Illegible, Erratic and Entertaining: Cataloguing the Notebooks of Alexander Carmichael

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In 2009, the Carmichael Watson Project, based at the Centre for Research Collections at the University of Edinburgh, began to research, transcribe and catalogue the field and transcription notebooks of Alexander Carmichael (1832–1912), an exciseman better known for being a folklorist and antiquarian and the compiler of *Carmina Gadelica*.[1] The two-year project was generously funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and allowed for a team of archivists and academics to work together to create a ground-breaking online resource.[2]

Understandably, people often think that the Carmichael Watson Project relates to the papers of a man called Carmichael Watson but in fact the papers in the Carmichael Watson Collection (ref. GB 237 Coll-97) were created by Alexander Carmichael, his son-in-law Professor William J. Watson (1865–1948), a noted Celtic and place-name scholar and his grandson, James Carmichael Watson (1910–1942), like his father, William, a Professor of Celtic at the University of Edinburgh, who was sadly killed in action in World War II. Taking up nearly nine linear metres of shelving, the collection also contains papers belonging to other Gaelic and Celtic scholars, namely: Elizabeth (Ella) Carmichael (1870–1928), the daughter of Alexander Carmichael and second wife of Professor William J. Watson, who co-edited *The Celtic Review*; Rev. Alexander Cameron of Arran (1827–88), pioneer Celtic philologist; Professor Donald MacKinnon (1839–1914), first holder of the Chair of Celtic at the University of Edinburgh; Alexander Macbain (1855–1907), Celtic scholar, philologist and lexicographer; Rev. Archibald MacDonald of Kiltarlity (1855–1948), historian and genealogist; Father Allan McDonald (1859–1905), priest, poet and folklorist; Rev. Angus MacDonald of Killearnan (1858–1932), historian and anthologist; and Rev. Charles Robertson of Jura (1885–1927), linguist and onomastician.

Since it was bequeathed to the University by the Watsons, the collection has seen considerable use. In the 1970s an attempt was made to create a descriptive list of the contents of the collection by Rev. John MacKechnie, who compiled the *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts in Selected Libraries in Great Britain and Ireland*.

1   A. A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, I–VI (Edinburgh, 1900, 1940, 1954 and 1971).
2   http://www.carmichaelwatson.lib.ed.ac.uk.

While the catalogue he created provides a useful starting point, the records have been described without being arranged and in many cases descriptions are rather subjective, meaning that many parts of the collection remain unknown. Physically, the catalogue is about three or four centimetres thick, in tiny print and gives the researcher no option but to start at page one and wade their way through dense text to find what they're looking for. Because the papers had been used by scholars and consequently cited in many publications, it was decided not to rearrange and hence renumber the collection, an activity which would be an entirely different undertaking altogether.

To understand the nature of the twenty-eight notebooks written by Alexander Carmichael, it is necessary to have a little bit of background on the man himself. He was born on the Isle of Lismore, Argyll in December 1832 and, following education on the island and in Greenock, he went on to become an officer for the Inland Revenue. He was posted variously to Dublin, Islay, Cornwall and Skye, where he began collecting folklore on behalf of the Victorian polymath John Francis Campbell (1821–85). His longest stint was for eighteen years in Uist and it is here that he collected most of his material, this time at his own behest. After he moved to Edinburgh, he would spend summer holidays in Argyll and Ross-shire collecting and was known to be tenacious in his pursuit of charms, songs, stories, prayers and lore of any kind. These precious gems of Gaelic and Highland culture were edited and translated for publication in *Carmina Gadelica*. Described as 'hymns and incantation', the first two volumes were published in Carmichael's lifetime while the last four were published posthumously. Through footnotes, glossaries and introductions to individual items, the text as a whole records much more than simply songs and prayers. Illustrated with Celtic designs drawn by his wife, Mary Frances MacBean (1837–1928) and inspired by manuscripts in the Advocate's Library, the publication was deliberately opulent to reflect the value of the contents and to instil some reverence for them at a time when Gaelic culture was often derided as lowly by those outside of it. Alexander Carmichael received an honorary doctorate from the University of Edinburgh in 1909. He died in 1912 and was taken back to Lismore to be buried.

