, but absent-minded I believe. You ask ‘what is he like’. He has been a handsome powerful man in his day, but is now much bent, owing to severe rheumatism more than old age, and he suffers from a sore eye, which he got hurt at the Roseneath sawmill. He has a large forehead and good expression, and speaks with great vivacity when you commence *Gaelic talk*, more particularly if about Sgeulachds.

Dewar first met JFC at Inveraray in August 1860 (Campbell 1890: 364). As his letters show (e.g. NLS Adv. MS 50.2.1(i), f. 8r), JFC developed an enormous respect for him, being the only man he had ever met who was both a teller of tales and a writer of them.

The idea of collecting history tales first emerged in a letter from Dewar to Robertson in February 1860 (NLS Adv. MS 50.1.14, ff. 436v–436Ar): ‘I would wish to know if tradition about the ceathairnich or freebooters which was in Scotland at the time of the feudal systime would be accepted of among the sgeulachds, as I thing [*sic*] a few of them might be got which never yet has been printed.’ Robertson took this up eagerly, sending Dewar’s letter on to JFC with the question (NLS Adv. MS 50.1.14, f. 427Ar): ‘What

would you wish as to the Ceathairnich stories? Might he not be allowed to write one or two?’ And many years later JFC recalled (Mackechnie 1963: 36):

After publishing the fourth volume of the *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* in 1862, I suggested to the Duke of Argyll that he might gather interesting Traditional History by using the machinery which I have set going. Accordingly John Dewar was paid wages to wander about and write anything which he could gather. He was chosen because he was the most matter-of-fact man among my collectors.

So he went around Argyll, Arran, West Perthshire and Lochaber from 1862 to 1872 collecting history tales, and the result is the Dewar MSS.

John Dewar died of heart disease at his brother Donald’s house in Dumbarton on 13 December 1872 (Mackechnie 1963, facing p. 32, also p. 46). He was buried in the family grave at Arrochar, his name being clearly legible on the headstone. The task of writing his biography falls essentially into three periods: his life before 1859, which is hardly documented at all, except for a period in Rosneath in the 1840s when he was working as a woodsman, running a shop, and making notes in a diary now incorporated into D6; his life from 1859 to 1862, which is well documented, thanks to his participation in the *PTWH* project; and the itinerary of his travels as a ‘collector of traditions’ from 1862 to 1872, which it may be possible to reconstruct from the dates and places scattered around the Dewar MSS themselves.

Dewar really had three patrons, the Duke, his son Lord Lorne and JFC. The Duke provided the finance, and his most memorable contribution was to declare (Mackechnie 1963: 36), ‘Of course it would be of no use to print the Gaelic. What is printed and published must be the translation.’ Lord Lorne’s chief claims to fame are that he married a daughter of Queen Victoria and spent some years as Governor-General of Canada; he was genuinely interested in the project, though his big idea at first was to turn MacLean’s translations into English verse. He made a start on this, and published the results in Canada, with due acknowledgment to Dewar (Lorne 1884: 93, 133, 137, 148, 152). Subsequently he changed tack, and devoted an entire book to synopses of MacLean’s translations, with no acknowledgment whatever to Dewar (Lorne 1898). By then he had allowed his younger brother Archibald to publish MacLean’s translations of three of the stories (Campbell 1885: 348–56). JFC’s contribution consisted of providing Dewar with gentle guidance and commenting on the results; his advice and comments are bound into the Dewar MSS themselves.

What were Dewar’s collecting methods?

JFC once described Dewar as ‘a precise accurate old man with a wonderful memory and

small imagination’ (Mackechnie 1963: 31). The ‘small imagination’ provides scholars of his work with an interesting debating point, but the ‘wonderful memory’ is not in doubt. In his first ever letter to JFC, from Glendaruel, he says (NLS Adv. MS 50.1.10(ii), f. 380rv):

There is several people in this glen that has some of them sgeulachds. Some will tell them and others will not. I got two from a shoemaker of the name of Litch, he says heard them from his gran[d]father. I have not wrote them yet, but I have them on memory.

