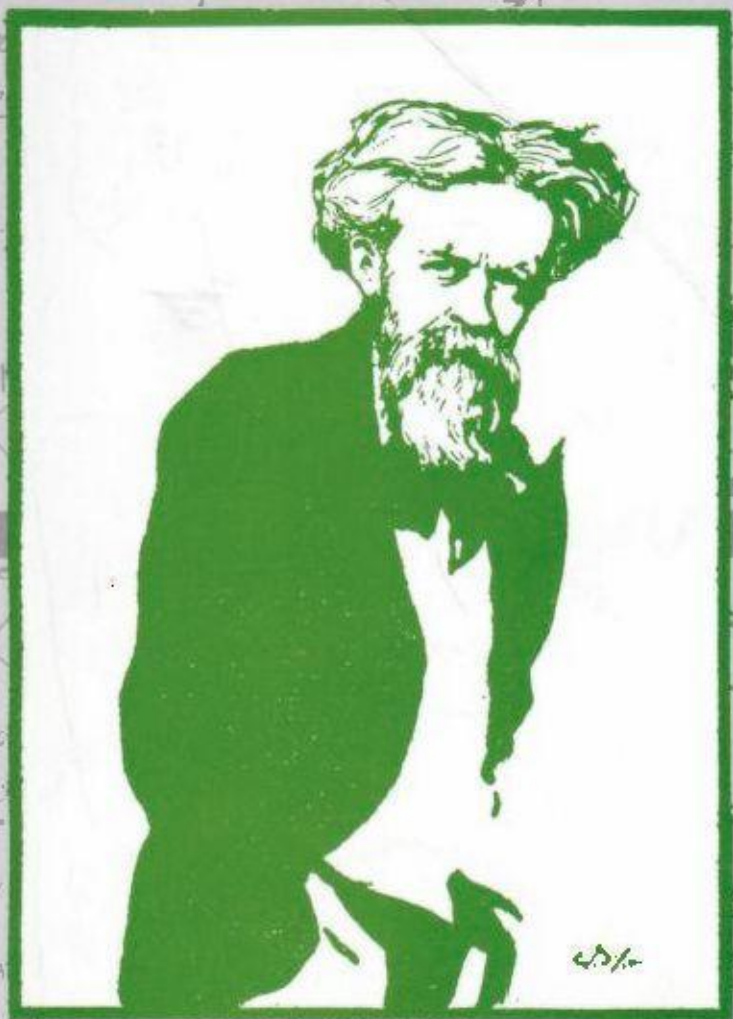


Edinburgh Review



PATRICK GEDDES
ECOLOGIST EDUCATOR VISUAL THINKER

(Symbol) (Graphic Notations) (Mathematics) (Imagination)

C O N T E N T S

EDINBURGH REVIEW ISSUE 88

TWICE YEARLY: SUMMER 1992

Editorial: Patrick Geddes 3

Introduction

Murdo Macdonald: A network of outlooks on Patrick Geddes 5

By Geddes

The Scots Renaissance 17

Life and Its Science 24

The Sociology of Autumn 31

The Notation of Life 42

About Geddes

Tom Hubbard: Patrick Geddes – Benign Faust 51

George Wyllie: A very good question, James 58

Gordon Campbell: Patrick Geddes – a theory of value 63

Brian Evans: Dear Green Place – a question of equilibrium 71

Sofia G. Leonard: The message of Patrick Geddes ‘the Green Pioneer’ 73

Duncan Macmillan: A single-minded polymath 78

Archie MacAlister: On developing Geddes’s imagery 89

Veronica Wallace: Maria Obscura 101

Kenny Munro: Sculptural outlook for Geddes Towers 110

Murdo Macdonald: Patrick Geddes – educator, ecologist,
visual thinker 113

Anjam Khursheed: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Jane Whyte and Patrick Geddes 120