The notebooks, on which the project concentrated, can be classified in two ways either as field or transcription notebooks. The field notebooks are those which Carmichael carried around with him and in which he recorded items as he heard them, having no other means available to him. In many cases it accounts for the difficulty in reading his writing as he would be trying to note down what he was hearing quickly while it was being sung or recited, sometimes in a different dialect from his own, sometimes in dark cramped conditions, as some of his reciters were quite impoverished, and sometimes with narratives changing between Gaelic and English. While collecting stories from Angus Gunn, a crofter in Ness, Isle of Lewis, and his daughter Ann, he wrote that she was 'a woman who talks like a machine'.[3] The accompanying story, about a

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[3]   Story entitled 'Caran mac Fitheall' collected from Ann Gunn, Edinburgh University

man with three sons who builds temples and castles but who does not trust his wife while he is away and wishes to test his sons, is notably incomplete.

One of the smallest volumes physically contains the greatest number of items: some 344 altogether,[4] most of which were collected from a foxhunter called Donald MacColl in Glencreran, Appin, Argyll. MacColl's contributions reflect the range of topics which have been uncovered, from professional knowledge on hunting foxes, the location of holy wells and stones, how to invoke the help of St Cyril, tales of people who fought at Culloden (reminiscent of how people today talk about World Wars I and II), stories of ancient tribes and place-name origins. There is no sense of Carmichael having any specific criteria for the information he noted down and as such the irregular nature of both content and appearance meant that whether transcribing or cataloguing, one was never very sure what was going to come next. He could easily jump from a note about fishing to a love song to one of his many notes of vocabulary. The following is a transcription of three items within notebook Coll-97/CW120, which shows the diversity of Carmichael's notes:

> Bishop of Argyll lived (in) Bearnary. Small
> house near the ~~cha~~ Temple
> In a dell W (West). is a burying (burying ground) with
> remain (remains) of dyke[5]
> Fish found on shore gave
> the plague to the people of
> Achadhanduin[6]
> Legacy.
> Duncan & James Stewart sons
> of Alex (Alexander) Stewart son of Dunc (Duncan) son taoitear writer
> (heir) of Stewart of Appin.
> After Culloden where
> they fot (fought) they fled to Jamaica …[7]

The transcription notebooks contain fair copies of items he recorded in his field notebooks and in these Carmichael made attempts to arrange the content or index it. Many of the items in the transcription notebooks appear in *Carmina Gadelica* and they are of great interest to researchers who have noted discrepancies between the two. While *Carmina Gadelica* was hailed for the magnum opus that it is, it had its detractors who said that he had tampered with the texts, making them more genteel or polished.[8] The project's efforts

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Library Coll-97/CW115/7.
[4] Field notebook, EUL Coll-97/CW120.
[5] Note on the Bishop of Argyll's residence, EUL Coll-97/CW120/16.
[6] Note about the plague, EUL Coll-97/CW120/17.
[7] Story entitled 'Legacy', EUL Coll-97/CW120/18.
[8] D. U. Stiùbhart, *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael* (Isle of Lewis, 2008), 32.
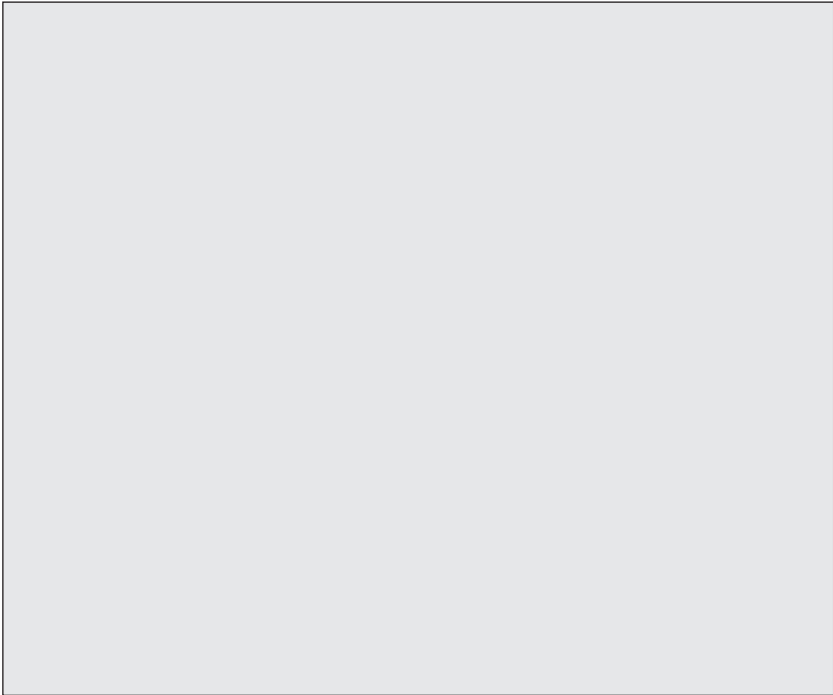
Plate 1   Screenshot of catalogue entry ref. EUL Coll-97/CW7/41.