His method was to listen carefully to stories as they were being told, write them down in abbreviated form as soon as possible, re-write them fully (on one side of the paper only) whenever he had the leisure, go back to the narrator with his manuscript, hear them again, and note any omissions on the blank versos (cf. Wiseman 2006: 164–65; Stiùbhart 2007: 125–26). Interestingly, when he describes this process for the long tale ‘Eachdraidh Chonaill Gulban’, which he got from John MacNair, a shoemaker in Cowal, what he calls the ‘forgets’ are blamed not on himself but on MacNair. He tells JFC (NLS Adv. MS 50.1.4(i), f. 81r):

Sir / I send along with this letter the sgeulachd of Conall of Guilbeinn son to the King of Ireland. When I got it written, I read it to my outhar [= *author*]. He remembered some fo[r]gets, which caused mi to write a good maney sheets over again. Where the forgets were but small, I put a mark at the end of the lines and wrote the part wanted on the op[p]osite side of the leaf, a [= *or*] rather turned the leaf over and wrote on the other side.

Another of JFC’s collectors, Hector Urquhart, the gamekeeper at Ardkinglas, once challenged Dewar on his method, and reported the conversation to his patron (NLS Adv. MS 50.2.1(ii), ff. 243v–243Ar):

How is it, says I, that you have the same Gailic for every tale, no matter what part of the country you get them? He said that, since he was not a *fast* writer, that he could not keep the reciter a long time waiting on him, & that his plan was to get part of the story by heart, & when he had that written he went back, perhaps this way three or four times. Oh, says I, that acc[oun]ts for it. Now, if he is still collecting for you, I really think you should tell him to write on the spot, just as the letter says it.

Dewar experimented with different forms of shorthand in an attempt to solve the

problem, but in the long run he stuck with his original method, and if he actually did go back three or four times, it is a very acceptable one. The real flaw which Urquhart put his finger on was that Dewar was writing in his own dialect, so that the bulk of the Dewar MSS are in a sense a translation from one dialect into another. However, the findings of the Dewar Project to date suggest that elements of the narrators' dialects survive here and there; on the other side of the argument, the sheer bulk of the Dewar MSS means that for the nineteenth century we probably have more texts in Arrochar Gaelic than in any other dialect whatsoever.

What is Dewar's style?

This is arguably where the 'small imagination' comes in. His handwriting is generally excellent; he repeats statements to the point of tedium; he prefers nouns to pronouns; his favourite conjunction, by far, is *agus*; he totally excludes English; he presents place-names imaginatively rather than accurately; his orthography is inconsistent; he uses Bible-derived spellings such as *iar* for *air* and *se* for *e*; his punctuation is abysmal; his understanding of the function of capital letters is inadequate; he makes frequent errors of anticipation, and corrects them clumsily; and he often confuses letters. By this last I mean that the following pairs of letters are frequently confused with each other: *a/o*, *a/u*, *c/e*, *l/t*, e.g. *lach* for *loch*. He does not go back to cross his 't's, dot his 'i's or add accents until he has finished writing a word, phrase or sentence, which means that these are often wrongly placed.

All of these things were of course noticed by Dewar's contemporaries when he was part of a team. But there is one aspect of style where JFC had some success in making Dewar change his bad habits. He wrote to him in 1867 (Mackechnie 1963: 37–38):

Now mind that you write dialogue, for I know that these stories are always told as if the people mentioned were talking, and it is far better to write in the same way, thus: then Mackenzie stretched out his hand and said, 'There is the hand that slew thy father.' With this which is genuine and vigorous and dramatic, compare that narrative style into which you are apt to fall when you write, viz.: then Mackenzie stretched out his hand and told him that that was the hand with which he had killed his father. One is powerful and good, the other is poor and tame and Sassanach to boot.

Sure enough, Dewar's first rendering of the tale 'MacLarty of Dunaula and the Laird of Craignish' includes these words (D9, f. 94r):

Chaidh e an sin agus bheir e air an each, agus chuir e Fear Chroiginnis air drim an

eich, agus dh' iarr e air Fear Chroiginnis e a mharcachd air falbh dhachaidh cho luath is a b' urrainn e gu e bhi á cunnart.

(Then he went and seized the horse, put the laird of Craignish on its back, and asked the laird of Craignish to ride away home as quickly as possible in order to be out of danger.)

But his more polished rendering reads (D2, f. 290r):

. . . ghlac e an t each a bh' aig an trupair, Chuir e Fear Chroiginnis air drim an eich, agus thubhairt se ris, 'So a nis, marcaich iar falbh dhachaidh cho luath is as urrainn duit, agus bi á cunnart.'

(. . . he seized the trooper's horse, put the laird of Craignish on its back, and said to him, 'Here now, ride away home as quickly as you can, and get out of danger.')

Why are the Dewar MSS important?

