

## *Around the Archives*

# Resources on Fish, Fishing and Fisheries in the School of Scottish Studies Archives, University of Edinburgh

*Kirsty M. Stewart*

The School of Scottish Studies Archives was established in 1951 to collect and preserve all aspects of Scottish culture whether rural, coastal or urban. Since then it has amassed over 33,000 recordings<sup>1</sup> relating to Scotland's languages, people, landscape, ways of life, crafts, traditions, music, song and oral culture. Alongside the internationally recognised sound archive is a photo archive, manuscript archives, some video and film, and an extensive library including some special collections.<sup>2</sup> The collection is not a static one with student projects and external donations deposited every year. In collecting cultural information on a nation such as Scotland surrounded by and filled with waterways, it is no surprise that the Archives contain many different types of information relating to fish, fishing and fisheries.

### **Online resources**

#### *Sound Archive*

The main access point for the School of Scottish Studies Archives (hereafter SSSA) is the Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches (hereafter TaD/KoR) website (<https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk>). Here, about 36,000 original audio tracks in English, Scots and Gaelic are available for anyone to listen to. Recordings from BBC Radio nan Gàidheal and National Trust for Scotland's (hereafter NTS) Canna Collection are also represented through TaD. Recordings from the SSSA continue to be added to this resource, as much of the collection is still only available in-house. The content from SSSA includes folklore, songs, music, history, poetry, traditions, stories and other information. The website was developed during 2022 to create an advanced search function. The following is a list of results for fish- and fishing-related terms:

<sup>1</sup> A recording can be made up of one or more tracks.

<sup>2</sup> For further information see C. Macaulay, 'The School of Scottish Studies Archives', *Scottish Archives*, 12 (2006), 81–94.

Search Term	Number of Results (tracks and informants)	Search Term	Number of Results (tracks and informants)
Fish	145	Iasg	206
Fishing	249	Èisg	138
Fisher	114	Iasgair	3009
Fisherman	407	Iasgairean	171
Fishermen	250	Iasgach	1172
Fishery	18	Iasgaich	240
Fisheries	35	Tuathanas-èisg	10
Fish-farm	125		

Note that the search results displayed are for SSSA, BBC and NTS Canna Collection combined.

Below are some examples of catalogue entries for sound recordings available online. They come from fieldwork recordings but the information provided ranges from place-names, exposition of fishing techniques, social history, oral tradition and natural history, to Shetland language and humour.

**Title:** Fishing in Jura **Date:** 1971.07.13

**Summary:** There is a place on the Cracaig shore called Leum Beathag, where a woman, trapped while fishing, had to jump across. Hand-lines [droghachan] were used for fishing. Most fishermen were from Islay. Dan MacDougall has seen herring so plentiful in Loch Tarbert that boys were gathering them on the beach. Saithe, lythe and mackerel were the most common fish caught in Jura. Dan has heard of gurnet [cnòdan] being kept alive for a few days in peat-dust.

**Item note:** Drogha is the local term for ‘dorgh’.

**Contributors:** Dan MacDougall **Reporters:** John MacLean

**Recording location:** **County:** Argyllshire **Island:** Jura

**Track duration:** 0:03:01 **Language:** English **Genre:** Story, Information

**Audio quality:** Good **Source type:** Reel-to-reel tape

SSSA, SA1971.118.B14;15, <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/41118>

**Title:** Ag iasgach timcheall Mhùideirt [Fishing around Moidart]

**Date:** 1959.05

**Summary:** Herring fishing went on both summer and winter; cod was fished in spring. They would also catch mackerel, saithe, and lythe. The contributor describes the boats used, the nets and lines, and the types of bait, such as lugworms and sand-eels. The people used to salt the herring for the winter; cod was salted and dried.