to transcribe and catalogue the notebooks in detail will enable researchers to investigate this argument.

Cataloguing was done using Encoded Archival Description (EAD), an XML language developed specifically for listing archives. In normal cataloguing practice, each notebook would get a fairly general description of its contents, picking out highlights and recording the usual creators, contributors, places and dates. In the case of Carmichael's notebooks, it was decided that to make the content as accessible as possible to the user, they had to be catalogued with a separate entry for each item. The advantage of this is that every precious item, be it a story, song or charm gets the fullest possible description. The disadvantage for the archivist is that the most insignificant or most confusing entry also has to get a full description. Bearing in mind Carmichael's reputation as an editor, special attention was given to recording where items were noted as being transcribed or scored through as if they had been transcribed elsewhere. Also important was the 'Related Material' field, which meant that different versions of material recorded by Carmichael could be identified and in effect cross-referenced as each record would link to the other. Plate 1 is a screenshot of a catalogue entry for item EUL Coll-97/CW7/41, a fair copy of the charm

entitled 'Mòthan'. The 'Related Material' field shows the cross-reference for the field notebook version and also where it was published in *Carmina Gadelica*.

It is unsurprising that this charm has related material as 'Mothan' is mentioned numerous times in *Carmina Gadelica*, Carmichael describing it thus on its first mention:

> The 'mothan' (bog-violet?) is one of the most prized plants in the occult science of the people. It is used in promoting and conserving the happiness of the people, in securing love, in ensuring life, in bringing good, and in warding away evil …
>
> When the 'mothan' is used as a love-philtre, the woman who gives it goes upon her left knee and plucks nine roots of the plant and knots them together, forming them into a 'cuach' – ring. The woman places the ring in the mouth of the girl for whom it is made in the name of the King of the sun, and of the moon, and of the stars, and in the name of the Holy Three. … And should the man kiss the girl while the 'mothan' is in her mouth he becomes henceforth her bondsman.
>
> The 'mothan' is placed under parturient women to ensure delivery, and is carried by wayfarers to safeguard them on their journeys. It is sewn by women in their bodice, and by men in their vest under the left arm …
>
> To drink the milk of an animal that ate the 'mothan' ensures immunity from harm. If a man makes a miraculous escape it is said of him, 'Dh'ol e bainne na bo ba dh'ith am mothan' – 'he drank the milk of the guileless cow that ate the "mothan."'[9]

Several versions of 'Am Mothan' follow this commentary, one of which was collected from Mary Stewart, the original version of which is listed in the catalogue entry shown. It is worth noting that the catalogue entry states that 'Additions have been made to the text.'

Each item description was also indexed according to six categories: subjects, people, places, families, corporate bodies and genre. An index term only had to be created once and was given a unique identification number in the University Archives' Authorities Database. The number was incorporated into the EAD metadata which meant that every item with the same index term could be linked. It also meant that if an index term had to be changed at all e.g. say an exact date of birth or death had been identified, it only had to be changed once within the database and not on every occasion it appeared in the catalogue.