One of the strengths of Dewar's work is in his careful logging of sources. The total number of his informants, including those who had provided him with tales since his childhood, is 328. Some of them are mere names, for others he provides incidental information, and for some it will be possible to work up a substantial biography. A good example of the latter is *Gilleasbaig Mac a' Chombaich*, Archibald Colquhoun, born 1782, the labourer at Port Appin who was Dewar's main source for the Appin Murder of 1752. Dewar tells us a great deal about him (Mackechnie 1963: 259; D1, ff. 325–6).

Dewar's stories represent history from the bottom up. We learn how people lived, what they ate, what they wore, how they thought. The subject-matter is spread over five hundred years. Presumably their accuracy increases gradually as we move through these five centuries from the time of Robert Bruce to the time of the Appin Murder. The 'epicentre' is Dewar's native Arrochar, which means that traditions from that area (which we may define as Dunbartonshire, Cowal, West Perthshire, Glen Shira and Glenorchy, covering especially MacFarlanes and MacGregors) are particularly well rehearsed and well checked. The more Dewar moved out to the north and west, however, the more robust was the traditional knowledge that he encountered, so it seems likely that the whole of his yield is pretty reliable. Descriptions of historical events which I assume can never be bettered by other sources include those of the battle of Tràigh Ghruinneart (1598), the battle of Glen Fruin (1603), the Massacre of Dunaverty (1647) and the Appin Murder (1752). Individuals whose adventures are related in detail include Robert Bruce, Colla Ciotach, Alastair mac Colla Chiotach and the tenth earl of Argyll. But an important part of the strength of the Dewar MSS lies in what they have to tell us about the lesser events and lesser people whose stories are important to their own areas, including, obviously,

the clans who inhabited them: Campbells, MacDonalds, MacLeans, MacDougalls, Stewarts, MacGregors, MacFarlanes, Lamonts, MacAlisters, MacIvers and so on, down to lesser clans such as the Macintyres, MacCorquodales, MacLartys and MacKays of Ugadale, for whose origins and early history the Dewar MSS constitute a major source. Going down into the substrata of Highland history, there are things for which the Dewar MSS will also constitute a major source once they have been fully analysed. What is the precise meaning of the term 'baron'? What do the stories tell us of fosterage? Or of archery? Already, as the first few texts of the 600 come under scrutiny, good questions are being raised by transcribers. For example, we are told that in the seventeenth century Dunaverty Castle had a piped water supply from a particular loch: what archaeological evidence is there for this? We are told that a boat was once carried over the hills on a winter's night from Loch Tay to Loch Earn: given the terrain and the likely weight of the boat, was this possible, and if so, how many men would be required to do it? And how common was it for the Highland people of the past to be able to swim?

The general characteristics of oral historical narrative may briefly be noted here: backwards chronology (earlier events seen through the prism of later ones); lack of dates; lack of awareness of published information; vague detail outside home area, precise detail within it; codification of sensitive issues (e.g. sex, rape, the supernatural); good deeds attached to a famous good person, bad deeds attached to a famous bad person; intrusion of stock motifs; big battles reduced to single combat. But as the late Dr John MacInnes once wrote (Newton 2006: 61), 'it would be a fascinating if monumental task to separate fact from fiction in all the historical tales; there is an enormous field for research here'. It can only be done a tale at a time, and the answers do not all lie in contemporary documents.

I mentioned Robert Bruce. Historians have established that Bruce's biography contains three Highland episodes. These may be characterised as: (1) 19 June 1306 to February 1307, the battles of Methven and Dalry, after which he disappears from view, reappearing finally in Carrick; (2) August 1308, the battle of the Pass of Brander; and (3) August–October 1309, a journey through the west from Lochbroom to Dunstaffnage (Barrow 1976: 226–42, 255–9, 272, 462). All three episodes appear to be described in the Dewar MSS; the pattern in which they are presented to us is typical of all the most important stories in the manuscripts as a whole, and is therefore worth describing here in some detail. Versions of parts of episode 1 appear in D9, ff. 85r and 87v (Dalry–Loch Lomond), D5, ff. 183–8 (Methven–Dalry–Loch Lomond–Glen Loyne), and D5, ff. 228–9 (Kintyre). Versions of episode 2, four in all, appear in D5, ff. 226–7, D6, pp. 196–7, and D9, ff. 114r and 261r. And a version of episode 3 appears in D5, ff. 230–31 (Ardtornish–Uist). These were got from a variety of informants local to the places in question. In D5 Dewar then attempts to stitch them together (adding some