**Contributors:** Angus MacNeill **Reporters:** Calum Iain Maclean, Ian Whitaker, Basil Megaw  
**Recording location:** **County:** Inverness-shire **Parish:** Arisaig and Moidart **Village:** Smirisary  
**Track duration:** 0:08:39 **Language:** Gaelic **Genre:** Information  
**Audio quality:** Good **Source type:** Reel-to-reel tape  
SSSA, SA1959.26.B4, <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/69212>

**Title:** Nicknames for people from different Shetland parishes.

**Date:** 1973.04.16

**Summary:** Laura Malcolmson lists nicknames used throughout Shetland for people from different parishes: Cunningsburgh – the ravens; Sandwick – gruellie heads; Whalsay – piltocks [saithe]; Burra – haddock; Scallowa – sma drink; Ness – mealie kjuties [fish] or mealie kyod [saithe]; Lunnasting – hoe [dogfish]; Skerries – oily muggies [fish stomachs]; Yell – sheep tief; Tingwall – milkie beds; Sound – bogies; Quarff – njoorts; Nesting – gaats [castrated pigs]; Bressa – crackers [good speakers]; Lerwick – whitings. Fladdabister came under Cunningsburgh ravens.

**Contributors:** Laura Malcolmson **Reporters:** Alan J. Bruford  
**Recording location:** **County:** Shetland **Parish:** Dunrossness  
**Island:** Shetland Mainland **Village:** Cunningsburgh  
**Track duration:** 0:03:02 **Language:** Scots **Genre:** Information  
**Audio quality:** Good **Source type:** Reel-to-reel tape  
SSSA, SA1973.64.A7, <http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/30910>

In 2020, using many and varied recordings from SSSA, the Gaelic film 'Iorram' (Boat Song) went on general release. The film used over eighty sound recordings from SSSA to accompany contemporary footage of life in Hebridean fishing communities. The film can be watched online on the website <https://iorramfilm.com>.

#### *Photo Archive*

The University of Edinburgh Image Collections website (<https://images.is.ed.ac.uk>) holds approximately 250 photographs from SSSA including a collection of documentary photographs by Jeremy Sutton-Hibbert, acquired by the University in 2021. Sutton-Hibbert's collection includes thirty-one images of North Sea fishing taken between 1992 and 1995 (SSSA, SSSA/JSH1). Images show crews at work and at rest, at sea and on shore, preparing and selling the catch (Plate 1).

Many SSSA Photo Archive images were added to SCRAN, a subscription-based website accessible to those in Scotland with a Local Authority or University library card (<https://www.scran.ac.uk>). A search for 'fish' reveals forty photographs including this one of Rena Welsh, shelling mussels for baiting the lines used by the Gourdon fishermen, taken by Ian MacKenzie in 1985 (Plate 2). Each line had up to a hundred smaller lines or 'snoods' with eight to ten hooks

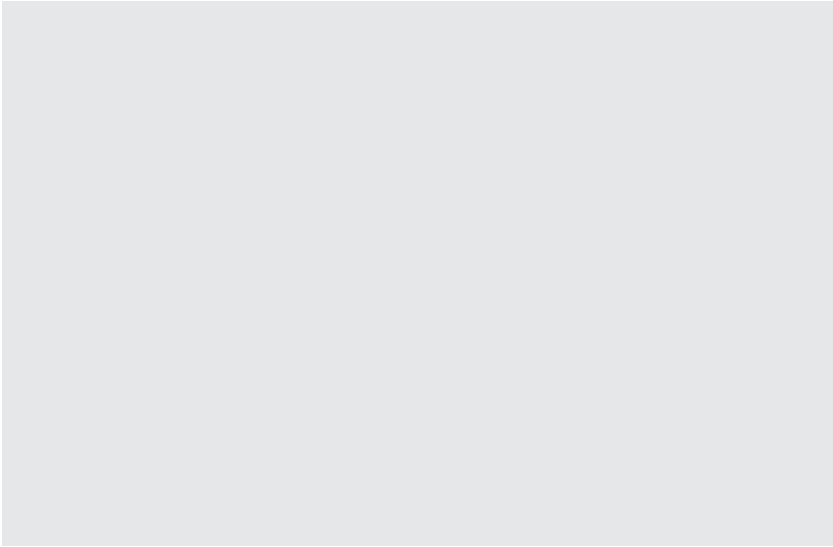


Plate 1 Bill Smith secures nets on the deck of the *Argosy*, North Sea, February 1992 (SSSA/JSH1/6).