Elizabeth Cumming: A note on Phoebe Traquair and
an Edinburgh ‘Dante’ 143

Resonances

Abha Sharma Rodrigues: Edinburgh and Jaipur 153

* Alastair McIntosh: The Isle of Eigg debate 158 *

Kenneth White: Elements of geopoetics 163

Normal Bissell: Open World Poetics 179

Work

Robert Alan Jamieson: Ootadæks 185

Tom Hubbard: Poems 189

James Meek: Safe 194

Karen Whiteson: Pieces 200

Alison Armstrong: The Cockney Piper 217

‘A collector’s item’ or community ownership – the Isle of Eigg debate

Alastair McIntosh

This text is based on the address delivered in the company of other trustees by Alastair McIntosh of the Isle of Eigg Trust. Some two-thirds of the people of Eigg attended the three-hour long public meeting on Friday 25 October 1991. Afterwards the community agreed to discuss the concept amongst themselves and respond in due course. The discussion which followed the address was encouraging. One working man, who lives on the island in a caravan because he does not have land, came up the next morning and gave £100. He said he really hoped for his sake and others like him that the Trust’s objectives might be fulfilled. A similar donation has been received from the Rev. John Harvey, Leader of the Iona Community. Most of the Trust’s expenses to date have been paid for by the trustees, particularly by Tom Forsyth taking on dry stane dyking work. Contributions are much needed and should be sent to 10 Doune Gardens, Glasgow G20 7DJ.

Ladies, gentlemen and children,

It is not without a certain sense of impertinence that we present our credentials to you this evening. We have, as you know, formed a charitable trust in the name of this island. Consultation beforehand was informal, not least because some had expressed reservations about speaking openly in view of future ownership uncertainty.

At a cost so far of some £3000 and many hours of work on behalf of myself, Bob Harris, Elisabeth Lyon and above all, Tom Forsyth, we have brought our proposal to a stage where we hope it can be weighed by you and considered as an alternative model for land ownership on Eigg.

To you I need hardly outline the history of land ownership in this part of the world. Since the Clanranalds first foresook their role as stewards and in exchange for £15,000 presumed to treat this island

as a market commodity in 1828, it has changed hands eight times and is now under a court order to be sold again. Some ownership regimes, like the present one, have been relatively benign and even generous. Others, remembered by some present tonight, have been described to us as 'like living under enemy occupation'.

Either way, the inhabitants of Eigg today, like those of so much of Scotland, have legal status akin only to nuisance value in matters of 'real' estate. 'A collector's item', is how one laird described the Isle of Eigg to me recently. A collector's item, indeed, which can be bought and sold without reference to the interests of those whose lives paint their meaning here. An absentee collector's item, or investment opportunity, or rich man's playground.

Some collectors item! This, where disused houses crumble while young men, women and children live in caravans. Where crofters have had to wait years or spend large sums in legal fees to procure freehold over their small plots. Where no-one knows who will be the next laird, hoping only that the highest bidder might show more generosity towards them than was perhaps evident during the accumulation of such massive personal wealth.

And this is not just Eigg. It is the condition of much of the Highlands and Islands today. The Clearances continue under economic masquerade. For example, tourism, one of our few growth opportunities for cottage industry, too often becomes controlled by estates which convert homes into summer timeshare. Those who belong to a place get squeezed out, leaching community.

Go to the poor quarters of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Govan, and look where too many of our people live now. Oh yes, the fortunate ones have done sufficiently 'well' sometimes to forget their roots, but many of the names on doors of those living in the high rise flats and 'priority treatment' estates are Highland. Folk for whom the tragedy of being uprooted, by direct clearance or by restriction of access to nature's sustenance, has given rise to the spectre of poverty across generations.

Going home on the Ullapool ferry recently I had the pleasure of meeting one of our former teachers at the Nicolson Institute. I had happened to have been reading the part of Jim Hunter's book on crofting history where he mentions that Leurbost, where I grew up as the doctor's son, had resettled some of the hundred or so families cleared in South Lochs. I asked this teacher *why* we had never been taught this. Remorsefully, he replied that it was not in the curriculum, is still largely excluded from the curriculum, and is the sort of painful history people prefer to forget.