One of the most important index terms recorded was the name of the person from whom Carmichael collected the item. As stated above, Alexander Carmichael began collecting folklore on behalf of John Francis Campbell, compiler of *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*. Still mindful of the scandal of James 'Ossian' MacPherson's fraudulent folklore, Campbell instilled in Carmichael the need for folklore to be collected from named individuals for the lore to be given a context of place, person and time. Many folklorists in other countries regarded the lore as belonging to 'the folk' and therefore felt there was no need to record the name of their reciter. The ability to trace the

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[9]   A. A. Carmichael, *Carmina Gadelica*, I (Edinburgh, 1900), 110.

path of stories, songs, poems and charms from one tradition bearer to another becomes possible when the name of the reciter or informant is recorded along with the name of the person from whom they in turn learned their lore. With all this in mind, the name of each person mentioned in Carmichael's notebooks has been indexed and, where possible, the individual traced using the splendid set of statutory records available at the ScotlandsPeople Centre, in the National Records of Scotland. The index term displays the following details where known or appropriate: the individual's name, maiden name, patronymic (a form of naming based on the given name of male ancestors), occupation, place of residence, dates of birth and death e.g.:

> Johnston | Donald | c1811–1880 | Dòmhnall mac Iain icRaghnaill | crofter | Eriskay

In 1865, this Donald Johnston, a crofter from the island of Eriskay, told Alexander Carmichael a long story about 'An Ceatharnach Caol Riach', the grey, grizzled outlaw, a story which he said he heard from his great-grandfather, Archibald MacInnes from Gearraidh Bhailteas in South Uist.[10] It is a complex story full of murder, magic, mystery, music, voyages and enchantment. As in this case, many informants stated from whom they had learned their song or story and so that individual has also been indexed. A good instance of this is that at least eight people in Uist, including a relative, stated that they learned stories from Ruaraidh Ruadh MacCuithein ('Red-haired Roderick MacQueen'), a catechist who travelled the islands and who in addition to his official duties often entertained people with Fenian ballads.[11] Nearly every informant gave a little bit of information about Ruaraidh including how he had been given 'a free piece of land for his duans [ballads]',[12] how he mainly told Fenian and Ossianic tales,[13] and how he had eighteen books on Fenian tales, which were burnt by his son 'who turned a F. C. [Free Church]'.[14]

In addition to indexes of people, short biographies of informants were written using the new Encoded Archival Context (EAC) standard. The project was the first in the UK to start using the standard and we were fortunate to have a number of volunteers to help us with the task of creating some 300 EAC biographies. As well as a short account of their life, the biography lists all the sources used in identifying an individual and records when they encountered Carmichael or were mentioned to him. Since going live, the project has

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10 Story entitled 'An Ceatharnach', EUL Coll-97/CW113/27.

11 http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/red-haired-catechist.html.

12 Story about Fenians and accompanying notes from the informant about story-telling collected from Hector MacIsaac, EUL Coll-97/CW104/28 and story about 'Bas Osgair' and accompanying note collected from John MacDonald, EUL Coll-97/CW105/2.

13 Story entitled 'Toirioc Na Taineac' and accompanying note collected from Hector MacIsaac, EUL Coll-97/CW105/14.

14 Story entitled 'Duan an Deirg' and accompanying note collected from Catherine MacQuien, EUL Coll-97/CW105/5.
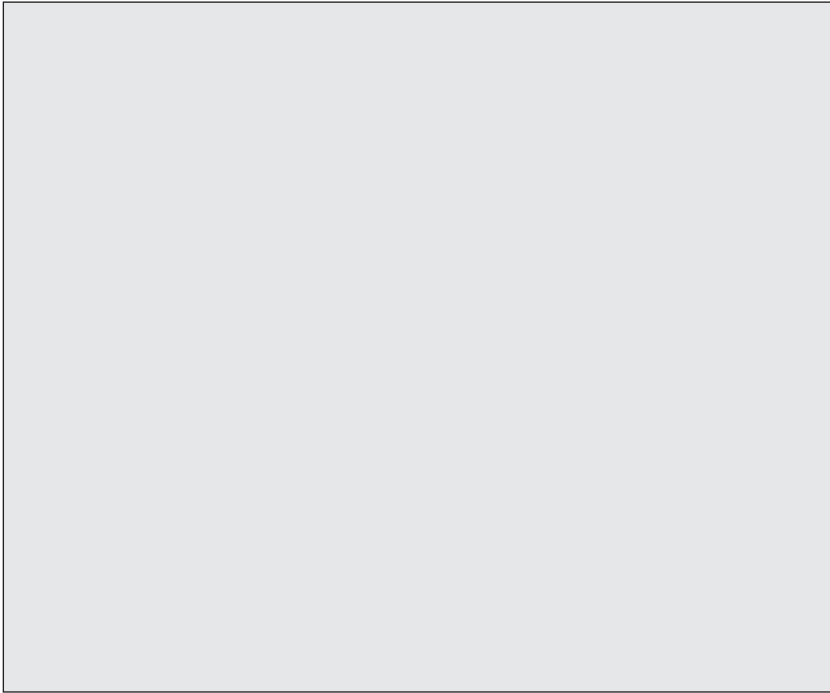
Plate 2   Screenshot of catalogue entry ref. GB 237 Coll-97/CW106/54.