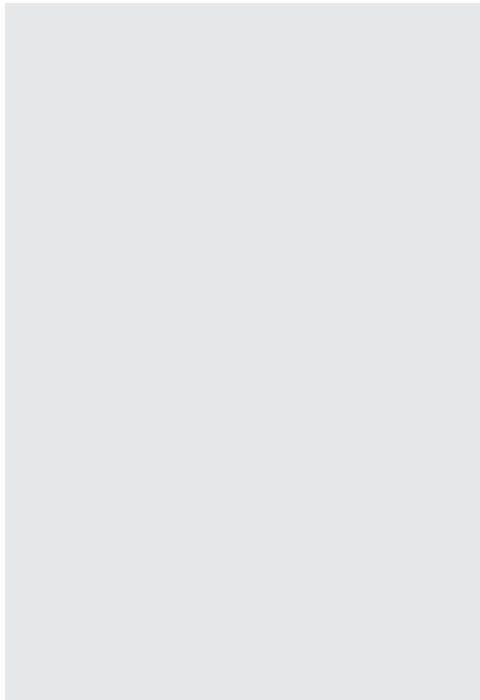


Plate 2 Rena Welsh baiting lines (SSSA, BIII/6/c1/8599).

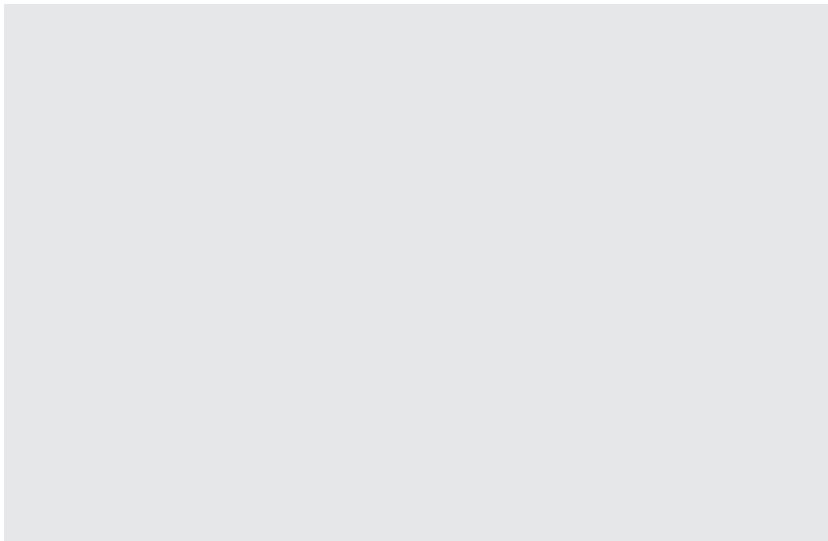


Plate 3 Spearing fish, South Ford, South Uist. Photo by Werner Kissling, 1936 (SSSA, BIII/3c/3038).

attached. Line-caught fish does not risk the damage caused by being jostled in nets, and Gordoun was one of the last ports where the technique was used.

During 2021, SSSA celebrated its seventieth anniversary with a number of events to mark this milestone. One of the key events was the launch of a *Google Arts and Culture* story, 'Scottish coasts, communities and crafts', presenting archival materials from an ethnological perspective (<https://g.co/arts/NPDicTdBK8gXbkdY8>). Included in this presentation are photographs of stake-net fishing on the River Cree and spear fishing between Benbecula and South Uist (Plate 3)

### **Only available on-site**

On-site at 29 George Square, Edinburgh, the SSSA Search Room finding aids include: an in-house database to audio recordings; chronological registers summarising tracks and recordings; transcription registers for a small proportion of the audio collection; index cards.