'I think I hear the cry of the children till this day', said one Lewis crofter of the clearances in Uig of the 1850s. My friends, which

amongst us cannot hear that cry *still* as we view rural caravan dwellers and the peripheral Sowetos of contemporary Scottish cities? Is it not time for us, like other indigenous peoples of the world, to demand restitution for the historical usurpment of our lands? We lament about native American peoples as featured in *Dances With Wolves*. What about Clearance?

Of course, we are told that such 'idealism' lacks economic viability. Perhaps these critics should spend time on Foula, off Shetland, or Scoraig, near Dundonnell. Both are revitalised crofting communities. Each shows that quality of life does not require a profligate standard of living. In any case, as the economic hubs of the world roll their way towards ecological suicide, are we really to be fobbed off with the suggestion that lifestyles based on industrial intoxication, nuclear umbrellas, agricultural soil degradation, land expropriation from the powerless and unjust trade relations with the Third World are somehow 'viable'!

What can we in Scotland do about it? First, I suggest, we must remember. We must remember in the way that those erecting cairns on Knoydart, or at the sites of land grabs in Lewis are presently helping us to do. As with personal psychological health, repression of a culture's past only turns anger and sadness inwards to deaden the soul. No cultural carcinogen is more powerful than oppression internalised to the point that a community blames itself alone for disempowerment, disfunction and under-achievement. So let us start by remembering. But let us do so mindful of the curative role which forgiveness must eventually play. Only forgiveness breaks the knock on effects of oppression re-perpetuating itself.

Then we can engage in re-visioning. We must envision what our communities could become ... sorting out the realistic from the phantasy and asking what kind of a people we want to be. Are our values primarily those of market forces, or do we stand for values to do with place, culture and relationship.

Finally, dare we re-claim? Can we, as in the words communicated by Moses, 'proclaim the liberation of all the inhabitants of the land ... a jubilee for you; each of you will return to his ancestral home. Land must not be sold in perpetuity, for the land belongs to me' (Leviticus 25)?

Some of you on Eigg may think private ownership by a wealthy benevolent laird would be in your best interests. If the lottery of ownership falls favourably, this could be so. But even then, is there not something about such patronage which quietly disempowers a community? You know, when Lord Leverhulme earlier this century promised Lewis crofters a fishing fleet, a fish cannery, railways, electrical power, a garden city, steady work, steady pay and beautiful

homes, the response which won the day was, 'We are not concerned with his fancy dreams that may or may not come true! What we want is the *land* – and the question I put to him now is: *will you give us the land?*'

Land restitution is much of what the Isle of Eigg Trust stands for. We are four people of humble means, but with an awareness of history, concern for the state of the world, sound track records in rural and community development and a love of Scotland and our own people. The benefits we offer are not overflow from the grail of monetary wealth. Rather, they are opportunities to reconstitute full community. Opportunities which, let it be said, lie sleeping in the taproot of existing community. Opportunities not of a selfish nature, but for patterns of living which could be of growing importance to a 'developed' world faced with a spiritual crisis of meaning and ecological bankruptcy.

We are not claiming that most people today can live entirely *from* the land on a smallholding! Rather, our experience is that having an opportunity to live *with* the land deeply enriches human life. It can release creativity in many forms, including economic entrepreneurship. Here lies a font of true viability.

Should the Trust acquire ownership of Eigg, the main thing we offer is *security of tenure* for those who lack it. We propose that new land holdings are made available to those in need, including current estate workers, other residents, emigres who wish to return and other suitable settlers – gradually and in limited numbers.

We further undertake that decisions about such matters would be made within the terms of the Trust deed by the trustees *and* a management committee representative of the community. (I personally undertake to resign as a trustee should this not be effected to the satisfaction of a majority of the resident community.)

Indeed, this trust offers the prospect that when a future visitor asks your children who owns Eigg, they will reply, not a German factory magnate, English pop star, Swiss banker, Saudi oil sheik, Dutch syndicate, aristocratic heir, racing car driver, insurance company or any other sort of 'laird', but simply, 'Us ... held in trust for people and nature'.

