

THE NATURAL WORLD: THE OUTER HEBRIDES AND ETHNOGRAPHIC PHOTOGRAPHY

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Abstract: This paper will discuss significant photographers to the Outer Hebrides, Scotland and their contribution made in forming ethnographic and documentary archives for the nation's posterity. The study is limited to Eriskay, South Uist and some of the now remote, uninhabited islands. The absence of the effects of The Reformation on the southern Catholic Isles of the Outer Hebrides has been pivotal in attracting folklorists, ethnomusicologists and ethnographers. South Uist as a location was chosen very carefully by Paul Strand who realised that the island and its islanders was an unaffected and indigenous culture, deeply-rooted in the land. Similarly, Eriskay was selected by the ethnologist, Werner Kissling, as a prime place where the people's old ways of making a living from the land could be observed and documented using a camera. Other photographers who documented significant cultural change in the remote islands typically happened to be there by accident, rather than by official appointment, especially since, in the case of St. Kilda, photographers were forbidden by The Scottish Office to record the evacuation process. Thus the important documentary collections chronicling this event, held chiefly by The National Museum of Rural Life and The School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh were formed unofficially and surreptitiously by photographers who had sufficient foresight and vision to anticipate the intrinsic worth of such a record.



THE MACHAIR OF THE MONACH ISLES PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROBERT ATKINSON

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INTRODUCTION

THE Hebridean Islands have a unique charm that has attracted many artists and photographers. The intensity and unique qualities of Hebridean light and changeable, or volatile, nature of the weather has been of particular interest to painters and landscape photographers while the biodiversity has seen endless troops of naturalists and nature photographers come and observe and record the fauna and flora. There are a number of small islands now uninhabited, notably Mingulay, St. Kilda and The Monach Isles which are of particular interest to naturalists and some are in fact now nature reserves.

The effect of the Reformation divided The Outer Isles in two: Lewis, Harris, North Uist and some of Benbecula adhere to the Protestant ways while the other half of Benbecula and the southern isles of South Uist and Barra are predominantly Catholic. While music was discouraged in the northern isles after the Reformation it was actively encouraged by the priests in the Catholic Isles. The writer's father taught Ceòl Mòr, or piobaireachd, the classical music of the highland bagpipe in the South Uist tradition to pupils from all over the world for this very reason. Gaelic songs, customs and folklore too were better preserved in the southern isles and provided much material for collectors who published seminal works, notably: J.F. Campbell of Islay,¹ Alexander Carmichael,² Father Allan MacDonald,³ Marjory Kennedy Fraser,⁴ Amy Murray,⁵ Margaret Fay Shaw,⁶ John Lorne Campbell,⁷ John Lorne Campbell with Francis Collinson,⁸ and others.

The early 1950s saw a keen interest, or revival, in folk song and folklore collecting. The School of Scottish Studies, part of Edinburgh University, was formed in 1951 by Hamish Henderson and Calum Iain MacLean and has now amassed some very important archives of material.⁹ A key figure in the folk movement of this time was the American, Alan Lomax. He compiled remarkable collections of folk song worldwide. His two Scottish field workers were Calum Iain Maclean and Hamish Henderson. A research project funded through Edinburgh University is currently being undertaken to catalogue the collections formed by Calum Iain Maclean.¹⁰ 'Calum Beag,' was younger brother of the great poet, Sorley Maclean,¹¹ the voice of the Gael. Sorley in an elegiac poem lamenting Calum Iain's [a wee guy, physically!] untimely death in 1960 writes:

Ghabh thu an ràtreuta
Fhir bhig a' chridhe mhóir
Ghabh thu do dhion air cul a' ghàrraidh
Far 's milse muran na Gàidhlig
Fhir bhig an truentais mhóir

You took the retreat
little one of the big heart
you took your refuge behind the wall
where the bent grass of Gaelic is sweetest
little one of the great heroism.

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1. *Popular West Highland Tales* 1868-70.
 2. *Carmina Gadelica* 1900.
 3. *Gaelic Words and Expressions from South Uist and Eriskay*. 1958
 4. *Songs of the Hebrides*. 3 volumes c. 1910-20
 5. *Father Allan's Island*. 1920
 6. *Folksongs and Folklore of South Uist* 1954
 7. *Stories from South Uist; Tales of the Cuddy*. c. 1965
 8. *Hebridean Songs*. Oxford University Press. 3 volumes. c. 1970
 9. <http://www.celtscot.ed.ac.uk/archives.htm>
 10. <http://www.celtscot.ed.ac.uk/research.htm>
 11. <http://www.somhairlemacgilleain.org/english/>

Calum who loved South Uist and had made the island his home converted to Roman Catholicism and is buried at Hallan Cemetery. His brother Alasdair was G.P. in South Uist for around thirty years. Alasdair's son Cailean is a broadcaster and photographer currently based in Skye.¹² The reasons for introducing the MacLean family will become apparent when we consider the photographer Paul Strand. However it is the intention of the writer to present the photographers discussed with a chronological semblance.

ST. KILDA AND THE KEARTON BROTHERS.

St. Kilda, an archipelago, lies some 41 miles west of Benbecula, the small island between North and South Uist. St. Kilda and its history is a permanent source of fascination. Many photographers have visited the island group, the location providing a unique resource for the shooting of a remote island landscape and wild nature on land, as well as underwater photography due to the good sea-diving conditions. Much has been published on St. Kilda, books and ephemera being eagerly sought by collectors.

Various travellers visited St. Kilda from the 17th century onwards but tourists in reasonable numbers starting only arriving in late Victorian times. MacBrayne's steamers ferried, fashionably dressed, Victorian passengers who had travelled from the sophisticated houses of the day in London and other cities.



They observed the primitive St. Kildans and some, between fits of giggles, threw them sweets from a safe distance. St. Kildans were certainly an object of curiosity. Their dress, physical appearance and lifestyle was different from anything these Victorians had ever seen before. Centuries of crag climbing had made the feet of the barefoot male St. Kildans squat and square-shaped, a rather odd spectacle to behold. The image on the left, taken by Cherry Kearton, shows the foot of a non-St. Kildan on the left to that of a native of the island on the right. After mid-Victorian times the island's population gradually declined and the last remaining islanders were evacuated in 1930. St. Kilda was given to The National Trust for Scotland in 1957 by the 5th Marquess

of Bute and is in their custody to this day, 2007 being their 50th year of custodianship.¹³

Our first study of Hebridean photographers begins with the Kearton brothers. Richard and Cherry Kearton [1871-1940] were pioneers of nature photography, being credited with having made the first serious study of the photography of birds. They visited St. Kilda in the summer of 1896 and in 1897 Cassell & Co. published a book written by Richard Kearton titled *With Nature and a Camera* illustrated with photographs taken by Cherry Kearton. Approximately one third of the text is occupied with St. Kilda material. The book, part of a digital eBooks project of Strathclyde University can be viewed online.¹⁴ They worked as a team producing books: Richard writing the text and Cherry taking credit for the photographic illustrations. They were intrepid adventurers using ropes to reach precarious and inaccessible areas of the rocky cliffs of St. Kilda. This would be performed with a heavy camera and equipment on their backs. Perfecting these techniques resulted in another book written by Richard, *Wildlife at Home: How to Study and Photograph It*. The work was a manual produced as a result of the many letters from interested photographers of natural history they had received. The illustration underneath and left shows a camera used by the Kearton Brothers which Richard describes as "a half-plate cam-

12. <http://www.skye-media.com/>

13. <http://www.kilda.org.uk/>

14. <http://gdl.cdli.strath.ac.uk/keacam/>

era fitted with a Dallmeyer stigmatic lens and an adjustable miniature on the top which is used as a sort of view-finder when making studies of flying birds. When fixed in position, and its focus has been set exactly like its working companion beneath it, both are racked out in the same ratio by the screw dominating the larger apparatus, which when charged with a slide and stopped down to the requirements of light and speed of exposure, needs no further attention. When the combination is in use the photographer focuses with his right hand, and holding the air-ball or reservoir of his pneumatic tube in his left, squeezes it quickly and firmly, directly he has achieved a sufficiently clear and strong definition of his object, upon the ground-glass of the miniature camera.”¹⁵ Use of the miniature camera is not critical and it is not recommended for the beginner.



He goes on to discuss using a silent shutter and in some cases a focal plane shutter, a subject we have touched upon recently in our class at RKC with Robert Tabor. Carrying a number of charged dark slides is advised rather than re-charge outdoors in a changing bag. On summer holidays the Keartons take developing materials with them. Correspondents, Richard writes, often ask them what plates they use. He lists: “Ilford Chromatic for still objects full of colour, Imperial Special Rapid for quick-time exposures; and Flashlight for very fast focal-plane shutter-work and night-photography, when we

are either burning magnesium-ribbon or using our small metal flash-lamp as illuminants.”¹⁶ The magnesium powder was put in underneath the lamp and a few drops of methylated spirits poured into a small indented area at the top and lit. The subsequent flare of the powder he describes as “geyser-like!”

The Keartons were innovative and developed techniques as nature photographers to approach wary birds and animals within a reasonable shooting distance. When the brothers parted ways Richard took up the subject of developing hides professionally for photographers while Cherry using a cine camera became a film maker, travelling and filming across Africa.¹⁷ Cherry was adept at rope handling and had a good head for heights as is apparent from this illustration right which shows him descending a steep cliff, possibly in the Shetland Isles. You can see the camera and tripod balanced on his back which must have made the descent twice as precarious! We wonder who took this photograph, perhaps it was Richard! Richard Kearton was a Fellow of the Zoological Society before any books by him were published. Cassell & Co. were his publish-



15. *Wild Life at Home*. 1898

16. *Ibid.* p. 6.

17. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAiVub88ICI>

ers and the story of his involvement with this house is interesting. This story I read from a website¹⁸ concerned with Swaledale in which lies Thwaite, the birthplace of the Kearton brothers: "...In the autumn of 1882 Mr. Sidney Galpin, the son of Thomas Dixon Galpin who with Petter and Cassell created the publishing house Cassell's visited Swaledale as a shooting guest on Muker Moor. At this chance meeting with Richard the pair stood at Bull Bog, close to the Buttertubs when Richard called in a Grouse which was promptly shot by Galpin. Impressed by Richards ability to call in these reckless birds, Galpin offered him a job at Belle Sauvage Yard and Richard started out for London on 10th. October 1882 and what was to become a famous and successful career in writing, publishing, broadcasting and lecturing as far a field as America as a guest of President Roosevelt.

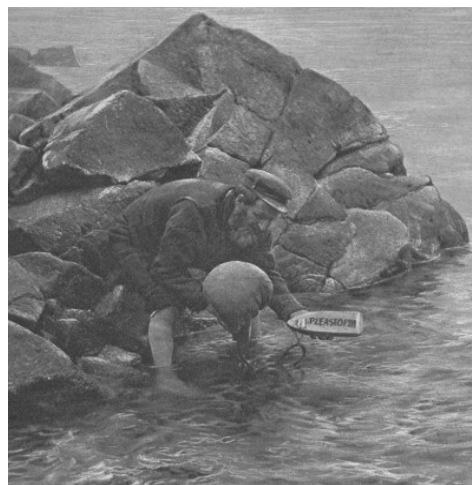
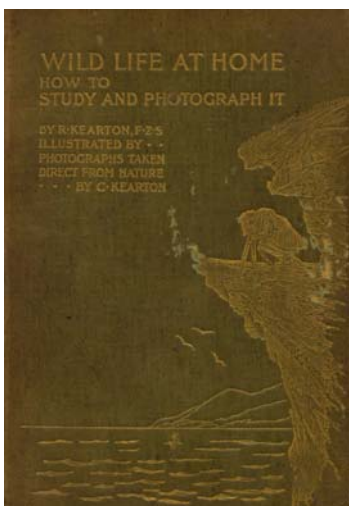
John Kearton died in 1887 and Cherry made the journey from Swaledale to join his brother at Cassell's. Armed with a cheap second hand camera and keenness to experiment with wildlife photography, Richard's text and Cherry's photographs proved to be the perfect blend for the publishers. Their first collaborative work, *British Birds Nests and Egg Collecting* was published in 1895 and many more books followed in many languages.....