### *Sound and Video Archive*

An audio streaming service became available in June 2021. This makes recordings that are not included on *Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches* available on request. Researchers can stream recordings remotely or use a computer in the Centre for Research Collections, the main access point for the University of Edinburgh's archives and special collections. Examples below include recordings on salmon

fishing in Kincardineshire from the Linguistic Survey of Scotland, a student project on a West Lothian fish farm and video footage of line fishing in Gourdon.

**Title:** Salmon fishing **Date:** 1959.08

**Summary:** Manager of salmon fishing for Powrie of Perth for twenty-seven years. Bag net. Leader. Fixed to rock. How nets work. How to get salmon out of net. Motor cobble. Oars before then. Boats the same make but lighter. Six-oar and four-oar boats.

**Informant/artist:** MAIN William

**Native area/country:** Kincardineshire: Portlethen

**Fieldworker(s):** J. Y. Mather

SSSA, LSS007UNNUMBERED A.7 [Linguistic Survey of Scotland].

**Title:** Fish-Farming at Beecraigs Trout Farm

**Summary:** A procedural study of a West Lothian fish farm with photos; diagrams; booklet on cooking trout.

**Native area:** West Lothian, Linlithgow, Beecraigs Loch

**Fieldworker(s):** Christian Matraka [SE I]

SSSA, MP1987.22 [Projects]

**Title:** Line Fishing **Date** 1985.5

**Informant(s):** WELSH Alec, SCOTT Jim, WELSH Rena, WELSH Alec Snr, MELLIS Bob, WELSH Isabel, CRIGGIE Bobby

**Native area:** Kincardineshire, Gourdon

**Fieldworker:** Neil MacQueen **Camera operator:** Neil MacQueen

**Comments:** u.Matic. Betamax with betamax copy. See VX006 and VX012 for rough edit. Part of a series of tapes VA1984.05–19.

SSSA, VA1985.05 [Video Archive]

#### *Photo Archive*

Photographs taken in the course of fieldwork, such as those by Ian MacKenzie, make up the largest part of the Photo Archive as well as collections by well-known photographers such as Werner Kissling (1895–1988) or Robert Atkinson (1915–95). A database links catalogue information to digitised images although physical copies can also be consulted in the search room. Among the photographs are images of fishing equipment, people preparing and repairing lines and nets, fishing-related sites and fishing vessels (Plates 4 and 5). Often photos will show traditional knitwear and textiles but may not bear a knitting, gansey or fishing subject in the index, so researchers on related topics may need to search creatively.

#### *Manuscript Archive*

Perhaps the best known of SSSA's manuscript collection are the Maclagan manuscripts (SSSA, MML). This is a collection of over nine thousand pages of folklore, customs and belief collected between 1892 and 1902 at the instigation

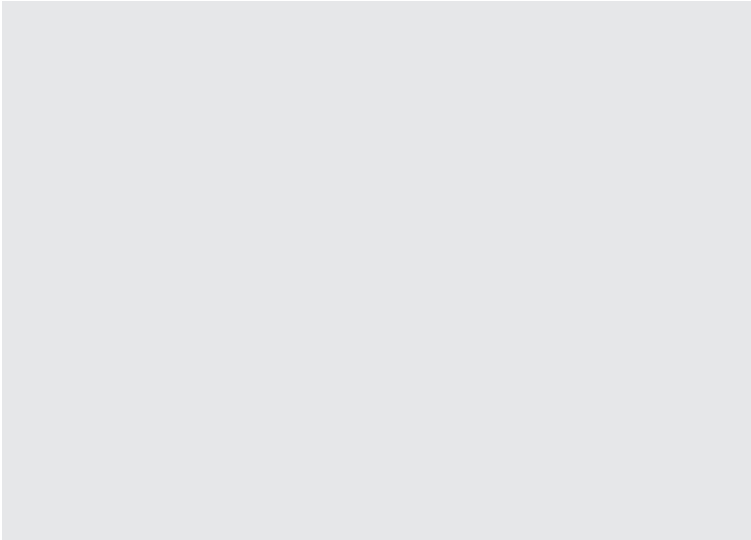


Plate 4 Drying haddocks, Noltland, Westray, Orkney; donated by Miss Audrey Henshall, July 1957 (SSSA, BIII/1e/1418).

