

Moder Dy



MSDS
Marine

Cladaichean to Laebraks

Inclusive heritage engagement in Scottish island communities
Project Summary



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



HISTORIC
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THE HISTORY OF BURRA
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Shetland *arts*

Outreach to Ownership Pilot Project

Background

Outreach to Ownership was funded by a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The Outreach to Ownership pilot project was developed and run by Historic England and Historic Environment Scotland. The purpose of the Outreach to Ownership pilot was to enable selected organisations to co-deliver innovative research designed to investigate the social and economic value of a range of approaches to inclusive community engagement across the culture sector.

The organisations selected to receive this funding were:

- MSDS Marine and Moder Dy (Scotland)
- The Scottish Council on Archives (Scotland)
- Heritage Lincolnshire (England)
- The Art House (England)
- The Churches Conservation Trust (England), the Heritage Trust Network (Scotland/England), Historic Churches Scotland and Churches Trust for Cumbria (Scotland/England)

Additional in-kind support was given in Shetland by the Burra History Group and Shetland Arts Development Agency.

Cladaichean to Laebraks

Outreach to Ownership focused on inclusive engagement in heritage; the MSDC Marine/Moder Dy project looked at how we can move towards achieving this in the isles of Skye and Shetland. A concurrent project run by Cardiff University with MSDS Marine also allowed data collection to extend the scope of the current project to the Western Isles (North Uist, Benbecula, Grimsay and South Uist).

Aims and Objectives

- Identify island audiences and determine a baseline of heritage engagement;
- Identify challenges to engagement in island communities, in contrast to mainland areas, and possible strategies for overcoming these challenges;
- Test and evaluate key potential recommendations, while exploring differences between island settings; and
- Evaluate project data and experiences and provide recommendations for how engagement with heritage in island settings could be improved in future.

Methods

- Identify island audiences and existing data on heritage engagement (i.e. census data, Scottish Household Survey data, Local Authority data).
- Use these data to baseline information on heritage engagement within island communities;
- Undertake surveys and consultation with local audiences to identify barriers to engagement, and potential solutions;
- Run a series of engagement events on Skye and Shetland designed to overcome identified barriers;
- Evaluate each engagement event to enable assessment of inclusivity at the individual events; and compare data from Skye and Shetland to draw conclusions about intra-island differences.

Barriers to engagement

An academic review was conducted ahead of the consultation period, to highlight the demographics of the areas and barriers to engagement already identified. For instance the Scottish Household Survey identifies three main barriers to heritage engagement: time, cost and travel. People with disabilities then faced a whole host of extra barriers to participation on top of these issues.

Consultation

Consultation with local stakeholders was conducted via face-to-face meetings, phone and email conversations, and an online meeting between Skye and Shetland. Stakeholder organisations included MSDS Marine, Moder Dy, Museum of the Isles, Sleat Local History Society, Shetland Museum and Archives, Ability Shetland, The Moving on Employment Project, Archaeology Shetland, Skye and Lochalsh Access Panel.

Engagement Strategy

An engagement strategy was developed following the feedback from stakeholders and the academic review.

GIS Workshops

Two online GIS workshops were planned as part of the project, using free, open source Geographic Information Systems mapping software and open access data, with all information provided ahead of the sessions.

Archive Workshops

Archive workshops were planned over three days at both the Museum of the Isles and Archives and the Shetland Museum and Archives. Events took place on weekdays and weekends where possible to allow accessibility to those with differing availability. Two general public workshops and one tailored accessible event ran in Shetland, the latter in partnership with Ability Shetland, which included accessible transport.

Coastal Surveys

Three archaeological surveys were undertaken in Skye, two in Shetland were planned (one was run as intended, and the second as an indoor event following poor weather). All survey equipment was provided by MSDS Marine/Moder Dy. The public surveys were advertised online, in local shops and the local media and open to all. The survey used open access free resources to learn how to monitor and record local archaeology, especially that threatened by coastal erosion.



Moder Dy also worked with Ability Shetland to run a tailored-accessible survey day; Ability Shetland provided an all-terrain wheelchair and transport. High winds and rain unfortunately led to an alteration to plans on the day and impromptu presentations and discussions were given by Moder Dy at Easthouse croft house, Burra, in place of the outdoor survey. However, a thoroughly good day was still had by all, despite the weather.

Pop-up exhibitions

Pop up displays were run over two days on Skye and three on Shetland, and a static exhibition was held at the Museum of the Isles in Skye. Pop-ups were located at places with good parking and local access. In Skye the material displayed included faunal remains (cetacean bones), peat samples (representing submerged prehistoric landscapes) a computer screen showing historic maps of the area, and an OS map which members of the community were invited to annotate with stories of the maritime heritage of the local area.