....After leaving Cassell's in 1894 Cherry continued to experiment with his photography, *Cherry Kearton Big Game Photographer* is believed to be the first publication containing flash photography, depicting a lion and a rhino. He also took the first cinematic aerial footage of London from an airship in 1908, nearly coming to grief in the process as the craft lost height and stability almost hitting a building and exploding. Setting up his own film company, he travelled to India, Borneo, Canada and Africa, capturing images of wildlife in still photographs and early films; he caught the public's imagination both here in

Britain and in America. An expedition off the African coast resulted in his best selling book; *Island of Penguins*.

Cassell published some of Robert Louis Stevenson's works around the same time the Keartons worked there. One wonders if Richard or Cherry Kearton were ever acquainted with RLS? The Keartons produced over thirty books all illustrated with charming wildlife photographs. They had a unique style of setting the illustrations in the text, many appearing as tailpieces and vignettes, in circular and oval form as well as in rectangular strips or the more common square form. Their books were well designed showing innovation and their experience of publishing would have helped. The gilt-embossed, front cover illustration left would have been prepared from one of their photographs. This cover style was quite popular in late Victorian book design; it would be expensive to do today in similar style.

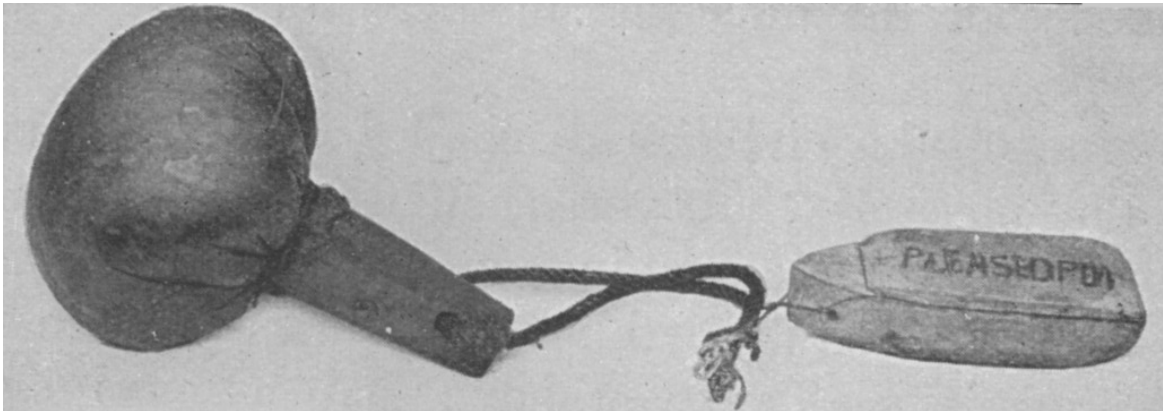
With Nature and a Camera contains some fascinating photographs of the St. Kildans. The dispatch of the St. Kilda mail-boat shown here on the right has been published very many times; it even appears on the website of the *St. Kilda Club*,¹⁹ an organisation setup some twenty years ago which publishes a newsletter, appropriately called *The St. Kilda Mail*. Although the Keartons visited St. Kilda with the intention of capturing images of wild nature the allure of the native St. Kildans, their quaint dress and customs proved to be too photogenic to ignore. The selection of images underneath were taken by Cherry Kearton. Unwittingly, the Keartons had become ethnographic photographers documenting the ways of an ancient island culture that no longer exists.



18. http://www.daleswalker.com/The%20Kearton%20Brothers_6.htm

19. <http://www.kilda.org.uk/>

Here is a selection of ethnographic studies of the St. Kildans made by the Keartons. First, a close-up, or early “macro” shot, of the sophisticated St. Kilda mail-boat. The message went in-



side the block of wood inscribed by knife and red-hot poker “please open.” Inside the wood or “boat” was a bottle sealed with candle grease. This contained the message. The “boat” was attached to a sheepskin bladder tacked onto a post or stick. Sometimes mail was picked up on the coast of Norway. The “boat” contained instructions for this scenario and the mail was usually re-directed to the Foreign Office in London!



St. Kilda was an highly organised community with its own parliament. The males spent much of the time climbing the crags for wild-fowl. The women worked very hard around their houses, some observers say harder than the men. Married women were distinguishable from unmarried ones. The married women wore a white frill on the front of the head-shawl, apparent above on the woman on the right. There was no wedding ring worn among the St. Kildans. There is a thin projecting rock with a two hundred feet drop on St. Kilda known as “The Lover’s Stone”, so called because a young man wanting to take a wife was required to stand at the very edge on his left heel with his right on his left toes and then touch the toes of his right foot with the fingertips of both hands! This took place in front of an audience. If he performed the feat he was considered a man and worthy of a wife! The St. Kildan fowling-rope were intrepid cragsmen and were photographed by the Keartons, as was their rope. The fowling-rope, made of horse-

hair, some thirty fathoms long, was so valued among the St. Kildans that it would be the first article a father would give to his eldest son as his inheritance. Should it happen to fall to a daughter's share in default of male heirs, it was considered to be the equivalent in value to two of the



best cows on the isle. So, the whole St. Kildan way of life revolved around cragmanship and catching wild-fowl, like Finlay McQuien above catching puffins. The rod was a thirteen foot pole with a hazel twig between two and three feet lashed onto the end with an attached snare-like noose of horsehair and gannet quills. Another Kearton shot shows him catching fulmars. The fowlers went around boldly barefoot among the cliffs with their rods and ropes.



The Keartons were astute observers of the St. Kildans, studying their ways in minute practical detail. They also photographed some of the antiquities of St. Kilda, recording artefacts from underground dwelling places as well as quern stones, cleits, details of wooden locks, iron lamps and such objects of antiquarian interest. Their main interest, once again, was wild nature and they photographed many of the birds of St. Kilda including the unique St. Kilda wren shown opposite.

Their contribution to the legacy of photography, particularly of St. Kilda is significant. I will conclude this sketch with a Kearton tailpiece. The tailpiece, typically a small illustration that concludes a chapter in a book in elegant fashion, was popular in Victorian book design. Usually it was in the form of a graphic illustration like a line drawing but the Keartons showed their innovative skills by using a photographic illustration instead.



A HIGHLAND COTTER'S HUT.

ERISKAY, SOUTH UIST AND WERNER KISSLING.

Werner Kissling, [b. 11th April 1895 died Moorfields Nursing Home, Dumfries, 1988.] ethnologist, film maker and photographer is our next subject of study. Most of the biographical detail underneath is taken from Michael W. Russell's two books on Kissling and his photographs.²⁰

Werner Kissling was born in Heizendorfn, an 18th century castle, near Breslau in Silesia. His father was the grandson of the founder of a wealthy brewing dynasty. He went to school in Breslau and Leobschutz and left shortly before the beginning of WW1.

He joined an elite German regiment, the Prussian Guard in 1914 but left within a year and spent the rest of the war years in the German navy. After the war he studied at Berlin Konigsberg and Paris universities. He went into diplomatic service after his studies and was posted to various places such as Riga, Geneva, Madrid, Budapest and London. In 1931 he quit his post as Second Secretary at the German Legation in London. After this he devoted his life to studies in ethnology. He became a Fellow of The Royal Geographical Society in 1930 and The Anthropological Institute in 1931.

During WW2 he was interned in the Tower of London. However his anti-Hitler stance was known and as a result he was transferred to the Isle of Man where he was a welfare officer, a role given to those who were trusted. He was still not allowed to travel to restricted zones, of which the Western Isles were considered to be. He was released in 1942 where he continued his studies in Cambridge.

He became an Honorary Assistant at Dumfries Museum from 1969-1988 after a failed attempt at running a hotel in Melrose. Kissling amassed thousands of photographs mainly of ethnographic interest as well as collecting artefacts for Dumfries Museum. He contributed articles and photographs to a range of journals. His most important academic studies were on the Hebridean Black House published during WW2.²¹

He was unmarried and had no children; he was homosexual in fact. His homosexuality was kept hidden, or certainly concealed, during his visits to the Hebrides and it's interesting to speculate if he would have received the same co-operation from the conservative, yet tolerant, minded islanders as photographic subjects, had they been cognizant of his sexuality. He was survived by a nephew in Germany who had little contact with him over the last 30 years of his life.

According to Michael Russell, the above biographical sketch, presented here in summarised form, has been verified from external sources. Kissling however told the story of his life in different ways to different people, spinning stories of dramatic escapes from Hitler and the Gestapo. His brother Georg Conrad, however, a senior Nazi officer, was involved in the "Colonels Plot" of 1944 and shot himself rather than be caught, tortured and executed.

Kissling having inherited a fortune from his father was a wealthy man before Hitler came to power and thus had the independent means to devote his life to the study of ethnology. His mother appears to have made regular trips abroad when he was a child. She also had an interest in photography. One of these trips was made to the western isles in 1905 from where she sent her son a postcard. Werner Kissling kept this postcard for the rest of his life.

The Werner Kissling collection of photographs is housed in The School of Scottish Studies, part of Edinburgh University, as mentioned. The archive holds most of his Hebridean photographs and some of his studies made around Dumfries. Kissling also photographed around the West Riding area in Yorkshire, this collection being kept at Leeds University. His photographs

20. *A Poem of Remote Lives: Images of Eriskay* 1934. The Enigma of Werner Kissling 1895-1988. NWP 1997 and *A Different Country: The Photographs of Werner Kissling*. Birlinn 2002.

21. Kissling, Werner (1943). The character and purpose of the Hebridean Black House. *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 83, 75-100 and Kissling, Werner (1944). House Traditions in the Outer Hebrides. The Black House and the Beehive House. *Man* XLIV Record 114 November-December pp. 134-140.

of Eriskay and South Uist document the old crofting ways of the Hebrideans. The collection constitutes a very important, accessible primary source of Scottish Hebridean life during the early to mid 20th century.

Underneath is a list of many of the islanders' crafts and activities of ethnographic interest which Kissling captured with his camera:

SUBJECT AND LOCATION WITH DATE

CARDING	ARDIVACHAIR, SOUTH UIST	1953
CARDING & SPINNING	ERISKAY	1934
CARRYING PEAT	ERISKAY	1934
COLLECTING CROTAL	LOCH CARNAN, SOUTH UIST	c.1947
CREEL MAKING	POLOCHAR, SOUTH UIST	1936
DYEING WOOL	LOCH CARNAN, SOUTH UIST	c.1947
HAY ROPE-MAKING	SOUTH BOISDALE, S.U.	
HEATHER ROPE-MAKING	SOUTH LOCHBOISDALE, S.U.	1947
KNITTING	ERISKAY	1934
LAZY BEDS	ERISKAY	1934
PEAT STACKS	SOUTH UIST	c.1934
PICKING BOG MYRTLE	GARRYNAMONIE, S. UIST	1947
PLAD-WEAVING	PENINERINE, SOUTH UIST	1953
PONIES CARRYING PLADS	ERISKAY	1953
POWDER-HORN & STUMPER	SOUTH BOISDALE, S.U.	1937
REAPING CORN	PENINERINE, SOUTH UIST	1953
ROPE-MAKING [BENT-GRASS]	PENINERINE, SOUTH UIST	1953
ROPE-MAKING [HORSEHAIR]	LOCHBOISDALE, S.U.	1936
THATCHING	ERISKAY	1936
SHEARING	ERISKAY	1934
WOOL-DRYING	ERISKAY	1934

As mentioned above, Kissling's main contribution as ethnologist was the study he made of the Hebridean black house. The traditional Hebridean black house clearly fascinated him. He took many shots of croft-steadings with dwelling places and out-houses, as well as interiors. The image illustrated underneath is a superb one in my opinion. Using natural light and shade it creates an highly evocative image of a crofting family sitting by the fire situated in the centre of the floor. You can see the shaft of light entering the room over the right side of the man's shoulder. The intensity of light has blown that area of the image, as you would expect, and some chromatic aberration is apparent as the blown zone meets the rest of the image. Still, it is a wonderful



composition. I do not think this was a calculated shot in the artistic sense but more a case of good luck. I would not describe Kissling as an artistic photographer but rather a documentary one.