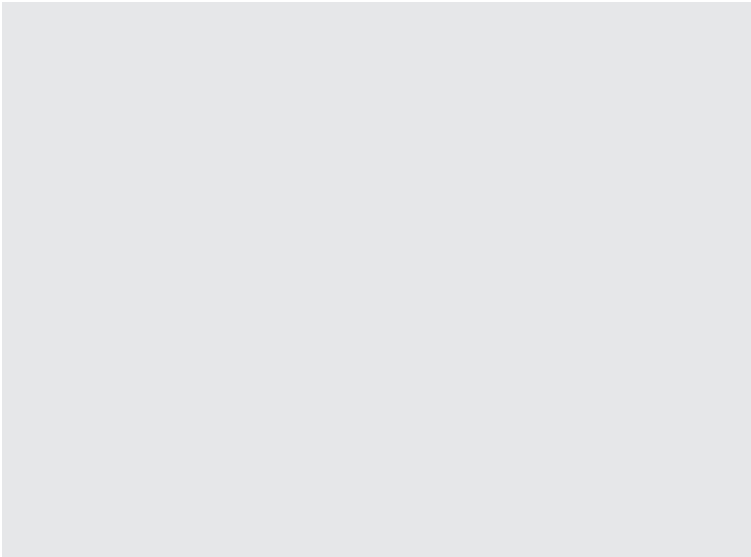


Plate 5 Making a cuddy net. The net is lowered into the water from the boat and boiled potato after chewing is spat into the water by the fisherman; when sufficient saithe are feeding, the net is hauled up. Port of Ness, Lewis. Photo by James McGeoch, 1952 (SSSA, BIII/3/c1/3940).

of Dr Robert Maclagan (1839–1919) for the Folklore Society. There is an in-house Microsoft Access database for the collection searchable by name, place and subject. In April 2022, the majority of the manuscripts were digitised and made available through the University’s Open Books website (<https://openbooks.is.ed.ac.uk>). Here users can download PDFs of approximately fifty images at a time. Work is still to be done to link the database information to the images but that the images are now freely available is a significant step forward in access. Below are two examples from the collection. The first is a place-name anecdote about Loch-nan-Gad, Kintyre, a ‘gad’ being a tough willow found growing around the loch: ‘When people used to fish trout on this loch they strung trout on a gad for carrying them home’ (Plate 6).

The second is a description collected from J. A. MacLeod, Auchoish School, Ardrishaig, of the practice of using the oil from the offals of fish in order to provide fuel for the cruisean or cruise lamp. The oil was also used as a lubricant in carding wool (armadh is oiling wool) (Plate 7).

Also of use to the researcher are the ‘Subject Boxes’, a relic of pre-Internet days, when copies of resources found elsewhere were gathered by archives to support in-person research. They contain printed items, letters, newspaper clippings and ephemera relating to various ethnological topics. For fishing, the relevant Subject Box is BIII. The items shown in Plate 8 relate to fishing vessels such as herring smacks and skiffs.

The SSSA administrative archives are in the process of being box-listed and may, in time, reveal records relating to the study of fishing and fisheries, whether through linguistics, lore, oral history, techniques, etc. and the decision-making around those studies. The Place-Name Archive and Linguistic Surveys of Scots and of Gaelic will also yield information on fishing more indirectly, SSSA PN, LSS and GLS.