Here is the vision which, for all its tentative nature, we place before you tonight. That this island, this 'jewel of the Hebrides', could become a turning point in Scottish land ownership. That Eigg could become a place where these children playing around us now can more readily unfold lives which find wealth in the richness of human relationships, through the land and sea, in self-directed work and local self-determination, in songs of the old tongue, and in all that can derive from assuming full responsibility for community growth.

But before we can undertake further advocacy in building support, it is important to hear clearly your voices. Is what we have outlined tonight and placed in the Trust booklet something you wish and would uphold? In responding, remember that continued private ownership could bring benefits which I have not highlighted, whereas trusteeship would require community effort and by no means guarantees a halcyon era.

What we have done is to create a trust in waiting. It can be used for charitable purposes while waiting, but crucially we seek your endorsement for its primary function – to try and remove the island, forever, from the vagaries of private ownership. We know that the current owners, Mrs Williams and Mr Schellenberg, are not without sympathy for this cause. Both have expressed qualified support. We call for more than that. We ask that they hear the pain which continued ownership uncertainty causes, and consider facilitating the primary objective of the Isle of Eigg Trust. This would be a gesture with little precedent. A healing gesture, setting right ancient wrongs. A gesture of stewardship; even, of belonging.

WEST HIGHLAND FREE PRESS, FRIDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 1991

NEWS

Vote of Confidence for Eigg community ownership plan

Residents on the Isle of Eigg have voted overwhelmingly for community ownership of the troubled island.

Thirty-five out of the 48 members of the Eigg residents association voted in favour of the proposals for trust ownership put forward by the Isle of Eigg Trust – a group of four individuals whose stated aims are to remove the island from the private market and hold it in common ownership.

The founders of the Isle of Eigg Trust visited the island recently to outline their plans to buy the island when it comes on the market. The sale was forced in a court case in which Mrs Margaret Williams, the half-owner, claimed that her ex-husband Keith Schellenberg – who trans-

ferred his half-ownership to a holding company – was neglecting the island.

The Isle of Eigg Trust consists of Tom Forsyth, Alastair McIntosh, Elisabeth Lyon and Robert Harris – all of whom have experience of community development.

Residents have put only two preconditions on the Eigg Trust proposals: that two islanders sit on the board of trustees, and that the residents' association have power of veto over decisions made by the trust. There was a 100 per cent turn-out for the vote.

The trustees now intend to raise the profile of the island and launch a public appeal for funds to purchase it. Estimates of its value vary from £1 million to £3 million.

Alastair McIntosh is Development Director with Edinburgh University's Centre for Human Ecology and honorary business advisor to the Iona Community.

Elements of geopoetics

Kenneth White

‘As intelligence and language, thought and the signs of thought, are united by secret and indissoluble links, so in like manner, and almost without our being conscious of it, the external world and our ideas and feelings.’

(Humboldt, *Cosmos*)

1.

‘IN each age of the world distinguished by high activity’, says Whitehead in *Adventures of Ideas*, ‘there will be found at its culmination, and among the agencies leading to that culmination, some profound cosmological outlook, implicitly accepted, impressing its own type upon the current spring of action.’

If we’re willing to admit the hypothesis that there exist, in the present age, at least some fields of ‘high activity’, it may be interesting to see what ‘cosmological thought’ is in the air, giving its shape to our mental space.

In his studies on the spiritual crisis and revolution of the 17th century (*Galilean Studies, From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*), Koyré reduces the changes made at that time in the conception of the world to two main elements: the destruction of the notion of *Cosmos* and the geometrisation of space. This new cosmology set aside both the geocentric world of the Greeks (the original *kosmos*), and the anthropocentrically structured world of the Middle Ages, replacing them with the decentred world of modernity. The consequences of such a fundamental transformation were many, two of the main ones being the displacement of the mind from contemplation and teleological philosophy to the mechanistic mastery over nature, and the rise of modern subjectivity accompanied by a sense, more or less vague, of having somehow *lost the world*. The poet of the crisis is John Donne, a sharp and subtle mind, who declares: ‘Tis