Kissling arrived on Eriskay in 1934 with a Leica III like that illustrated underneath, with coupled rangefinder

built by Leitz Wetzlar. The innovative feature of the Leica III was slow shutter speed which would probably have facilitated the shooting of interiors of Hebridean blackhouses which tended to be dark, smoky places as you can see from the above image. The top shutter speed was 1/500 sec. with a slow speed split at 1/20 sec. Leitz was originally a microscope and scientific optics company. The first series of screwmount Leicas were designed by Oskar Barnack and have been named Barnack cameras by some. The prototype Ur-Leica was designed in 1918, but mass production did not start until 1925 when the Leica I came out.²²



The Kissling photographic archive was partially viewed on a visit to The School of Scottish Studies [SSS] on the 4th December 2007 and more comprehensively on the 11th of February, 2008. The photographer for the SSS and librarian of the photographic archives is Ian Mackenzie who has written a paper on photography and ethnology.²³



The image left was taken in 1934 at Ardivachar, South Uist, very close to where the writer's father's people hail from. Kissling really liked to photo-

22. <http://www.photoethnography.com/ClassicCameras/index-frameset.html?LeicaIII.html~mainFrame>

23. Ian Mackenzie. *Festivals, Faces and Fire: A Survey of Fieldwork Photography* by Ian MacKenzie for the *School of Scottish Studies*, 1985-2005

graph blackhouse and croft-house interiors. He liked the play of light and smoke through the doors and small squat windows and the flame of the fire in the centre of the room. Although he photographed many other subjects, as is evidenced in the table above, in keeping with a theme the examples of his work chosen here look at dwelling houses only. This next example was taken



at Polochar, South Uist in 1934. Kissling writes “this house faces east, its doorways sheltered from the prevailing winds. The walls of stone and earth are about 6ft. high throughout and 3 1/2 ft. thick at the base, decreasing thickness towards the top...”

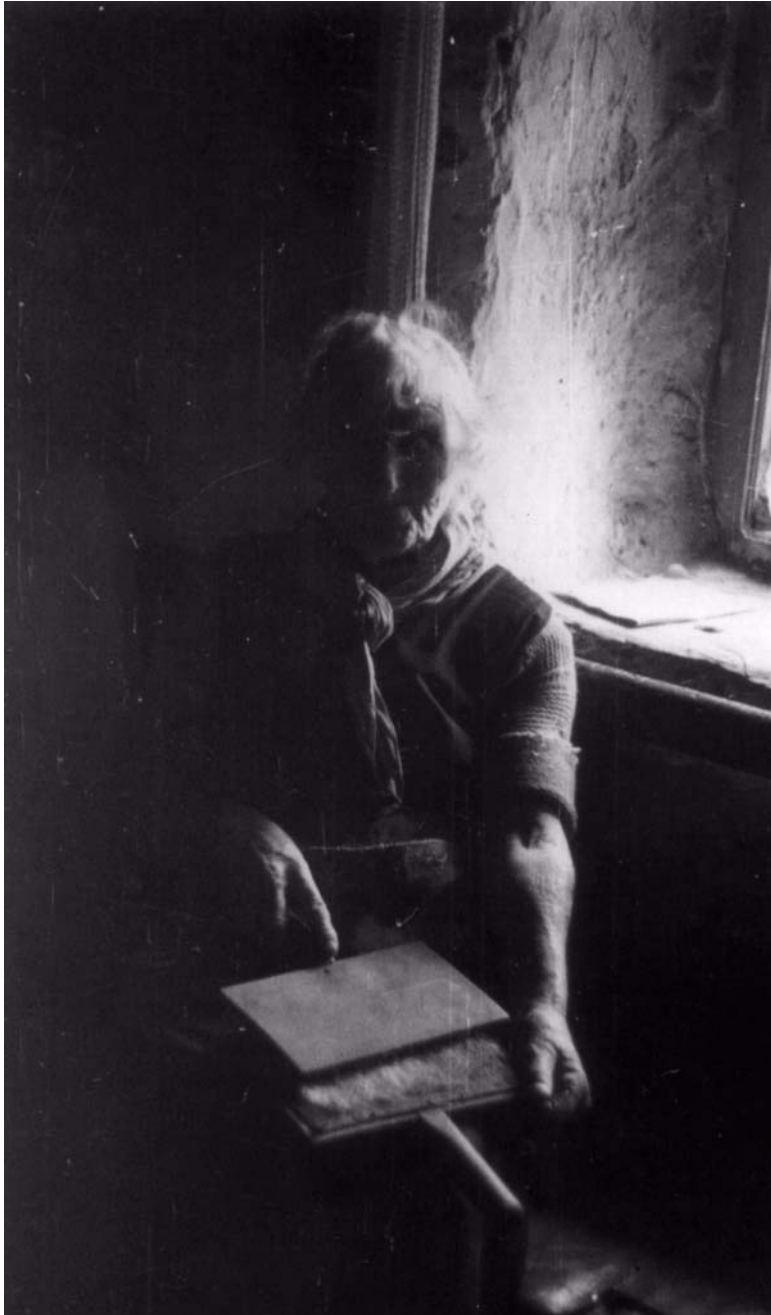
What attracted Kissling in making the image underneath was the smoke

coming out of the window. It is atmospheric but also indicates the conditions inside. This shot was also taken in 1934 at Polochar in the south of South Uist. Kissling comments on a kind of



lintel stretching across the inner wall, adding that despite being recently built still resembles an old black house.

These examples show Werner Kissling’s acute observation of Hebridean dwelling houses and of their style, layout and construction. In this he had the eye of a vernacular, architectural historian of the Hebridean blackhouse and as a documentary, ethnographic photographer. He had the same measured eye for interiors and as a photographer his compositions here appear most evocative. Again, the effect of smoke and dust in the shafts and beams of light streaming through the doors and windows of the black houses appealed to him. Inside you have high contrast zones due to the small windows: areas almost permanently dark against areas of intensely



bright light. There was no electric light in these times. This last image is of an old woman carding at Ardivachar, South Uist in 1953. Here we see that contrast from the play of shadow and light discussed. This is a wonderfully evocative image but again I feel any artistic effort was probably by accident and good luck rather than design.

Werner Kissling is also credited with making what is believed to be the earliest film with Gaelic language dialogue: *Eriskay A Poem of Remote Lives*.²⁴ was made in 1935 on 35mm film, running for 18 mins in black & white. Like Paul Strand, Kissling was inspired by the film maker, Robert Flaherty and in particular his *Man of Aran* [1934]. Kissling's movie is available from The Scottish Screen Archive. Werner Kissling's photographs will continue to be studied by historians, researchers and scholars for many years. He left the nation a rich photographic legacy.

24. <http://www.scottish-screen.com/film/detail.php?id=17010001>

ALASDAIR ALPIN MACGREGOR AND ST. KILDA.

Alasdair Alpin MacGregor [1899-1970]²⁵ was a writer and photographer. He produced many books, a good number of which are of Hebridean interest. His books are mainly topographical works in which the history, traditions and folklore of the area are sketched. Invariably they were accompanied with photographs, the majority of which were taken by himself.

His most collectable and valuable work is *A Last Voyage to St. Kilda*.²⁶ In the preface of this book he acknowledges permission to reprint articles and telegrams from *The Times* newspaper. At the time of the evacuation of St. Kilda in 1930 MacGregor was special correspondent for the newspaper and in this role, documenting the evacuation of the St. Kildan islanders, he could be described as an ethnographer. Photographers and journalists were not allowed on St. Kilda at the time of evacuation by order of The Scottish Office. MacGregor had petitioned the P.M. to be allowed on the island at this time but to no avail. He was obviously determined to be there in some capacity and in doing so created a photographic archive that has proved very valuable. The evacuation of St. Kilda was the idea for a film by Michael Powell²⁷ called *The Edge of the World*. MacGregor accused Powell of basing his movie upon his book and tried to stop production by means of a court injunction. However he lost his case. Powell was denied permission to film on St. Kilda and instead filmed on Foula in Shetland. The film was released in 1937 and is available for download from the BFI site.²⁸ There was also an amateur movie made of St. Kilda by John Ritchie at the time of the evacuation which was kept secret until 1979 but which can now be viewed.²⁹

The Western Isles, a general work, was a heavily criticised book that made Alasdair Alpin MacGregor quite unpopular among the Hebrideans. MacGregor, a teetotaler, took a dim view of the drinking bouts and easy lifestyle of factions of the islanders and made some comments to this effect. Compton Mackenzie, the satirical writer who lived in Barra, who disliked MacGregor's romanticism anyway, was involved, supported by the eminent Celtic scholar, John Lorne Campbell in chastising MacGregor. Unlike Seton Gordon³⁰ and other writers of books of Hebridean interest, MacGregor, was never very popular among the islanders of the western isles after this, his work being viewed with some caution and suspicion.

However, he did have a passionate love of the Scottish highlands and islands, their natural history, scenery and folk traditions and created a valuable photographic documentary record of the rural areas of these regions and their associated activities in the early part of the 20th century. His collection is housed in The Scottish Life Archive, a branch of the National Museums of Scotland. Established in 1959 the aim of the SLA is to "collect, record and preserve documentary and illustrative evidence of Scotland's material culture and social history."³¹ The SLA have put a good number of A.A. MacGregor's photographs on SCRAN,³² a major online resource site, largely utilised by schools and academic institutions.

His photographs are of a wide-ranging number of subjects, taken from all over Scotland. The usual subjects like castles, historic buildings and like places were covered. The selection underneath was compiled from the many images available online at the SCRAN site, ignoring the commoner subjects, thus highlighting the more unusual rural and ethnographic ones. By no means definitive, this selection represents a reasonable cross-section of his photographic work, which, assembled in this form gives an insight into the mind of Alasdair Alpin MacGregor as a

25. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alasdair_Alpin_MacGregor

26. Alasdair Alpin MacGregor. *A Last Voyage to St. Kilda*. Cassell and Co. 1931

27. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Powell_%28director%29

28. <http://www.7digital.com/stores/listing.aspx?shop=286&masterartist=98283#>

29. <http://www.scottish-screen.com/film/detail.php?id=07930001>

30. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seton_Gordon

31. http://www.nms.ac.uk/collections_scottish_life_archive.aspx

32. <http://www.scran.ac.uk>

working photographer. As writer of many topographical and historical works, he was highly observant of the old ways found in rural areas of the highlands and islands in the earlier part of the 20th century before modern society as we know it today existed. His camera was a visual notebook that supplemented his writings, a relationship that many writers have with their cameras.