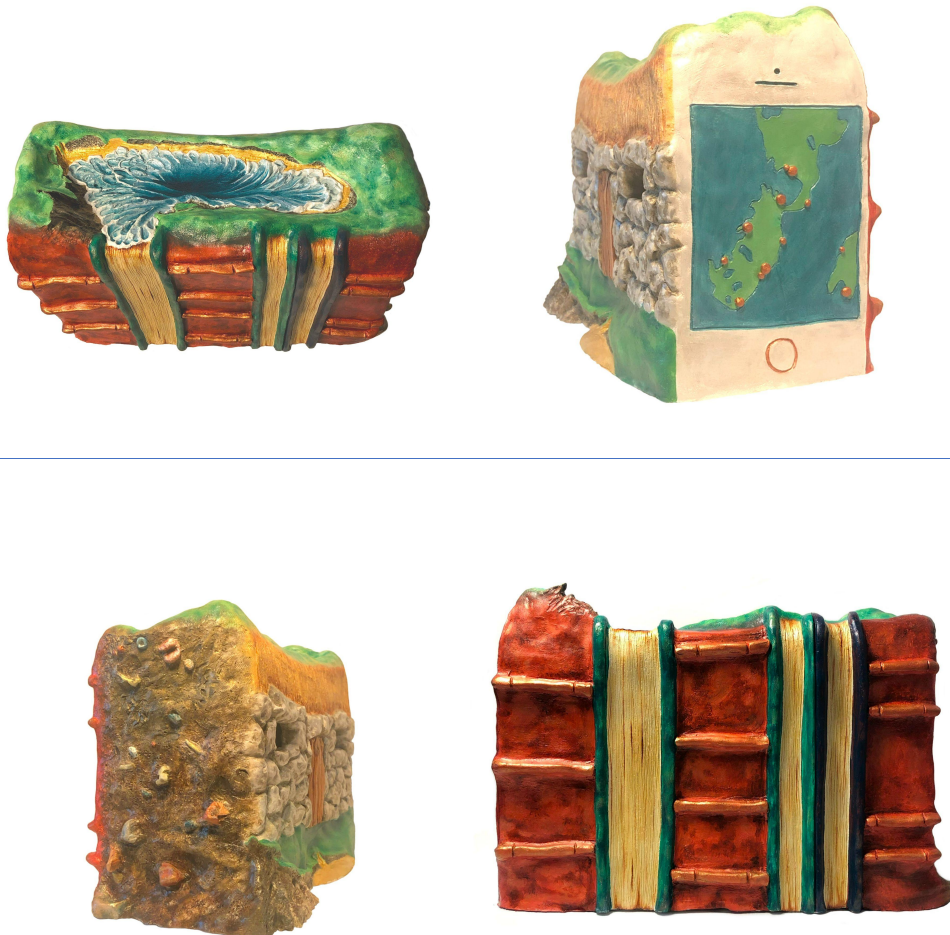
In Shetland pop-up exhibitions were held at Easthouse, Burra, the Tollclock shopping centre (Lerwick), and Speldiburn (Bressay) on the day of the Park Run. The display featured finds, maps and photos from the archive and survey days. Finds on display included an Early Iron Age decorated pottery sherd and oyster shell from an eroding midden site, sections of a late 19th - early 20th century clinker-built boat that had formed the roof of a 'boatyhoose' before being destroyed by storms (post-2014) and a 16th century pottery sherd from the Hanseatic trade with Germany.



Shetland art commission

Moder Dy, in association with Shetland Arts, advertised a commission for an artist/maker to take part in, and creatively respond, to the project. The successful artist/maker was Christina Inkster, selected by a panel of representatives from Shetland Arts and Moder Dy.

Christina attended all the project events and made a plaster sculpture in response to her experience. This formed the centrepiece of the exhibition which generated a large amount of interest and discussion during pop-up events. A video of Christina talking about her experience and the making of the wonderful sculpture is available on the Moder Dy website <https://www.moderdy.org/projects-6>.



Key findings

Over 500 members of the public attended the events across Skye and Shetland during the summer of 2022 and the following results were identified:

- Engagement with new audiences including local residents may be best focused at locations within the community where people pass by during the course of their everyday life;
- Engagement with young audiences remains low, though new young audiences may be engaged by less traditional pop-up events, and events with a creative focus, or a mixed natural and cultural heritage focus;

- Engagement with male participants remains lower than female, however archive-focused workshops were more popular with this group and may be a way to increase engagement;
- Engagement amongst those with health issues remains low; extra barriers may be imposed by island infrastructure. Successful means of engaging identified by this project include working with focused and resourced groups (e.g. Ability Shetland);
- The focus of employment differs between island groups and each employment type has its own constraints which influence engagement. Island-specific engagement plans are therefore necessary and strategies for engaging different groups were discussed by the project team, stakeholders and participants;
- Participants also demonstrated a variety of interests in terms of specific aspects of heritage, which included both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Many participants showed an interest across all sectors of natural and cultural heritage and the arts.



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