bits of material and dropping others) into a continuous text which might be called a saga, with the following itinerary: ff. 195–8 the battle of the Pass of Brander, ff. 198–213 Methven–Dalry–Loch Lomond–Bute–Arran–Kintyre–Arran–Kintyre–Rathlin–Carrick–Arran, ff. 213–16 Arran–Ardtornish–Uist–Arran, ff. 216–23 Arran–Carrick–Stirling–Bannockburn, f. 223 the battle of the Pass of Brander again. Probably the main conclusion that may be drawn from this is that Dewar has found a recollection of episode 3 and wrongly slotted it into the middle of episode 1, wishing us to believe that when Bruce disappeared from view in the winter of 1306–7 he went to Ardtornish and Uist. But it should also be pointed out that one of the characters in the Pass of Brander story is William Wallace, who had been dead since 23 August 1305; this is probably why Dewar was so unsure whether to place it at the beginning of the saga or the end.

All three episodes are described in the principal written source for the great king's biography, John Barbour's epic poem *The Bruce* (Duncan 1997: 96–203, 360–67, 562–7), though it is perhaps worth noting that Barbour places the western expedition (episode 3) after Bannockburn, not before. The poem has existed in manuscript since c. 1380 and in print since 1571; further printings followed in 1616, 1620, 1648, 1670, 1672, 1737, 1790, etc. It is therefore extremely likely to have influenced Gaelic oral tradition, and it will be essential to carry out a detailed comparison between Barbour and Dewar, paying particular attention to the battles. One incident might be cited here. Barbour tells us that after Dalry, Bruce is riding through an unnamed narrow place when he is set upon by two men called Makyne Drosser (clearly *Mac an Dorsair*) with an accomplice. He kills them all, the weapon mentioned being his sword (Duncan 1997: 116–19). Dewar tells us that after Dalry, Bruce is going along on foot by a burn called *Allt nan Saor* when he is set upon by an unnamed weaver and his two sons. He kills them all, the weapon mentioned being his battle-axe (D5, ff. 186r, 202–3; D9, f. 87v). The climax of Dewar's story is that the dead weaver is left clutching Bruce's cloak with its brooch, which thereby becomes the 'brooch of Lorn'. No cloak or brooch is mentioned by Barbour.

This suggests that the Bruce stories in the Dewar MSS were informed by Barbour, but also have a life of their own. Is it possible that the 'life of their own' is true history? While Barbour has the advantage of near-contemporaneity, Dewar has the advantage that his stories were told by inhabitants of the districts where the events took place, in the same language that was spoken by their fourteenth-century ancestors. Passages about Bruce like the following are tantalisingly circumstantial (D5, f. 204r):

Cha robh e eolach 's an dùthaich, agus an aite dh'a dol rathad taobh an aird an iar de Lochlaomain, b'ann rathad taobh na aird an ear a chaidh e, fhuair e bhàir-choise bha dol seach a Bheinne-ghlaise, Chaidh e air aghart seach Airdshlis, Dun phuille-Chrò, seach braigh Phuill-a-chrò, bha camhanaich na h-oidhche tighinn

aig an am sin, agus trath rainig e braigh na caoille braigh aite ris an abaireir Sgairneach nan cat, thainig an oidhche dorcha . . .

(Being a stranger to the district, instead of going by the west side of Loch Lomond, he took the east side. He found the footpath that went past Beinglas, then carried on past Ardleish, the Doune of Pollochro and the hills of Pollochro. The dusk of the evening was coming on at that point, and when he reached the high ground above the forest, above a place called *Sgairneach nan Cat* ('the Scree of the Cats'), the night grew dark . . .)

This is a case where there is basically nothing except Barbour with which to compare the text. On the other hand, a well-known incident like Bruce's encounter with MacKay of Ugadale in Kintyre exists in many versions (including two by Dewar), none of them quite the same as any other (Black 2017: 6–9). This warns us that if we had other accounts of Bruce's Loch Lomond itinerary, they would probably not all be the same. But then, this applies to Barbour too. He had his own agendas.

Half-a-dozen biographies of Bruce and two Hollywood films about him, the excellent *Outlaw King* and the lower-budget *Robert the Bruce*, have appeared since 1965. All have been heavily dependent on Barbour. Once the Bruce stories in the Dewar MSS have been published, there will be something new to say.