SELECTION OF SUBJECTS OF RURAL & ETHNOGRAPHIC INTEREST

BROCHS	BURIAL GROUNDS	BURIAL ISLANDS
CHAPELS	CHURCH MANSES	CISTS
COAL PUFFERS	COCKLE GATHERERS	CRANNOGS
CREELING PEATS	CROFTS	CROFT HOUSES
CROFTERS' THATCHED COTTAGES	CROFTERS CUTTING MARRAM	CROFTING TOWNSHIPS
DESERTED TOWNSHIP	DESERTED VILLAGE	DOOCOTS
FACTORS' HOUSES	FARMHOUSES	FERRIES
FERRYMENS' HOUSES	FIELD SYSTEMS	FISH CURERS
FISHING BOATS	FISHING FOR SALMON	FORDS
GRAVEMARKERS FOR DROWNED SAILORS	GRUBBING CABBAGES	GYPSY WEDDING HEART
HAAF FISHERS, SOL-WAY	HAYMAKERS	HAY STACKING
HERRING DRIFTERS	HIGHLAND CATTLE	HOUSE BUILT FROM TURF
HOUSE IN THE MOUNTAINS	INNS	IRON COFFIN COVERS
ISLANDERS CARTING PEATS	LAND FORMERLY PLOUGHED INTO RIGS	LANDING PLACES FOR BOATS
LIGHTHOUSES	LOADING DISTILLERY PEATS	LOBSTER CREELS
LOBSTER FISHERMEN	LUGSAIL BOAT	LUMBERING
MACHAIR LAND	MEN CURING LING	MEN DIGGING LUG-WORMS
MEAL MILLS	MILKING COWS	NET MENDING
OLD WHALING STATION	PEAT BOATS	PIERS
PLOUGHING	POST BOATS	PUFFERS
RASPBERRY CULTIVATION	REPAIR OF BOATS	SHARK FISHERS

SHEEP CLIPPING	SHEEP FANKS AND CLEITS	SHEEP SHEARING
SHEPHERDS AND DOGS	SHIELINGS	SLATE QUARRIERS
SMALL HOLDINGS	STANDING STONES	STILES
STOOKS	TELFORD BRIDGES	THATCHED HOUSES
TOLLHOUSES	TRANSPORT OF LIVE-STOCK FROM ISLANDS	WATER PUMPS
WELLS	WHERRIES	

While the above table serves to show MacGregor’s wide choice of subjects across all of Scotland this sketch will look specifically at some of the photographs he took on St. Kilda in 1930. The MacGregor collection of photographs was viewed by the author on the 11th February 2008.³³ The collection comprises several hundred negatives and prints taken from around 1920-1960. There was no information in the archive on the type of camera(s) used by MacGregor. Some of the negatives viewed were large sized being approximately 4 inches by 2. MacGregor photographed on the following islands of the Outer and farthest Hebrides:

BARRA, BENBECULA, BERNERAY, ENSAY, ERISKAY, FLANNAN ISLANDS, HARRIS, LEWIS, MINGULAY, MONACH ISLANDS, NORTH UIST, NORTH RONA, SACHAY, SHIANT ISLANDS, SOUTH UIST, ST. KILDA, SULA SGEIR and VATERSAY.

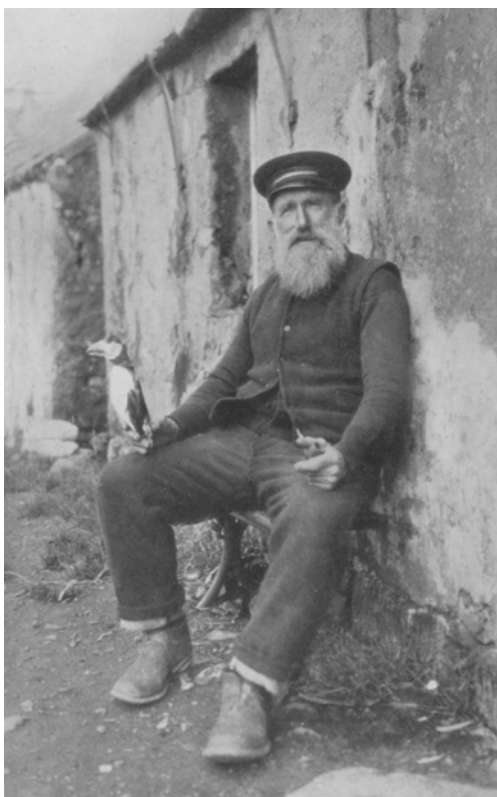
The examples selected of MacGregor’s photographs are of St. Kilda interest taken in 1930



at the scene of the evacuation. He had an eye for making “souvenirs”, shooting the last “this and that”—like the last cow to leave the island! The example above shows St. Kildan, Neil Ferguson about to enter the P.O. with the last bag of mail. The day before the evacuation saw the biggest mail bag in St. Kildan history; many people wanting to acquire the last St. Kildan postage frank on a letter as a souvenir. St. Kildan postal history is now very collectable and valuable too. A.A. MacGregor helped the St. Kildan postmaster process the massive bag!

33. National Museums of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh.

Some of his portraits of the St. Kildans are good. The one below left shows the legendary Finlay MacQueen. Apparently he would not be photographed without a puffin he had snared and stuffed! The other shot is of Granny Gillies and she is knitting. Both are wonderful portraits and ethnographic studies.



The two images of males underneath carrying loads, show, from left to right, Neil Ferguson carrying the last sack of wool to leave St. Kilda and Donald John Mackinnon carrying his personal belongings.



It is not clear how the authorities felt about these images being made public—they appear in his book, *A Last Voyage to St. Kilda*. Another poignant image taken by MacGregor is of the last batch of sheep waiting to be transported on the ship, *Dunara Castle*. When the sheep reached the mainland and resumed grazing many of them died because the grass was different in some ways to the St. Kildan grass.

Most of the St. Kildans were evacuated to Ardtornish in Argyll and were found jobs with the Forestry Commission. The Alasdair Alpin MacGregor collection is another valuable archive which will be used by historians and researchers for many years to come.

ROBERT ATKINSON AND ISLAND GOING.

Robert Le Lacheur Atkinson [1915-1995] was naturalist photographer for Collins publishers. He studied at Cambridge University. In 1953 he married Patsy Cohen, art editor for Collins publishers. They had three children. Robert was a fruit farmer in Oxfordshire for over thirty years and wrote a few books on the subject. His wife Patsy died in 1973.

After leaving Cambridge in 1936 Robert Atkinson began exploring the remote islands of the west coast of Scotland. He had read the Kearton brothers book on St. Kilda, *With Nature and a Camera*, referred to above when he was eleven years old so you could infer that wild nature and remote islands were in his blood! The Outer Hebridean island chain contains a good number of very small islands. Most of these are found in the sounds that separate the main islands. Thus we have, beginning from the south:

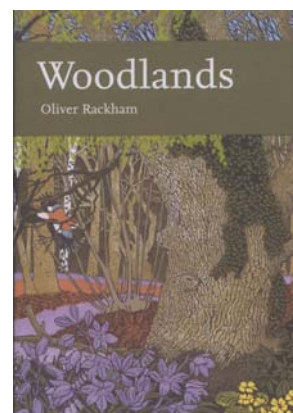
SOUND OF MINGULAY; SOUND OF SANDRAY; SOUND OF BARRA; SOUND OF ERISKAY; SOUND OF MONACH; SOUND OF BERNERAY; SOUND OF SPUIR; SOUND OF PABBAY; SOUND OF SHILLAY and SOUND OF HARRIS.

In particular the Sound of Harris, which embraces several of the other sounds listed above, has very many small islands and it was here Robert Atkinson sailed, studied and photographed during some of his visits as his study of the Sound of Shillay formed the basis for the work *Shillay and the Seals*.³⁴ His most popular work is *Island Going*.³⁵ This book is an account of six years of adventurous trips made to islands from 1935-46, with a long interval between the fifth and sixth years. The war interrupted the sequence during which Atkinson served in the R.N.V.R. in escort trawlers and in Coastal Forces. The first island which gave Robert Atkinson and his friend, John Ainslie, who often accompanied him, a taste of things to come was Handa island in north-west Sutherland. Atkinson refers to this trip as an “elementary exercise in island going.” Handa Island today is managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust and is home to some 200,000 seabirds each summer. The itineraries written of in the book *Island Going* run thus:

FIRST YEAR	HANDA ISLAND
SECOND YEAR	NORTH RONA—SHIANT—CANNA
THIRD YEAR	FLANNAN ISLES—NORTH RONA—EIGG
FOURTH YEAR	NORTH UIST—MONACH ISLES—ST. KILDA
FIFTH YEAR	SULA SGEIR
LONG INTERVAL	LEWIS REMEMBERED
SIXTH YEAR [1946]	THE HEBRIDES REGAINED

There is a useful and more detailed list of itineraries made by Robert Atkinson in the School of Scottish Studies.³⁶ A list of the islands of the Outer Isles referred to in his books and probably visited by Atkinson is given underneath. The -ay part of the name comes from the Norse “ey” meaning island.

His work as naturalist photographer is apparent in Collins’ *The New Naturalist* series of monographs, one of the most popular and scholarly ever published in the realm of natural history in this country³⁷. Beginning in 1945 with E.B. Ford’s *Butterflies*, the series saw its 100th volume in 2006, shown on the right, *Woodlands*, by the landscape historian, Oliver Rackham. An appealing feature of the series is the colourful dustwrapper, the design of which has been crafted by a number of significant artists over the years. Atkinson’s wife, Patsy Cohen, may have been involved here. The authors of the ‘NN’, as the series is known as, are invariably experts in their field,



34. Robert Atkinson. *Shillay of the Seals*. Collins and Harvill Press 1980

35. Robert Atkinson. *Island Going*. Collins 1949 Reprinted Birlinn, 1997

36. RSPB Warden, South Uist. *Photocopy of MS list of itineraries made by Robert Atkinson*.

37. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Naturalist_series

sometimes well known and respected naturalists and scientists. The original Editorial Board consisted of Julian Huxley, James Fisher, Dudley Stamp, John Gilmour and Eric Hosking. Eric Hosking³⁸ was a leading bird photographer of the last century. He wrote a good number of books illustrated with his own photographs. Annually, the *Eric Hosking Award* is given to young photographers aged 18-26. Many of the early volumes of *The New Naturalist* are illustrated by photographs taken by Robert Atkinson and Eric Hosking. The two photographers must have met. Atkinson met other naturalists whilst on his field trips as he mentions sailing with James Fisher and Frank Fraser Darling in *Shillay and the Seals*, both of whom contributed to NN series. The eminent, evolutionary biologist, W.D. Hamilton who was introduced to genetics after reading E.B. Ford's *Butterflies*, wrote in reference to Hosking, Atkinson and a few other of photographers responsible for *The New Naturalist* series: "It seems to me that for people clearly passionate about scenery and natural history they must have had one of the most wonderful jobs imaginable—provided, that is, you could stand the British wind and rain."³⁹

Having acquired and refurbished a derelict fishing boat, *The Heather*, Atkinson visited St. Kilda and the remote islands on a number of occasions where he took photographs and made written notes of his experiences and observations. The School of Scottish Studies holds The Robert Atkinson Collection of photographs. The collection comprises a few albums of prints with careful topographical and descriptive captions. There are also a number of negatives. Although Atkinson was primarily a naturalist photographer he did make some studies that could be deemed ethnographic. Some of these include:

PORTRAITS OF ST KILDANS

ST. KILDAN DWELLING PLACE INTERIORS

ST KILDANS SNARING PUFFINS

ST KILDAN WOMAN SPINNING

Other subjects include recording human traces on remote, uninhabited islands e.g.:

OLD MOORING RINGS; SHEPHERDS' GRAVESTONES; QUERN STONES; CLAY LAMP; BOTHIES; ANCIENT CHAPELS.