received a number of enquiries from genealogists who have discovered valuable information about their antecedents and are delighted to learn that they may have contributed to *Carmina Gadelica*.

Subject indexing is seen by some in the archives profession as the Holy Grail, making records easier to categorise and search, and by others as a can of worms, with uncertainties over how general or specific index terms should be and how time-consuming the task can be. The project used Library of Congress Subject Headings,[15] the UK Archival Thesaurus,[16] an unpublished subject list provided by the School of Scottish Studies Archives and, inevitably, created its own terms where necessary. The terms tend to the general as the subjects covered by Carmichael's notebooks are so vast it would be difficult to be authoritative on more specific terms. Alexander Carmichael was fascinated by the landscape and often made notes on rocks and stones he came across so that subject index terms for these instances may include archaeology, geology and geography. It was felt that this would keep the notes open to a broad range

[15]   http://authorities.loc.gov/.
[16]   http://www.ukat.org.uk/thesaurus/alpha.php.

of users and would guard against mistakenly indexing different periods or ages of archaeology or geology. Cataloguing and indexing every item means that there are also instances where it is not possible to attach a subject index term because the text is illegible, or there are too few words for the note to make any sense. In these cases every effort has been made to attach an index term of at least one category and to record the uncertainty in the catalogue description. To give an idea of the wide scope of material Carmichael recorded, the statistics show 560 subject index terms were created for the project alone. Plate 2 shows the catalogue entry for a story about a man swallowed up by the ground on Bernera Island, off Lismore, and is a good example of an unlikely grouping of subject terms.

The category of genre in the index terms is a departure from many archival indexes but it was felt that it was necessary given the nature of the material. Once again, the approach was to keep things general, so that this category only contains sixteen terms. A song is indexed simply as a song in the genre category but, when appropriate, may be given another term to distinguish it from other types of song in the subject index, such as lament or lullaby. Similarly, it would have been desirable to categorise tales according to the Aarne Thompson classification system for international tales, or to further subdivide items into historical anecdote, place-name origin etc., but it was felt that the resources required to do so would be disproportionate to the benefit so again the subject index has provided extra detail for the tale e.g. Ossianic tales, Fenian tales.

The index terms for families record kin groups which are well known such as MacDonald of Clanranald, Stewart of Appin or Maclean of Duart; ancient ones such as Sìol Ghoraidh in North Uist or the Abraich in Lochaber and lesser-known groups which are clearly defined in the notebooks and probably known in the locality such as the Blacks on Lismore or MacCuish family of North Uist. The term is kept simple with family name, title (if applicable) and territorial distinction e.g.:

Campbell | of Barbreck or Fraser | Lord Lovat

The corporate names index terms were the least used in the catalogue although, as one might expect in a set of notebooks written by a middle-class man of scholarly intent, there are references to educational establishments such as schools and universities, churches and a number of businesses in Edinburgh such as a hat shop, photographer and coal merchant. One notebook, which contains a plethora of material on birds and fish found on Islay, also contains stories relating to the Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses building the Rinns of Islay Lighthouse.[17]

Like the index of people, the index of place-names is significant for the folklorist as it can help to identify the distribution of particular material. However, Carmichael was interested in place-names themselves, and possibly

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[17]   Field notebook, EUL Coll-97/CW89.