Another strength of these manuscripts is women's history. A tale from Arran, 'Nic Ille Chiurr 's Mac Alasdair', is a good example (D6, pp. 472, 504–18). Its protagonist is a heroic woman who suffers domestic abuse. All of Dewar's women live in a world blighted by inadequate resources, leading to cattle-raiding, blood-feuds, casual violence, rape. There are codes of masculinity which all men aspire to, but few are able to fulfil (Dziadowiec 2018). Over and over in these stories, it is noticeable that when a community is in danger, the men hang back, and a woman comes forward to deal with the situation. We meet countless females who are strong, independent, or both: the indomitable Màiri Mhòr nighean Dhonnchaidh Ghlais Mhic Eanraig from Glencoe, wife of the farmer at Arivean in Glen Lochy, who shelters and protects the young tenth earl of Argyll in her shieling bothy when he is fleeing from his enemies (D5, ff. 324–5); the sister of MacKinnon of Corriehiam in Arran, a *ban-tuathanach* ('female farmer') whom we meet hard at work with her farm-servants at Achnabeinne (D4, f. 249r); Eilidh Mhòr Nic Bhrìdein from Laglingartan on Lochfyneside, wife of the farmer at Gaunan on Lochlongside, who tries to persuade the men to follow her when the Gaunan cattle are stolen, but fails, and recovers the cattle all by herself. And so on, *ad infinitum*.

All in all, women are much more to the fore in the Dewar MSS than formal published history would lead us to expect. Why should this be? Is it coming in some way from Dewar himself, who never married? Only 8% of his informants were women, and it is

not my impression that the stories about women were necessarily told by women; in any case, women are regularly portrayed in this way in tales which are mainly about men. Certainly we know that a high proportion of the first stories Dewar ever heard in his childhood were told by women. Does it have to do with the nature of the storytelling environment? Or does respect and concern for women and their lives have to do with social class? Or with the custom of fostership? Or with Gaelic society as a whole? As with so many issues, an attempt to answer these questions can only be made when the Dewar MSS have been thoroughly sifted and analysed, but it is fair to suggest that they are a vital source, probably *the* vital source, for Highland women's history.

What is being done with the Dewar MSS?

The first scholarly edition of any part of the Dewar MSS to appear was Prof. Angus Matheson's valuable paper 'A Traditional Account of the Appin Murder', taken from D8, ff. 134r–143r (Matheson 1939). Next came his 'Traditions of Alasdair Mac Colla', taken from D9, ff. 163–92, 100–01 (Matheson 1958). At that time the duke's archives in Inveraray Castle were still closed to the public, but the Rev. John Mackechnie was allowed the privilege of borrowing the first tome of Hector MacLean's translation in order to prepare *The Dewar Manuscripts Volume One* (1963). A subsequent visitor in the late 1960s and early 1970s (for other purposes) was Eric Cregeen, and since then there has been a gradual process of opening up the archives as a whole. In parallel, there have been various plans for editing the Dewar MSS, all of which envisaged publishing the original Gaelic as well as an English translation, but all of which have fallen by the wayside. The principal name associated with these plans was that of Donald Archie MacDonald. He died in 1999, greatly regretted, and the sole outcome was that the School of Scottish Studies obtained a microfilm of the manuscripts, which was used by younger scholars to produce one excellent book (Newton 1999) and one invaluable paper (Wiseman 2006).

In 2012 a professional archivist, Ishbel MacKinnon, was appointed at Inveraray. In 2013 the archives, now known as the Argyll Papers, were moved out of the castle into a separate building. Later the same year Ms MacKinnon found MacLean's translation, which had been lost since Mackechnie's time, covered in mould (but otherwise undamaged) in a turret off one of the castle libraries. In 2015 a support body called the Friends of the Argyll Papers was founded. In the same year the Dewar MSS and MacLean's translation were photographed and digitised in their entirety by my wife Máire. Then, late in 2017, work began on transcribing both of these collections.