The official evacuation of St. Kilda happened in 1930. There were still St. Kildans on the island in 1938 and Atkinson took some poignant photographs of them, like the image below.



Since steamers still visited St. Kilda after 1930 some St. Kildans returned to their former homes for the summer months. However this steamer service stopped as the nation prepared itself for war in 1939. Atkinson was there in 1938 leaving on the ship, *The Hebrides*, along with the St. Kildans and other passengers. He notes that the event merited a paragraph in the newspaper which ended:

"...again been evacuated and left to the undisturbed possession of the seabirds...".

As a writer and photographer, Robert Atkinson was good at describing and documenting the poignancy of remote places that had

once been a living, thriving community. The image below is an example that illustrates this quality. The same image was used by Tom Steel in his popular book on the island.⁴⁰ Steel used the photograph to evoke the poignancy of St. Kildans coming back to their former homes in the

38. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Hosking

39. William Donald Hamilton. *Narrow Roads of Gene Land: Collected Papers of W.D. Hamilton*. Oxford U.P. 2005

40. Tom Steel. *The Life and Death of St. Kilda*. Fontana 1975



summer months; the man staring into the fire as if reminiscences of former happier days when there was a community rather than only memories. The same poignancy is evoked by Atkinson in *Shillay and the Seals* which is much concerned with the Monach Isles. These islands were evacuated in the late 1940s. Atkinson compares the abandoned schoolroom to that of St. Kilda after it was evacuated. The blackboard was used by lobster fishermen to leave messages. The school books just lay around along with the children's script books as if the children had just left a short time before.

His photographs as a naturalist are generally good. Robert Atkinson possessed a thorough knowledge of all aspects of natural history. Ornithology seems to have been his main attraction, Leach's Fork-tailed Petrel being one of the birds he tracked since it is only found on remote Irish and Scottish islands. The shot right shows Razorbills off a cliff on the island of Rona. Some of his bird shots

appear in an artistic or montage-like form. He would have been aware of the Keartons' style of showing photographs in unusual frames. It is possible his wife, Patsy, who was art editor for his publisher helped prepare an image like the one opposite. Atkinson was knowledgeable of botany and mammalian zoology too. As naturalist photographer for Collins publishers he travelled around the country, sometimes in search of orchids as in the *New Naturalist Series* volume, *Wild Orchids of Britain* by V.S. Summerhayes, a work which contains a good number of photographs by him. The orchid-rich machair is a unique Hebridean habitat, one which the writer has photographed on South Uist many times. The colours of the zones and pockets of wild flowers among the grasses can be beautiful. The machair on the Monach Isles is regarded as being very special. His knowledge of the ecology of seals was good too. He took a number of photographs of the seals on the Monach Isles,



one of the biggest seal colonies in western Europe. The image underneath shows a seal pup he named "St. Kilda" in the pool where it learned to swim. This photograph was used on the dust cover of the book *Shillay and the Seals* and captures that very wistful, human expression that seals seem to be capable of making. Atkinson also photographed the St. Kilda wren and mouse—opposite, species unique to St. Kilda, taking some live mice away with him destined for the London zoo, an event which was dutifully reported in *The Stornoway Gazette*.



Robert Atkinson's book *Island Going* and its spirit of adventure has inspired a number of people. A few years ago a drama production was made by an Edinburgh theatre group based on his adventures. There is a website devoted to travel to the west coast and western isles which has adopted the same name.⁴¹ An exhibition of Robert Atkinson's work of that name, organised by The School of Scottish Studies, was held in various centres throughout the western isles in 1998. In the writer's opinion *Island Going* is one of the best adventure travel books ever written on the western isles. The Robert Atkinson collection held in the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh is a valuable and unique one made by a remarkable observer.

Notes on the camera and equipment used by Robert Atkinson is not yet recorded in the archive in *The School of Scottish Studies* and it has been difficult to find any information on the technical side of his work. It was noted on an album that 1/2 plates were used on occasion by Atkinson but that could be because his friend John Ainslie, who also took photographs, had taken the shots. The image underneath right has been blown up to try and get a better idea of the kind of camera Atkinson used, a medium format one perhaps. Whether this is Atkinson or Ainslie using it is not clear.



Above: Robert Atkinson's "dune house" on Shillay in the Sound of Harris.

Right: Robert's beloved *Heather* stranded in the Sound of Harris!

41. <http://www.islandgoing.com/default.asp>

ISLANDS REFERRED TO AND VISITED BY ROBERT ATKINSON

BENBECULA	BERNERAY	BORERAY	CAUSAMUL	CANNA
CEANN EAR [M.I.]	CEANN IAR [M.I.]	CLETHA MEDHA	COPPAY	DEASKER
DUN-AARIN	EIGG	EILEAN MOR [F.I]	EILEAN SIORRUIDH	ENSAY
FLANNAN ISLES	GASKER	GILSAY	GOMERSON [B & L	GOUSMAN
GREY HORSE	GRIMSAY	GROAY	GROATAY	HANDA ISLAND
HARRIS	HASKEIR	HERME- TRAY	KILLEGRAY	LEWIS
LINGAY	MONACH ISLES	NARSTAY	NORTH RONA	NORTH UIST
OIL	OPSAY	PABBAY	RED ROCK	RONAY
RONAY	SARSTAY	SCARAWAY	SGEIR VOLINISH	SHILLAY
SHILLAY BEG	SHIANT ISLES	SHIVINISH [M.I.]	ST. KILDA	SOAY [St.K.]
SOUTH UIST	SURSAY	TAHAY	TARANSAY	TOROGAY
VACCASAY	VOTTERSAY			

PAUL STRAND AND SOUTH UIST.

LIFE OF PAUL STRAND

Paul Strand [1890-1976] was born on 16th October 1890 in New York City. There are a number of websites that provide biographical information on this famous photographer. Much of the information given here came from a site that has grouped notes from various sources together.⁴² There are also a number of books and articles on the life and work of Paul Strand. One good source is a book published in 1990 to celebrate the centenary of Strand's birth.⁴³

He was the only child to parents of Bohemian-Jewish descent. The family name originally was Stransky. He was given his first camera at the age of 12. Although there is a good deal of material on Paul Strand the artist and his place in contemporary art movements there is much less on the technical details of how he achieved his remarkable photographic results. In 1904 he enrolled at the Ethical Culture Secondary School in New York City, an innovative establishment based upon the humanist beliefs of Felix Adler, a Jewish rationalist intellectual who founded the Ethical Culture movement.⁴⁴ He was involved in various humanist activities, one of which was the foundation of the National Child Labour Committee which is of interest to us because Lewis Hine⁴⁵ was the Committee's photographer. Strand had photography as a study option in his senior year. Lewis Hine arrived at the school in 1907 to teach photography and Paul Strand was fortunate enough to be taught by him. Hine used photographs in his teaching and developed documentary photography or photo-journalism where the photograph is used to make a social comment and thus be an instrument of social reform. Hine tried to teach pupils to "recognise what is good in a composition" by choosing carefully from the multitude of objects in the outside world those that are pleasing to the eye. "When children realize" he wrote "even to a limited extent, that success cannot be attained by snapping at everything, but by patient, careful, orderly work, they have taken an important step."⁴⁶ Naomi Rosenblum here suggests that where Hine saw "beauty" Strand substituted "objective truth," adding that Strand later did acknowledge his debt to Hine although his earliest work shows little influence to the ideas and values voiced by these teachers or reformers. Rosenblum writes that throughout the 1910s and 1920s Strand was more attracted to symbolic themes. During his final year he was taught art appreciation by the writer and critic, Charles Henry Caffin,⁴⁷ one who had a good background in aesthetics. It irritated Strand that photography on being accepted as an art form was constantly questioned. He graduated in 1909 and in 1911 embarked upon a tour of Europe's major cities visiting art museums, probably, as Rosenblum writes, as a result of Caffin's influence. Caffin had argued that photographic work could merit it to be placed among the other Fine Arts.⁴⁸

Making a living after graduating from High School was a dilemma for Paul Strand, who had now embraced the aesthetic qualities of photography. His father Jacob helped him in this regard by finding him a job as a clerk in a family enamel ware business. In his spare time he frequented The Camera Club of New York which at that time was a fairly elitist organization demanding an annual fee of fifty bucks. The club provided spaces for meetings and exhibitions, library and darkrooms. Here he gained technical skills on how to enlarge negatives shot from his Adams

42. <http://www.answers.com/topic/paul-strand>

43. Maren Stange (Ed.), Trachtenberg, Alan (Intro.) 1990 *Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work*. Aperture.

44. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felix_Adler_\(Society_for_Ethical_Culture\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felix_Adler_(Society_for_Ethical_Culture))

45. <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/IRhine.htm>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewis_Hine

46. Naomi Rosenblum. The Early Years in *Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work*. Aperture 1990.

47. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Henry_Caffin

48. Charles H. Caffin. *Photography as a Fine Art*. N.Y. 1971.

'Idento' and Ensign Reflex cameras⁴⁹ as well as being actively involved in the organization of the print side of the club.

Let us look at these early cameras used by Strand as reported by the art historian, Naomi Rosenblum. Adams & Co. were a London based manufacturer of cameras, who seemed most active around the turn of the last century. The website on Box Cameras⁵⁰ quotes Adams & Co.



as having been a camera maker for the rich and famous. They made a wide range of cameras with names like the clam-shell folder Natti, the Vesta and Verto folders, the Vaido plate and the wooden Studio Minex; the Minex became brand name for a range of SLR cameras. The Adams Indento, shown opposite, appears to have been a medium format camera where the lens and viewfinder could be rotated together on the front depending on whether the camera was being used horizontally or vertically; the viewfinder in both cases showing the same view as projected onto the plate.

The illustration was acquired from a Bonhams online auction site. The item was catalogued as Identto hand camera: Adams & Co. London, No. 2374 quarter plate with a Zeiss Patent 9 inch f/6.3 lens No. 12751 in Adam's patent shutter and matching film pack back in maker's fitted leather case. It realised £210 in May 2007. An Ensign Reflex camera is shown opposite.



At any rate a soft-focus gum print titled Versailles, 1911, taken on some early camera was good enough to win him a club prize and was entered in the London Salon in 1912. However, these early images could not be described as new or even innovative since the approaches had been explored already by Alfred Stieglitz⁵¹ and others. Alfred Stieglitz was to prove a strong influence on Paul Strand. He did much to promote photography and have the medium accepted as an art form. He tended to have exclusive circles that operated on an invitation only basis. The Photo-Secession founded by him in 1902 was one such group. It would appear that Strand's respect for The Camera Club was on the decline and as a result of an incident in 1920 he was suspended. He had left a negative of a full frontal nude to dry overnight and its un-concealed presence caused a commotion among the Club's committee! Strand through letters assured the trustees that his intentions were aesthetic and his suspension was lifted but the incident must have left a bad taste with Strand, a modernist and humanist. Strand's family business was sold in 1911 and he looked to photography as a source of income. He tried selling images taken in Europe to American tourists abroad but sales were disappointing. Then he did shots of graduating students against campus buildings of the eastern U.S. but this too did not bring in much money. These hand-coloured prints on platinum paper sold for two and a half bucks. 1913 saw a dramatic change in his style from that of the soft-focus pictorial image to applying cubism in photography. He was encouraged in this direction by Alfred Stieglitz and the circle associated with the Gallery 291.⁵² Rosenblum writes that the circle saw in New York "a visual metaphor for all they considered forward-looking and progressive."⁵³ So for the next three years we see Paul Strand taking photographs of his native New York, in a manner Rosenblum describes as "more influenced by the taste for

49. Naomi Rosenblum. The Early Years in *Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work*. Aperture 1990

50. <http://www.boxcameras.com/adamsdeluxe.html>

51. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Stieglitz

52. <http://www.georgia-okeeffe.com/gallery291.html>

53. Naomi Rosenblum. The Early Years in *Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work*. Aperture 1990



Japanese art than by purely Cubist theory.” 1915 sees Strand producing the famous image of Wall Street, shown underneath, a visual metaphor integrating, by means of geometry, the financial power of the austere architectural institution compared to the frailty of the passing human figures.