not just because he was responsible for collecting place-names for the Ordnance Survey (OS) in the 1860s and 1870s from Harris all the way down to Barra Head on Berneray. His notebooks bear sketches of archaeological sites, mentions of submerged churches, descriptions of eroding coastal graveyards and local history relating to buildings such as Teampull na Trionaid (Trinity Temple) in Cairinis, North Uist or Caisteal Chiseamail (Kisimul Castle) in Barra. While he was on Taransay, more than once, Carmichael recorded a story about a notorious factor called Donald Stewart who appeared to have no respect for the past:

> Aft[er] a high tide last w[in]t[er] the whole small bay was covered over with bones – the tide being as ruthless as Stewart who had Loscantire [Luskentyre] and who ploughed the cladh [graveyard] the people had at Seilebost.[18]

> Even the bury[ing] place the Seilebost people had he plowed till skulls were rolling ab[ou]t & bones cover[in]g the ground like stones. Horrible barbarity.[19]

In looking for more information about the location of this former graveyard an unexpected reference was uncovered, in a note of a Public Meeting in Seilebost School on 16 June 2010, published by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

> It's much more subtle than Donald Stewart ploughing the fields in the graveyards in the west side in the 1850s but its (sic) happening again.[20]

Indexing the place-names was one of the most time-consuming activities in cataloguing but is also an area where the project incorporated ideas never tried out before in archives catalogues. The first thing to tackle was bilingual place-names. As well as having terrible handwriting, Carmichael was also a little haphazard when it came to spelling, in either English or Gaelic, although to be fair, Gaelic spelling has never been completely standardised. The spelling given by Carmichael is recorded in the catalogue entry but the index term records the version by which the place is recorded on the most recent OS map, whether in Gaelic or English. Some place-names have only been found on nineteenth-century OS maps for which the National Library of Scotland's excellent online resource of Scottish maps was consulted.[21] Catalogue entries give a standardised version of the place-name in both English and Gaelic, as appropriate, and the island or county to help differentiate between places with the same name e.g.:

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[18]   EUL Coll-97/CW116/19.
[19]   EUL Coll-97/CW116/53.
[20]   http://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/education/consultations/review2010/transcript/ Transport%20of%20Seilebost%20School%20Consultation%20Meeting%20-%20 16%20June%202010.pdf, 26.
[21]   http://maps.nls.uk/os/index.html.

Àiridh nam Bàn, Uibhist a Deas/South Uist
Baile a' Mhanaich/Balivanich, Beinn naFaoghla/Benbecula
Gleann Lìomhann/Glen Lyon, Siorrachd Pheairt/Perthshire

Other sources used for the clarification of spelling were Dwelly's Gaelic Dictionary, Stòr-dàta Briathrachais Gàidhlig and Àinmean-Àite na h-Alba/ Gaelic Place-names of Scotland. It is likely that there are individuals who disagree with our decision to use OS spellings as they are not always accurate, however, given the predominance of OS maps it was deemed to be a fair choice.

All place-names were also geo-referenced, which means that the metadata for the index entry contains co-ordinates for latitude and longitude e.g. 57.444421; −7.335223, exactly identifying the place's location. Embedding the co-ordinates allowed the website developers at EDINA, the national academic data centre, to link the data to contemporary OS maps, so that these display in the catalogue entry. It also makes it possible to link to pictures of the places on the Flickr,[22] Geograph[23] and Geonames[24] websites, enhancing the geographic and environmental context of the archive material. Both of these facets are new to archives cataloguing. It is worth noting that while Carmichael's own work contains a lot of valuable information on place-names, the collection as a whole, incorporating as it does the papers of Professor William J. Watson, is an excellent source for toponymists and place-name enthusiasts.

Many index terms were already available in the University Archives' Authorities Database and the thousands of terms added by the project are now available for use by other projects. Table 1 shows the number of index terms created by the archivist although more may be added to the total to account for already existing terms.