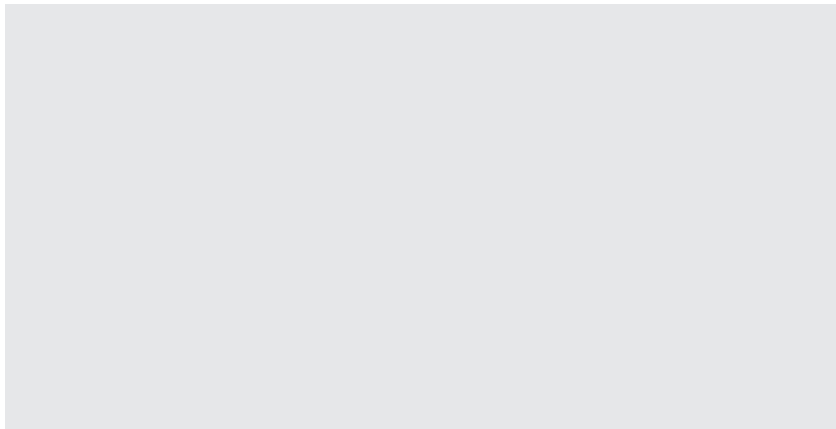


Plate 6 A place-name anecdote about Loch-nan-Gad, Kintyre (SSSA, MML/2347).



Plate 7 Use of offal from  
fish in the Highlands  
(SSSA, MML/241).

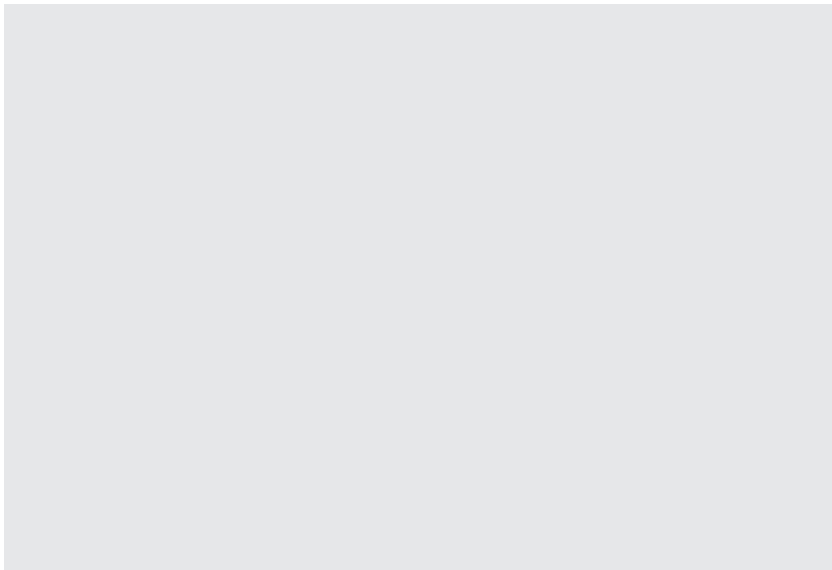
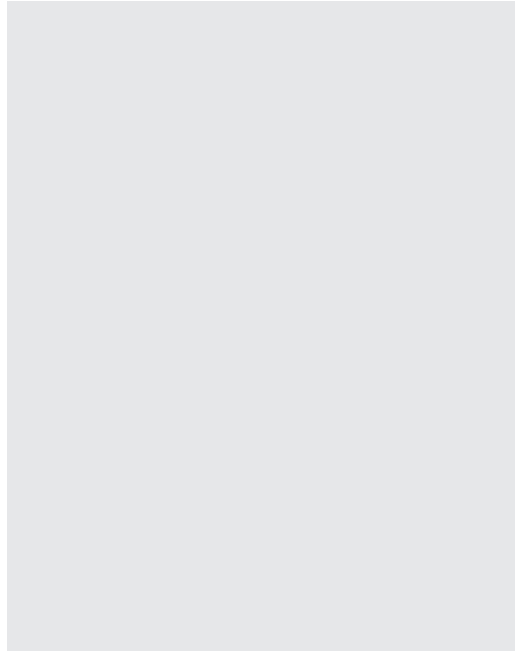


Plate 8 Letter from Walter Wyndling to Jack Aitken, Dictionary of the Older Scottish  
Tongue (SSSA, Subject Box/BIII/4c).