We see a change in the sharpness of Strand’s images too. The softness of his early pictorial images defined by wide apertures and special lenses was replaced by smaller apertures. According to Rosenblum this was as a result of criticism by Stieglitz of a 1914 landscape by

Strand where the major elements appear indistinct. So we now see Strand emerging on the contemporary photographic scene as an original voice and in 1915 he was invited to visit 291 and in the following year he was asked to exhibit. The show was titled *Photographs of New York and Other Places* and consisted of soft-focus landscapes and street scenes as well as some of his new geometric and small aperture work. 1916 saw him produce the abstract image *Porch Shadows*, shown opposite, shot at Twin Lakes, Connecticut, one which can be viewed from various angles or perspectives and thus epitomises Modernism. The image reveals that Strand had grasped the spatial geometry of combining architectural detail with an ordinary domestic scene to achieve pure abstraction: he was a Modernist.



Rosenblum reports that Strand was using a newly acquired large format camera with sharper lenses at this time⁵⁴ but does not name the type.

Also from 1916 he took candid portraits of unknown people he saw on the streets. He achieved this by using a prism lens which let him focus upon the subjects without their knowledge. He would not get away with such a practice today! However his thinking was that such an approach would prevent any posed facial expressions, conscious or unconscious, that contact between photographer and



subject can create, and fitted his theory of complete objectivity towards subject. His famous photograph, *Blind Woman* 1916, shown left, is evidence that his technique worked. Strand took around seventeen of such portraits but left this method of working for fifteen years. He was involved in the Great War in Europe and although he had doubts over America’s involvement initially his opinions changed after being drafted into the army.

Strand was becoming well known as a photographer, winning top prizes in Wanamaker Competitions, then the most prestigious of photographic competitions in the US.

54. Naomi Rosenblum. The Early Years in *Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work*. Aperture 1990

These successes gave him sufficient confidence to make his voice public. In 1917 writing in an art periodical, *The Seven Arts*, he asserted his belief that it was critical to have “absolute, unqualified objectivity” to make a photograph original.



At this time we also learn of what Naomi Rosenblum terms a “puzzling” approach by Strand to Georgia O’Keefe⁵⁵ who was teaching in Texas. Early in 1916 Anita Pollitzer took some of O’Keefe’s drawings to Stieglitz’s Gallery 291. This account is taken from Wikipedia: “He told Anita the drawings were the “purest, finest, sincerest things that had entered 291 in a long while,” and that he would like to exhibit them. Georgia had first visited 291 in 1908, and later on several occasions, but had never talked with Stieglitz although she had a high regard for his opinions as a critic. In April 1916 Stieglitz exhibited 10 of her drawings. She had not been consulted before the exhibition and only learned about it through an acquaintance. She confronted Stieglitz for the first time over the drawings. She later agreed to let them hang. Georgia’s first solo show opened at 291 in April 1917. Most of the exhibit were of watercolours from Texas.”

Clearly there was than an attraction between the two artists. [The image opposite is of Georgia O’Keefe, photographed by Alfred Stieglitz].

Strand encouraged O’Keefe to leave for New York to be “sustained both psychologically and financially by Stieglitz.” However, the puzzling aspect is that it appears that Strand had become interested himself in O’Keefe as a partner while at the same time purporting to be an agent, or matchmaker, for O’Keefe and Stieglitz. She however had chosen Stieglitz as a partner. His involvement in this odd situation caused him to be excluded from Stieglitz’s personal life temporarily. Stieglitz who was married to Emmeline Obermeyer was thrown out of the house when his wife came back to discover him photographing O’Keefe. He divorced her in 1918 and went to live with O’Keefe whom he married in 1924.

Strand’s period in the army changed him and he emerged afresh with new ideas. His army chores consisted off documenting surgical procedures and taking X rays which had given him a scientific approach to photography, strengthening his belief in absolute objectivity. These included becoming a freelance cinematographer. He acquired an Akeley Camera⁵⁶, shown under, and this appears to have provided him with a decent living throughout much of the 1920s. The Akeley Camera was designed by the explorer, Carl Ethan Akeley [1864-1926] who needed a robust camera that could handle wild-life filming so he designed and built this camera known as the “Pancake” Akeley due its round shape. Cameramen liked them for action shooting. Akeleyes were used to shoot the chariot races in the 1925 movie, *Ben Hur* as well as Westerns and movies that had action in the air. They could pan and tilt quickly and accurately. The word pan, from panoramic, is used by cameramen to describe following and shooting a moving object. Panning is a technique we studied in the class at RKC ourselves, but using a stills camera instead of a cine.



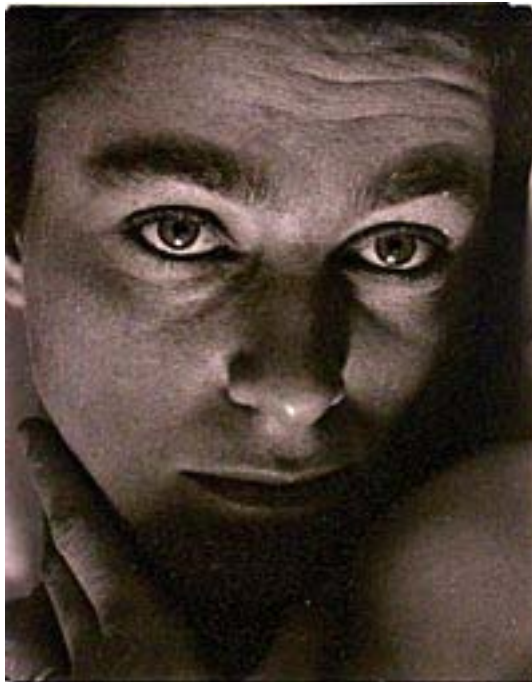
55. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia_O%27Keeffe

56. http://www.samdodge.com/sams_oldsite/akely257_sold.HTM

In 1920 Strand worked with Charles Sheeler,⁵⁷ a painter and photographer and one of the founders of American Modernism. He had a Debrrie camera, shown left. Joseph Jules Debrrie founded the Debrrie company in Paris in 1898. He developed the Le Parvo camera which was very popular in the early 1920s. Leni Riefenstahl used one to film her masterpiece on the 1936 Olympic Games held in Berlin. Sheeler, a Precisionist, had a fondness for architecture and geometric precision and it was here that the two men joined forces. The six minutes long movie titled *Manhatta* [still shown right] was based on some sections of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and represents an imaginary day in New York City. The angles and shots serve to highlight the geometry and architecture of New York. The work has been described as the first avant-garde film made in America and can be viewed at the website of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁵⁸ Through the 1920s Strand took photographs of machines and their forms. His Akeley camera was photographed in close-up creating an abstract view of the geometric forms of technology and showing Strand's appreciation of the design and sophistication of modern technology. However by the end of the 1920s it was apparent he was becoming disenchanted with machine art.



As already stated Alfred Stieglitz had a strong influence upon Paul Strand. He was an older man and the relationship took the shape of a mentor-disciple one. Stieglitz had been taking portraits of Georgia O'Keeffe from 1917 onwards. He took around 300. Strand had forged a relationship early in 1920 with Rebecca Salsbury who had also attended the Ethical Culture School in New York, graduating in 1911. She was a painter who had a curious technique of painting on glass. Strand began to photograph her in 1920, taking one hundred portraits of Rebecca until 1932. One is shown here, left. The couple were married in 1922. This work which has remained largely hidden and unexplored compared to Strand's other work shows a major breach in Strand's style. Here we do not see the complete objectivity that he insisted upon throughout his life as photographer. Belinda Rathbone in her essay on Strand's marriage to Rebecca lists reasons as to why these portraits have been kept in obscurity.⁵⁹ Strand must have felt uncomfortable following Stieglitz's idea of the serial portrait so closely, plus his subsequent divorce were likely factors. Rathbone writes that there was a "striking physical resemblance between Rebecca Salsbury and Georgia O'Keeffe," adding that "the two women's physical similarity is difficult to accept as merely coincidental." It appears that Rebecca was at first



an enthusiastic participant of having her portrait taken by Strand but as she learned of Stieglitz's own project being made of Georgia she became less willing and the issue was a source of ten-

57. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Sheeler

58. http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/artists_view/manhatta_main.html

59. Belinda Rathbone. Portrait of a Marriage: Paul Strand's Photographs of Rebecca in *Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work*. Aperture 1990

sion in their marriage. She was also acutely aware of how much Strand was influenced by Stieglitz and instinctively urged Paul to not be in his clutches and have his work appear derivative. The portraits of Rebecca are intimate and warm.

1929 was a turning point in the lives of the group of four. Georgia and Rebecca, at the urging of Mabel Dodge Luhan,⁶⁰ took off and journeyed to Taos, New Mexico. Dubbed ‘Mabeltown’ the two women fell in love with New Mexico [and it would seem with each other!] and both lived there for periods for the rest of their lives. This was a four month trip away from their husbands and for Georgia O’Keeffe it began what was to be a part-time marriage to Alfred Stieglitz. Strand shared Georgia and Rebecca’s love of New Mexico and for the next few summers the Strands stayed at Taos. One last portrait taken of Rebecca in Taos, New Mexico, 1932—the year before the Strands’ marriage ended—shows Rebecca pained and distant looking, quite different from the warm intimacy of the portraits taken in the early 1920s of her. Strand would never take such intimate portraits again. Instead we see earthy or robust characters viewed objectively. This is especially true of *Tir a’Mhurain*, his Hebridean images, our main study of the art of Paul Strand.

The early 1930s saw Paul Strand explore landscape photography, capturing what he called *The Spirit of Place*. He worked in New Mexico chiefly around Taos [image opposite—Ranchos de Taos Church, New Mexico] and Santa Fé in 1930, 1931 and 1932. Capturing vernacular architecture of the adobe mud and straw dwelling places and the landscape was a new and fruitful direction for Strand. In 1932 his relationship with Stieglitz was coming to a close and he was thus free, in a sense. His direction at this time was influenced more by Harold Clurman,⁶¹ the founder of The Group Theatre in New York who realised the experimental nature of his work in New Mexico and was also conscious of the fact that Stieglitz did not have the same interest or influence upon it. Some of his landscapes are of the Badlands, near Santa Fé, Dark Mountain and Dark Mountain, Cerro. Mesa Verde which was taken in Colorado is a wonderful shot. Strand commented on his landscape work in New Mexico as seizing the moments



when a precise relationship exists between sky and land.



He was using an 8 by 10 large format [below left], Korona camera, a 4 by 5 in Graflex, [below right], an intermediate 5 by 7 inch



view camera. Later he used a lighter Graflex camera for landscape work and a few years later he acquired a 5 by 7 inch Graflex that combined features of the Korona and smaller Graflex.⁶² He had a high regard for his Graflex cameras.

60. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mabel_Dodge_Luhan

61. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Clurman

62. Steve Yates. *The Transition Years: New Mexico in Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work*. Aperture 1990

During the period 1933-1942 Strand was involved in the making of movie films that had a political message. He was in Mexico from around 1933 to 1942. Strand, albeit a latecomer to the arts scene in Mexico, was fascinated by the artists who had been politically active during the Mexican Revolution. The American photographer, Edward Weston⁶³ who “became known as the pioneer of precise and sharp presentation” was part of this circle. Strand prepared a portfolio, *Photographs of Mexico* of twenty gravures. One is shown right, titled *Christo, Oaxaca*, 1933. He photographed a number of Mexican Catholic shrines and it would be surprising if he did not photograph the *The Virgin of Guadalupe*⁶⁴, the Saviour and Succour of indigenous peoples, a kindly saint who would intervene, if called upon, on behalf of the native people. Katherine Ware, the historian of photography, referring to Naomi Rosenblum’s work on Strand’s early years⁶⁵ writes that Strand had been interested in indigenous cultures as early as 1922 in the United States, had offered to make educational films on the Indian Reservations of the Southwest but that his proposal had not been accepted.



Strand was employed by the Mexican government to make movies that focused upon political issues that had arisen as they struggled to achieve the aims of the revolution. The first film made in Mexico was *The Wave* [still shown below], a film about a poor Mexican fishing village, the inequality between fishermen and boat owners and of the fishermen receiving a fair wage



for their hard work. Typical socialist stuff! Strand was cameraman and according to William Alexander⁶⁶ his trademark as photographer is apparent throughout with angle, line and light. Strand’s model was the film maker Robert Flaherty⁶⁷ who liked to live with the indigenous culture he was intending to film. He would first observe their ways and build his story around what he saw. His methodology was thus an ethnographic one and in this regard he was a pioneer. One of the father figures of the doc-

umentary, a Scot, John Grierson,⁶⁸ was friend and champion of Flaherty. In writing about Flaherty’s 1926 film *Moana*, he commented on its “documentary” value, probably coining the use of the word. Flaherty inspired not only Paul Strand with his ethnographic approach but also Werner Kissling. [See above]. Strand was also inspired by Soviet films such as *Potemkin*, *Storm Over Asia*, and *Road to Life* because of their nature or content and technical production. He

63. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Weston

64. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_Guadalupe

65. Katherine C. Ware. *Photographs of Mexico*, 1940 in Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work. Aperture 1990

66. William Alexander. Paul Strand as Filmmaker, 1933-1942 in *Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work*. Aperture 1990

67. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_J._Flaherty

68. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Grierson

made a trip to the Soviet Union hoping to work with Sergei Eisenstein⁶⁹ on his latest film but was unable to secure a work permit.

Nykino, a name derived from Soviet cinema, was a New York based radical film group which ran from 1935-1937. It had split away from the New York Worker's Film and Photo League 1930-1935. Nykino had ideas about films and documentaries being more fluid and organic in their presentation allowing creative techniques like re-enactments, creative photography—adding colour and drama generally, a path in which documentary making has continued to go down with increased sophistication to this day. The main players were Leo Hurwitz, Ralph Steiner, Lionel Berman, Ben Maddow, Sidney Meyers, Willard Van Dyke, Jay Leyda, Joris Ivens, Irving Lerner and Paul Strand. The members were political activists in the film making scene. Strand, Hurwitz and Steiner worked as cameramen for Pare Lorentz's film *The Plow That Broke the Plains*, a movie about U.S. Resettlement policy. Lorentz was no leftist but admired some of the Nykino group's photographic skills. Despite problems and conflicts over the script when the movie finally appeared to have been well put together and was highly praised. Nykino produced a newsreel production, *The World Today*, which was previewed in 1936 with *The Wave*, this film having been delayed by the Mexican government. These progressive films which had an interested audience earned enough money for the to launch Frontier films, a non-profit making collective in 1937, the idea being a change of name more indicative of being on the front-line of battle for the labour movement. William Alexander⁷⁰ writes that a Soviet film called Frontier was partly to do with it too. *Heart of Spain*, 1937 was their first release which takes up the cause of the Spanish partisans against the fascist Franco. *China Strikes Back* and *People of the Cumberland* were another two productions and there were a few other lesser-known ones. The big movie they made was *Native Land* 1942 which like *Heart of Spain* was spearheaded by Hurlitz and Strand. It became a monster by the group, who had scorn for Hollywood and big budget movies, and used up an awful lot of their humble resources. Film making of *Native Land* began in 1938 and took four and a half years to complete, sometimes stopping when funds ran out and they were forced to raise more by independent means. The duration saw tension and conflict with Steiner and Van Dyke quit to form American Documentary Films, taking the half-finished documentary *The City* with them. The fact that *Native Land* saw completion is testament to the strong central character of Paul Strand, his tenacity and determination. The overtly political movie was concerned with unions and union-busting, fascism and anti-fascism and the extreme right in the U.S. The cinematography by Strand is widely accepted as being very fine as we would expect. Strand Hurwitz received the final print for *Native Land* just after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour and the were forbidden to show the film until sometime later. Some report that the U.S. government threatened to destroy the negative. The film was a failure, Frontier Films not recovering even a small fraction of their combined resources in money or public support and thus no more films were made by the collective.

William Alexander sums Paul Strand's legacy as a filmmaker thus: "...It is his legacy of combining a troubled vision of American experience with political art, his refusal to compromise art for the sake of funding, his achievement of significant form in support of a vision, his understanding of the need both to make people central and to treat them with respect. It is a legacy of strength, integrity and commitment, of refusal to buckle to reactionary forces and to personal hardships. It is a resource for contemporary filmmakers and for other artists seeking to make responsible art."⁷¹

69. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergei_Eisenstein

70. William Alexander. Paul Strand as Filmmaker, 1933-1942 in *Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work*. Aperture 1990

71. Ibid



After the film making years Paul Strand returned to still photography. He embarked upon a series of books which was to occupy him until the time of his death in 1976. The first project was executed with Nancy Newhall and was a book titled *Time in New England*. He travelled throughout New England in the fall of 1945. The image opposite *Side Porch* was shot in 1946. In the late 1940s he was active with the Photo League Advisory Board and the Art Division of the National Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions and gave lectures and attended meetings—eventually complaining of the seemingly endless meetings. He contributed articles on Stieglitz for *New Masses and Popular Photography*. In 1948 his second marriage to Virginia Stevens ended.

The book was designed so as not to date markedly beyond the time of its publication, in 1950, published by Oxford University Press. The quality of the photographic prints in the book were not of a good quality and was a source of concern for Strand and Newhall and did attract criticism from various public and institutional quarters. The sales too although initially seeming quite buoyant were below what the publishers had estimated. The image left is titled *Toward the Sugar House*, taken in 1944 at Vermont.



Living in the U.S in the 1950s was a time of real discontent for Paul Strand. *Native Land* had won a prize in Czechoslovakia in 1949 and instead of receiving acclaim in the U.S. a number of his film colleagues would soon be blacklisted. The stifling environment created by McCarthyism and the extreme right in the U.S. proved unbearable for Strand. He along with Hazel Kingsbury, whom he was to marry in 1951, left the U.S. for France. They settled in Paris for a while before making permanent home at Orgeval, a village some thirty-five kilometres west of Paris. He had the idea of making another book which was to be a portrait of a French village with text, similar in style

to *Time in New England*. However it became apparent to Strand that his portrait was one of the entire nation so the book was formed by a selection of images of France with the text by Claude Roy and published as *La France de Profil*. Strand was to oversee the plate and production, organising the inclusion of luminous rotogravures⁷² in Switzerland thereby not repeating the weakness of production of *Time in New England*.

Strand married Hazel in 1951; she was his third wife. Catherine Duncan writes that Orgeval was Strand's first real home.⁷³ Orgeval proved to be his base too for the other books he produced. These works were all intended to show the spirit of an indigenous culture with its roots and unique identity: Strand as a lifelong humanist had a natural empathy with these peoples. We could argue that they were ethnographic and humanist studies. The other books Strand produced were: *Un Paese*, in collaboration with Italian cinematographer Cesare Za-



72. John Rohrbach. *Time in New England: Creating a Usable Past in Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work*. Aperture 1990

73. Catherine Duncan. *The Years in Orgeval in Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work*. Aperture 1990

vattini, depicts Luzzara, [The image above right is from Strand's Luzzara project, titled *Tailor's Apprentice*, 1953.] the home village of Zavattini; *Tir a'Mhurain* with Basil Davidson, a study of South Uist which we will be looking at in more detail; *Living Egypt* with James Aldridge and *Ghana: An African Portrait*, again with Basil Davidson. At the time of his death in 1976 he was involved in projects on Morocco and Romania and was trying to find writers who could do the text that would marry the photographs he had taken.

TIR A'MHURAIN

Tir a'Mhurain literally means "land of the bent grass". Bent grass is another name for marram, the familiar, wiry grass that grows on sand-dunes and by its binding of the sand, prevents erosion. *Tir a'Mhurain* is another name for the Outer Hebridean island of South Uist, one which the native Gaelic speaking islanders acutely know has a certain affection and sense of place.

As discussed in the introduction, the 1950s saw a revival of folk song and folk song collectors of whom Alan Lomax⁷⁴ was a key player. There are some websites devoted to the work and achievements of Lomax which are listed under the wikipedia reference below. He wrote a number books and articles on folk songs and ethnomusicology; a selection of his writings 1934-1997 was published a few years ago.⁷⁵ Like Paul Strand, Alan Lomax was regarded with suspicion by the security services as being a left-wing activist or communist in the frosty-cold political climate of the early 1950s whereas the reality was that he had a deep love of the folk music of indigenous cultures and fulfilling this appreciation meant involving himself with the roots of the peoples of these ethnic cultures. Thus when Paul Strand heard Lomax on a radio programme in the early 1950s enthusing about the people of South Uist and the richness of their song culture and of the songs Lomax had collected from his visit in the summer of 1951 he felt an empathy and an instant desire to visit South Uist and record the people of the island in his unique and artistic way. Lomax would have elaborated on the customs and lore behind the songs; the waulking songs of the women, sung together at work.

In 1954 Strand with his wife Hazel visited South Uist, staying for three months. The first few weeks were spent observing the islanders and how they lived. This approach is similar to how, as we earlier discussed, the film maker, Robert Flaherty had worked and Strand as Catherine Duncan, who wrote the preface of *Tir a'Mhurain*,⁷⁶ attests in her account of Strand's last years at Orgeval. They were escorted around the island by Alasdair Maclean, brother of the folklorist, Calum Iain and Gaelic poet Sorley, who was G.P. on the island for around thirty years. Dr. Maclean had a very good knowledge of South Uist families and in fact was author of a paper on the subject.⁷⁷ His son Cailean is a professional photographer.⁷⁸ Cailean discussed Paul Strand on South Uist with the writer.⁷⁹ Cailean drew my attention to a paper by the academic and geographer, Dr. Fraser MacDonald.⁸⁰ MacDonald, a native of North Uist, answers some questions I had posed to Cailean Maclean in trying to establish the connection between Strand and his fa-

74. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Lomax

www.culturalequity.org.

www.lomaxarchive.com

www.loc.gov/folklife/lomax

75. Ronald D. Cohen (Ed.) *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings 1934-1997*. Routledge 2003

76. *Tir A'Mhurain*. The Outer Hebrides of Scotland. Photographs by Paul Strand. Preface by Catherine Duncan. Commentary by Basil Davidson. Aperture Foundation Inc. 2002

77. Dr. Alasdair Maclean. Notes on South Uist Families *TGSI* 53 (1982-84) 491-518

78. <http://www.skye-media.com/>

79. Interview with Cailean Maclean. 27th Nov. 2007.

80. Fraser MacDonald. Paul Strand and the Atlanticist Cold War in *History of Photography* 28(4): 356-373 2004.

ther. He quotes from an interview Paul Strand had with photography critic, Bill Jay for The Institute of Creative Arts in 1972 which was subsequently published in *Creative Camera*.⁸¹