	Total No of Terms
Subjects	560
Family	145
Personal	935
Corporate	24
Places	1,547
Genre	16
Total	3,227

Table 1

22 http://www.flickr.com/.
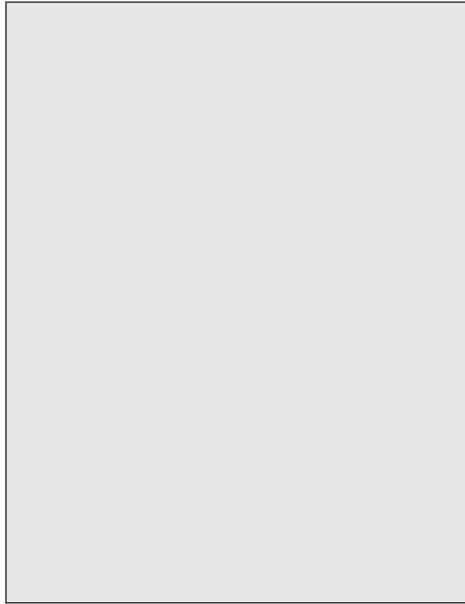23 http://www.geograph.org.uk/.
24 http://www.geonames.org/.

Plate 3   Folio 1v from notebook ref. EUL Coll-97/CW110/30 and 31, showing the charm 'Smaladh An Teine' ('Smooring the Fire') and the story 'An Saibhir Sanntach' ('The Greedy Rich Man').
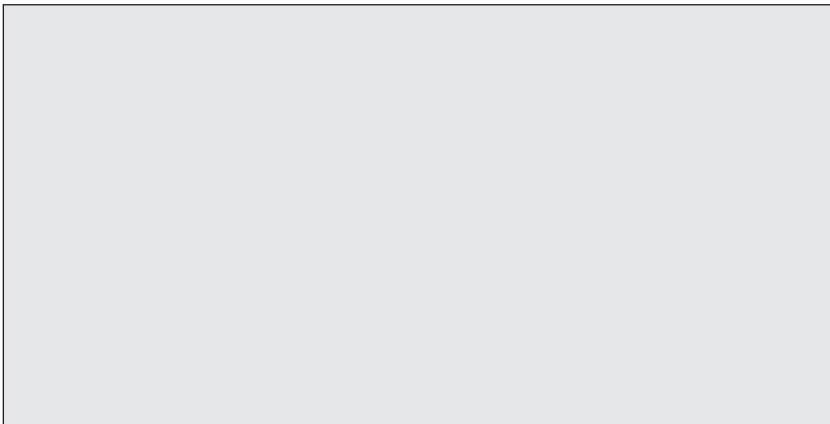
Plate 4   TEI tagged transcription showing ID numbers for people and places.

In order to address the illegibility issues, the notebooks were fully transcribed, which aided the cataloguing process considerably. Dr Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart, senior researcher, and Dr Andrew Wiseman, research assistant, transcribed some half a million words from the twenty-eight notebooks. This was no mean feat, especially when you consider Carmichael's scruffy handwriting, his extensive use of idiosyncratic abbreviations, the possibility of switching between Gaelic and English within an item, his tendency to score through text for different reasons and the deterioration of his writing as he got older (Pl. 3). An online guide to Alexander Carmichael's handwriting was devised to assist researchers.[25]

Having first transcribed the notebooks into Word documents, they were then converted to XML files and tagged according to Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) standards. Tagging allowed the transcriptions for each notebook to be divided into the same items as the catalogue so that the transcription and catalogue item could be linked electronically. In addition, people and places were tagged and the metadata given the unique identification number that was designated when added to the Authorities Database so that they could be linked to every catalogue item which mentioned them (Pl. 4). It is possible to tag as few or as many components of text as one chooses including aspects of text such as direction of text, deletions, abbreviations, line breaks, line groups, language, superscript text, etc. The TEI is then displayed online in two versions, the first being the original text and the second expanding abbreviations or standardising spellings.

The project budget did not have enough money to conserve the notebooks, some of which were in a terrible condition having been, in some cases, of inferior quality and carted over hill, moor and ford in the quest for folklore. However, on application to the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust, the project was fortunate to receive a grant which was match-funded by the University's Special Collections and Archives. This meant that all of the notebooks could be repaired and housed in bespoke, archival quality boxes (Pl. 5).

Another aid to preservation was the complete digitisation of the notebooks by the University's Digital Imaging Unit. High-resolution colour images were created and metadata indicating which page contained which catalogue item allowed the images to be integrated into the online resource and linked to both catalogue and transcriptions. Indeed, online the transcriptions are displayed adjacent to the images to give users as full an understanding of the texts as possible.