The work is being done by volunteers world-wide under the aegis of the Friends of the Argyll Papers. We have a publication programme which took its original cue from Dr Wiseman's advice (2006: 163) that, rather than following the order of the texts in the manuscripts as Mackechnie had done, 'a better editorial policy would have been

one where the stories would have been arranged thematically in order to give a cohesive structure to the types of tradition represented within the collection'. Such thematic rearrangement is essential, because (as has been shown for the Bruce material) Dewar's stories went through various drafts and reincarnations, which pop up haphazardly through the ten manuscripts, and all and any of these contain vital information. In 2013 I used a draft catalogue of the Dewar MSS which Dr Wiseman had kindly sent me to see what thematic patterns emerged, then I grouped these into subjects which could provide the titles of ten books:

1. The Oldest Songs and Stories
2. The Montrose Wars
3. The Earls and Dukes of Argyll
4. The Barons of Argyll
5. The People of Argyll
6. Cowal, Lennox and Perthshire
7. Kintyre and Arran
8. Appin and Glencoe
9. The Islands and the North
10. Miscellaneous and Indexes

This involved a combination of geographical, historical and social approaches. By 2018, however, with the need for a simple, practical scheme which would make the books as popular and saleable as possible, the geographical approach had won out, and there is now an assumption that each volume will be separately indexed. In alphabetical order, the new arrangement is:

1. Appin and Lorn
2. Arran
3. Cowal
4. Glencoe, Lochaber and the North
5. Inveraray, Mid Argyll and Knapdale
6. Islay, Jura and Colonsay
7. Kintyre
8. Mull, Coll, Tiree and Morvern
9. Perthshire and Loch Lomond
10. Texts with no geographical location

This scheme combines local interest with the dynamic of the texts. No. 1, for example, has much on Stewarts, MacDougalls and Campbells. No. 4 is about MacDonalDs, Camerons and MacLeods. No. 5 contains stories about Alastair mac Colla Chiotaich and the Campbells. And no. 9 consists mainly of material on MacGregors and MacFarlanes.

As far as possible, the stories will be organised chronologically within each volume. Good progress has been made with the work of transcription and translation, and it is hoped that, all going well, no. 6 will be published in 2021, no. 9 in 2023, no. 7 in 2025, and no. 2 in 2027. Beyond that it would be foolish to speculate.

The texts include many otherwise unrecorded Gaelic place-names, and each book will include a full gazetteer for the region in question, including any relevant names that occur in stories published in other volumes. The gazetteer for Arran has already been compiled, and includes many names additional to those featured in the standard work on Arran place-names (Fraser 1999). Naturally the presence of the names in stories provides excellent clues to their location.

Of course basic transcription and translation are almost the least of it. Basic transcripts have to be turned into edited transcripts, according to a set of criteria which have now been worked out. The fundamental principle of these criteria is that Dewar's orthography is allowed to stand, but his punctuation is not, so that his texts are allowed to flow, 'letting Dewar speak'. The fundamental principle of the translation is that it is into natural English, ignoring Dewar's unnecessary repetitions and overuse of *agus*. MacLean's translation is old-fashioned, stilted and sometimes incomplete, but contains occasional useful insights, so it will always be consulted. Edited transcript and translation will be on facing pages, and each volume will have end-notes on historical and linguistic matters. In addition, the first few will contain biographical essays on Hector MacLean and John Dewar, indexes to the Dewar MSS (cross-referenced to the MacLean MSS), and a catalogue of the MacLean MSS (cross-referenced to the Dewar MSS). A good deal of this work has already been done. The MacLean essay will be in the 'Islay, Jura and Colonsay' volume, and the Dewar essay in the 'Perthshire and Loch Lomond' one.

Conclusion

The Dewar MSS, one of the great nineteenth-century Gaelic folklore collections, are a vast resource for the history of the Highlands in the period 1306–1752. Ever since they were created by John Dewar in the period 1862–72, they have been underused and misrepresented. One of the reasons for this is the existence, since 1879–81, of Hector MacLean's partial translation. Another is the fact that the collection is split between Inveraray and Edinburgh. Two of the main published outcomes have failed even to mention Dewar's name (Lorne 1898; Matheson 1958). In his edition of part of MacLean's translation, Mackechnie (1963) effectively confused the public by using Dewar's name in the title of his book while saying very little about his manuscripts. These injustices have now, however, been corrected by Wiseman (2006).

The present Dewar Project is aimed at publishing the Dewar MSS as a series of ten

regionally based volumes. It is believed that this will be the best way to bed the stories into their geographical and historical context. As in the present paper, issues of personal biography, collecting methods and literary style will be addressed. The intention is that these volumes will serve as valuable tools for historians, ethnologists, onomasticians, dialectologists and lexicographers, and that for generations of scholars they will inform the debate about the relationship between oral tradition and history. The first volume (Islay, Jura and Colonsay) will be published in 2021, and it is hoped that subsequent volumes will appear at two-year intervals.

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