The question was how to contact these people. When we heard that they were very hostile, one way that we began to dig into the problem was to meet the local doctor, whom we had heard was a man of considerable culture, who, besides being a physician, was also interested in the folklore of the island. So one day we went to him and said 'Dr. Maclean, this is our problem, how are we going to photograph the people? Will they be very hostile to us'. He said 'No. I don't think so.' 'Well you as doctor, you know everybody here. Would you mind sitting down and making a list of people from babyhood up to old age, who you think are photogenic, who we might go and see and say 'Dr. Maclean knows our reason for being here. We are making a book about this island and he thinks that it would be a good idea if you would allow yourself to be photographed'.... Of course the whole thing depended on whether Dr. Maclean's idea of somebody being interested and photogenic and typical of their life was valid and a good solid judgement ... But it worked, it absolutely worked. He had a very fine eye and everybody we met was photogenic.⁸²

Fraser MacDonald, an academic with a strong interest in geopolitics leans heavily on Strand and Marxism in his rather turgid paper. He appears uneasy with Alan Trachtenberg's stance and comment that Strand's politics bear "an uncertain relation to his art, and seeking out connection between them is probably fruitless."⁸³ Instead MacDonald seeks to develop the argument of Mike Weaver, editor of the journal, *History of Photography*, the same one that published MacDonald's paper. In his essay Weaver concludes that "Strand's work remains the magnificent culmination in photography of a great realist tradition in art which must be seen within the context of his socialist vision if it is to be fully understood."⁸⁴ Weaver's essay is sophisticated and I can accept the above premise; it was inevitable, that considering the nature of Strand's work and vision, he mixed freely with the people and among these social networks would be found the apparatchiks and ideologies. However, I feel differently towards MacDonald's essay, one which refers to Strand in relation to his work as photographer as "his Marxist aesthetic" in the second paragraph. I find this presumptuous; MacDonald, it appears, wants to pin Strand's political colours to the Marxist mast at all costs but I remain unconvinced. I more than concur with Trachtenberg's statement. Paul Strand was an artist and a humanist and trying to make interpretation of his art through his politics is more than 'probably' fruitless.

The images taken and preserved for posterity are superb making the book *Tir a' Mhurain* one of the most important photographic works produced in post-war Scotland. The text was written by Basil Davidson, a writer noted for works on Africa. Compton MacKenzie had been considered for the job but things just didn't seem to work out between the two and so the project was abandoned. Fraser MacDonald refers to the actor Alex McCrindle⁸⁵ as being the agent acting between Strand and Mackenzie. He states that McCrindle was the "most important person behind the *Tir a' Mhurain* project" apart from Strand and Davidson.⁸⁶ *Tir a' Mhurain* was first published in 1962 by McGibbon and Kee, the same publisher of some of the poet Hugh MacDiarmid's work. The book was reprinted in 2002 by Aperture, the New York based publisher of photographic works. There is a slight difference between the two books; the 1962 edition has a portrait missing in the 2002 edition which has a few images not in the 1962 edition.

Paul Strand said that a photographic portrait was a very difficult thing to do. You had to take an image of a person in such a way that it brought the presence of that person to people who had

81. Bill Jay. Interview with Paul Strand for ICA 1972. *Creative Camera* 141 (March 1976), 84

82. Ibid

83. Alan Trachtenberg. Introduction in *Paul Strand: essays on his life and work*, 1990

84. Mike Weaver. Dynamic Realist in *Paul Strand: Essays on his life and work*. Aperture 1990

85. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alex_McCrindle

86. Fraser MacDonald. Paul Strand and the Atlanticist Cold War in *History of Photography* 28(4): 356-373 2004.

never seen the person before but after they looked at the photograph they would not forget the person.⁸⁷ The portraits of the islanders taken by Strand in *Tir a' Mhurain* fit this definition, making them timeless and universal. Most of their portraits were taken against the stone walls of their houses. The texture provides a good physical contrast with the ruggedness of the older male subjects but there is also a deeper and empathetic relationship; the lichen encrusted ancient stones are symbolic of the endurance of the islanders. This message comes across in the text written by Davidson too as he recounts the sufferings of the Gael from the suppression of the Lords of the Isles; the effects of the Reformation; the anglicisation of the clan chiefs and callous disregard for their people through the clearances; the attempts at extirpating the Gaelic language after 1745 and more besides. When we read the history of the islands since the Reformation one wonders why the Gael was not made extinct long ago and the answer is the resourcefulness and steadfast endurance of the islanders. Strand loved to portray strength of character in the form of stoicism and robustness in his portrait subjects and in Uist he found it in abundance. A selection of examples of his portraits of the islanders are shown here.



Margaret Maclean, South Uist, 1954

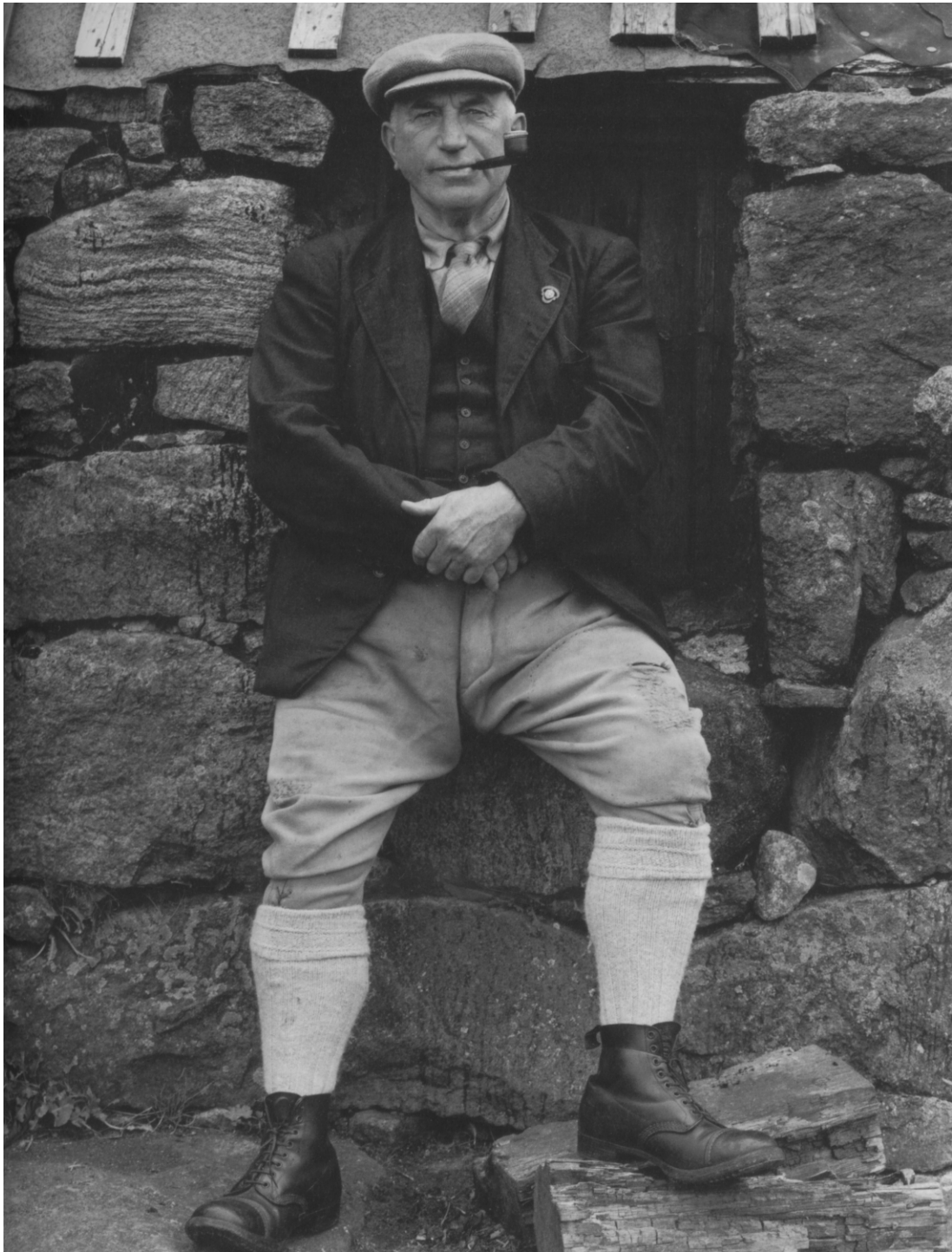
87. Documentary titled *Under the Dark Cloth*, 1989.

This striking portrait is of a person whom the writer would describe as typically South Uist looking; the dark hair, eyes and quite dark complexion and the broadness of cheekbones being contributing elements. She was photographed against the stone wall of a croft house, as were other of his subjects. For Strand to have used a studio to make these studies would be tantamount to denying the whole ethos of his project.



Mr. and Mrs. Angus MacLean, South Uist, Hebrides, 1954

More MacLeans: there are a fair number of Macleans on South Uist so this couple are probably not related to the woman above. Once again a strong image, an elderly couple photographed outside, presumably, their home. There is an empathy between the man's moustache and the straw thatch, nothing disrespectful intended; it does complement the ruggedness of the man's face. This couple are probably typical for their age of the islanders as regards dress and style.



Archie MacDonald, South Uist, 1954

A strong character; it looks as if he dressed for the occasion and having his pipe in his mouth was an issue! This is the husband of *Mrs. Archie MacDonald* (naturally!) who was also photographed by Paul Strand. His wife was a Gaelic singer on the island, Dr. MacLean having recorded a good number of songs from her and had encouraged his brother Calum Iain as well as Alan Lomax to do likewise.⁸⁸ Archie MacDonald also, according to Fraser MacDonald acted as

88. Fraser MacDonald. Paul Strand and the Atlanticist Cold War in *History of Photography* 28(4): 356-373 2004.

guide for Paul Strand; he was a second contact. This photograph is one of the most popularly reproduced of Strand's Uist photographs.



Kate Steele, South Uist, 1954

Strong character once again: endurance, tenacity, patience... all these qualities are apparent. Wonderful image, one of the strongest Paul Strand made in South Uist.



Katie Morag Morrison, South Uist, 1954

Another striking portrait. Katie Morag is a second cousin of the writer. Her father, John Morrison [mac Alasdair Aonghais Ruaidh] was the son of John Morrison [mac Aonghais Ruaidh] who was the son of Angus Morrison [ni'n Iain Mhurchaidh] who was the father of Johnnie Morrison [mac Aonghais Ruaidh Iain Mhurchaidh] who was my grandfather. It may seem odd that you had a 'John' and a 'Johnnie' in the same family but South Uist Catholic families were like that and it can get extremely confusing, as you can easily imagine. Katie Morag Morrison [ni'n Iain Alasdair Aonghais Ruaidh] married Ian Paul Steele [mac Chaluim Ruaridh] and had three children, Iain, Calum Joseph and Ann Marie. She lives in Fort William at present and was subject of an interview and article by a BBC journalist a few years ago which can be read online.⁸⁹

Paul Strand captured the horses that roamed wild in South Uist for the image used on the dust cover of *Tir a' Mhurain*. He liked to capture the black and white sequences of the horses' formation seen above left.

Our final image shows Paul Strand himself and the large format camera he would have used to capture the striking legacy of Hebridean images he left the Scottish people.



Although it has never been termed as such, the writer would venture to describe *Tir a' Mhurain* as an ethnographic study of the islanders of South Uist. Paul Strand examined as an artist with an ethnographic interest in specific, or indigenous peoples, makes more sense than that of him as a Marxist ideologue, or one prepossessed with a political agenda.