*Printed Materials*

The Scottish Studies Library, which grew up around the research needs of those collecting for the SSSA, is available to University staff, students and external researchers. The University of Edinburgh's online catalogue for books, *DiscoverEd*, can be found at <https://discovered.ed.ac.uk>. It is possible to refine your search by Library, selecting Scottish Studies Library. The in-house classification system has fishing under: I – Material Culture and Art; I6 – Fishing and Boats.

The SSSA's journal *Tocher* is available at <https://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/celtic-scottish-studies/research/publications/in-house/tocher>. Articles in *Tocher* are usually short form and are centred around SSSA's archival holdings whether the format is sound, text or photographic. Relevant volumes for fish and fishing include:

Volume	Issue	Article
No. 19	Autumn 1975	Jamesie Laurenson, oral historian of Fetlar; fishing memories; three Child ballads; cures and other lore. 40pp.
No. 20	Winter 1975	Ceit An Tailleir (Mrs K Dix), Berneray storyteller and bard; fishing methods, customs, songs, etc.; three versions of Child 2; New Year songs, etc. 44pp.
No. 21	Spring 1976	The Stewarts of Blair, singers and storytellers in travelling family; fishing tragedy, comedy and hardship; Arran tradition, customs, etc. 44pp.
No. 23	Autumn 1976	Bessie Whyte, Perthshire traveller; tales, riddles, Scots and Gaelic songs; Sutherland fishing; seasonal customs, etc. 40pp.
No. 41	1987–88	Christina Shaw and Peggy Morrison, sisters from Harris; Gaelic waulking songs, sea songs, love songs and laments; Ailean Duinn from third sister; Mary Martin; traditions, etc. 86pp.
No. 46	Summer 1993	Lewis Grant, a Highlander in Archangel; East and West coast fishing; Durness bards; Balquhiddy dairy; Wigtown childhood; obituaries and tributes. 64pp.

Ongoing volunteer work is improving the indexing of *Tocher*, so that the complete series can be added to *Edinburgh Diamond*, a website of library-supported Open Access journals (<http://journals.ed.ac.uk>).

Originally produced by SSSA but now compiled by the Celtic and Scottish Studies Department, the journal *Scottish Studies* is a useful resource (<http://journals.ed.ac.uk/ScottishStudies/index>, for volumes 34–6). According to 'Remembering Jim Mather' by J. C. Catford, Mather published two articles in *Scottish Studies* directly relating to fishing in which 'he brought to bear his enormous professional knowledge of boats and sea fishing'. The 1966 article deals with fishing boats, gear and techniques, and the one on 'Fishing Communities of the East Coast' from 1969 deals with a 'remarkable coincidence between the

distribution of certain conventions and techniques in the traditional small-line fishing and the use of certain vowel systems in dialect speech'.<sup>3</sup>

- 'Aspects of the Linguistic Geography of Scotland II. East Coast fishing,' *Scottish Studies*, 10 (1966), 129–53.
- 'Aspects of the Linguistic Geography of Scotland III. Fishing Communities of the East Coast', *Scottish Studies*, 13:1 (1969), 1–16.

### **Archives service**

Archives on fish, fishing, fisheries and associated topics can be found in a variety of formats across the SSSA's holdings. Staff are accustomed to helping users navigate the various finding aids whether they are online or in-house. As of April 2022, the SSSA Search Room and Library remain closed to users, however, as was the case throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, staff continue to monitor email daily and do what they can to assist with enquiries: [HeritageCollections@ed.ac.uk](mailto:HeritageCollections@ed.ac.uk). Manuscripts, sound recordings, photographs, videos and finding aids can all be made available on request and by appointment in the Centre for Research Collections in the University's Main Library. The SSSA blog contains contributions on the archives from regular users as well as staff past and present: <http://libraryblogs.is.ed.ac.uk/sssa/category/blog/>. An active social media presence is maintained on Twitter: @EU\_SSSA and on Instagram: @scottish.studies.archives.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Catford, 'Remembering Jim Mather', *Scottish Studies*, 34 (2006), 227–9, <https://doi.org/10.2218/ss.v34.2724>.