In May 2011, a small exhibition was mounted at the Centre for Research Collection in Edinburgh University Library on George Square. The exhibition, entitled 'Unlocking the Celtic Collector', provided a timeline of Carmichael's work from his birth in Lismore in 1832; through his days collecting folklore in the Gàidhealtachd; to the publication of the sumptuous *Carmina Gadelica*

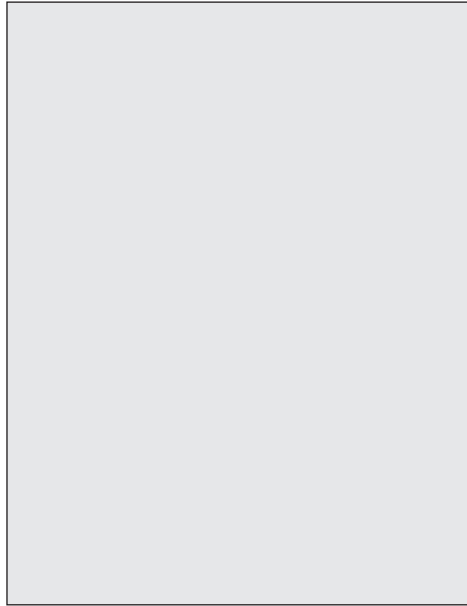[25] http://www.carmichaelwatson.lib.ed.ac.uk/cwatson/en/handwritingguide.

Plate 5   Notebook EUL Coll-97/CW110 before and after conservation.

(the University's first edition being displayed) noting the Celtic art influences which adorn it; and finally to the present day and books inspired by or drawing directly on Carmichael's work.

The website was formally launched by two of Alexander Carmichael's great-grandsons, Eoghan and Alasdair Carmichael, on 23 June 2011 at the project's conference: *Alexander Carmichael: Collecting, Controversy and Contexts*. The conference showcased the work of younger scholars and independent researchers and, as is fitting with the breadth of material which Carmichael recorded, covered topics from 'Am Bròn Binn' ['The Sweet Sorrow', an Arthurian poem]; 'Lismore in Carmichael's Youth'; 'Alexander Carmichael and Scottish Oral Versions of The Táin'; 'Carmina Gadelica and Celtic Art'; 'A Thankless Task? Alexander Carmichael and J. A. Harvie-Brown' (an ornithological paper); and 'Alexander Carmichael and Lady Gordon Cathcart's Long Island Estate'. The proceedings of the conference are due to be published in 2012.

The research resulting from the project was considerable given the small size of the team and its relatively short duration. Papers on charms, archaeology, song and Carmichael's circle amongst others were delivered nationally and internationally to local and academic audiences. Information on this research can be found on the University of Edinburgh's new website Edinburgh Research

Explorer.[26] Social networks such as Facebook[27] and Twitter[28] were used to engage with communities further afield and the two-way exchange of information between the team and interested friends and followers has been invaluable. A blog[29] was established and during the project there were 180 entries, many of which shared and explored the nuggets of information which surprised or interested the team while tagging or cataloguing.

The benefit of having a team composed of both archivists and academics was that the records could be catalogued to professional, international standards without research interests interfering while expertise on folklore enhanced catalogue entries through a greater understanding of the material. The workflow of transcribing, cataloguing, indexing, tagging and quality checking allowed material to be looked at several times, improving the accuracy of transcriptions and catalogue entries. The project website is largely bilingual, as was the daily working of the team, but it has not been possible to provide English to Gaelic or Gaelic to English translations of the notebooks, nor translate all the catalogue entries, although it is possible to navigate the site entirely in one language or the other.

A Central Belt archivist once refused to take information leaflets for the Carmichael Watson Project on the grounds that they were unlikely to have any readers who were interested in Gaelic. It can only be hoped that this article has demonstrated that, far from being a collection solely of interest to Gaels in Gaeldom, the Carmichael Watson Collection is of interest to archaeologists, natural historians, ornithologists, toponymists, storytellers, genealogists, singers, healers, linguists, folklorists and local historians alike. The notebooks may be nigh on illegible, the collection erratic, but the content is most definitely entertaining.

[26] http://www.research.ed.ac.uk.
[27] http://www.facebook.com/CarmichaelWatsonProject.
[28] http://www.twitter.com/Coll97CW.
[29] http://carmichaelwatson.blogspot.co.uk.