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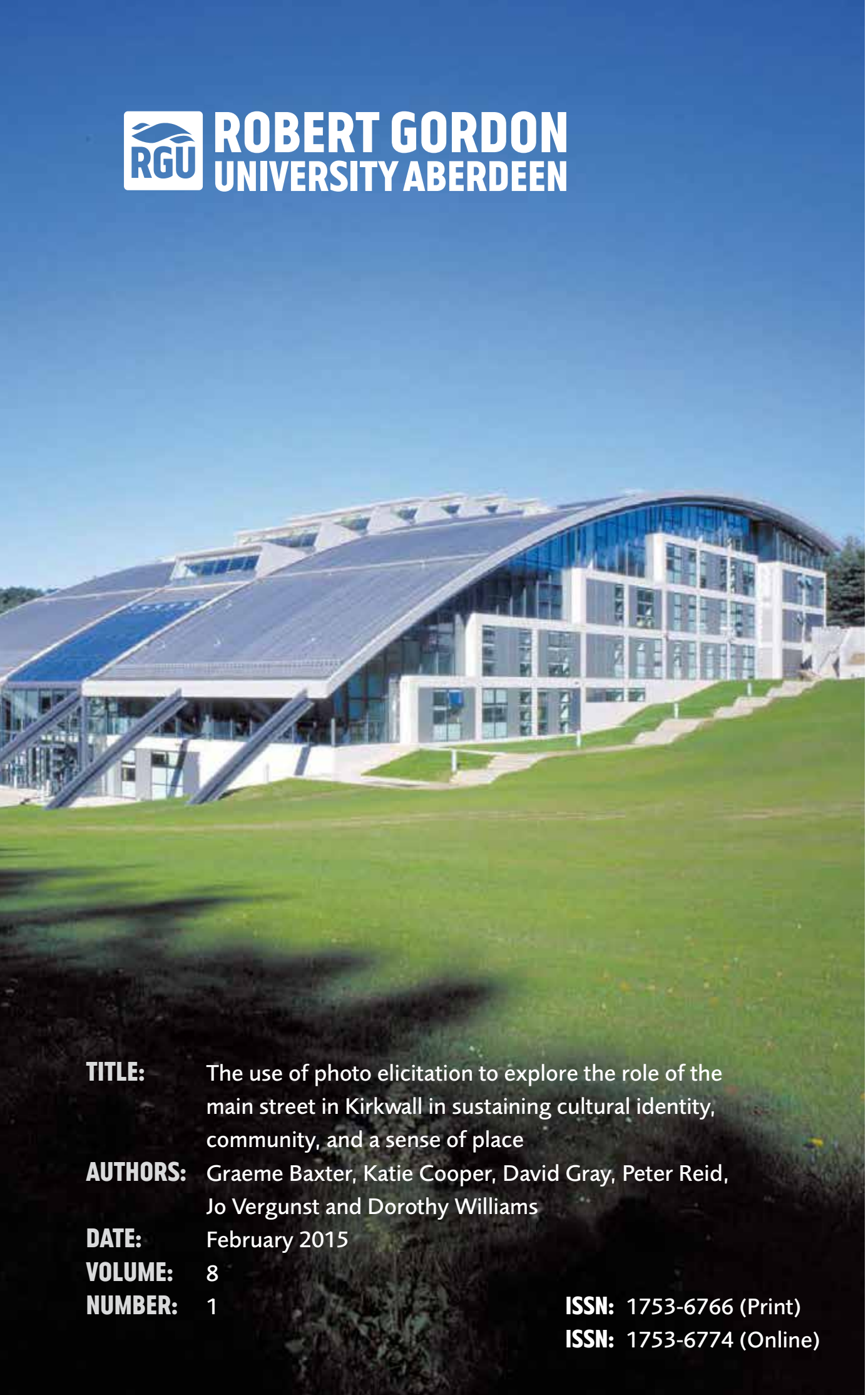

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The use of photo elicitation to explore the role of the main street in Kirkwall in sustaining cultural identity, community, and a sense of place

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Abstract

This paper explores the value of photo elicitation as a method for investigating the role played by small town main streets in Scottish island communities in sustaining cultural identity, community, and a sense of place. In particular, it critically evaluates the photo elicitation techniques used during a multidisciplinary pilot study, conducted in Kirkwall, Orkney, in 2010. A number of techniques were used, including a photographic exhibition, discussion groups, extended face-to-face interviews, and the creation of a special Facebook page. Throughout all approaches, participants were presented with old and current photographs of the main street, together with some novel 'merged' images combining both historical and contemporary views. These elicitation techniques proved successful in obtaining rich, detailed, qualitative data from 164 informants, who each shared their personal memories and perceptions of the social and cultural role of the Kirkwall main street. Indeed, the very process of identifying familiar buildings, landmarks and faces from photographs (both past and present) appeared to reinforce the participants' cultural identity.

KEYWORDS: Kirkwall, main street, photo elicitation, photo interviewing, Scotland

Introduction

This paper explores the value of photo elicitation as a method for investigating the role played by small town main streets in Scottish island communities in sustaining cultural identity, community and a sense of place. In particular, it critically evaluates the elicitation techniques used during a multidisciplinary pilot study, conducted in Kirkwall, Orkney, in the summer of 2010.

In general terms, main streets are important in towns and cities of all sizes. However, in small island towns, where the communities are relatively isolated and close-knit, the psyche of the main street is heightened. In Scotland, island towns such as Kirkwall, Lerwick on Shetland, and Portree on the Isle of Skye, are compact, so that the main street is a natural focus point that people can access quickly and easily on foot or by car. The commercial sectors of these towns also tend to be concentrated in and around the main street, and there are few, if any, competing, 'out-of-town' retail outlets to draw people elsewhere. All of these factors heighten the expectation of local residents that they will see familiar faces, and meet and catch up with people on the — often frequent — occasions that they visit the main street. The main streets of small island towns are therefore unique; and the research discussed here sought to test the effectiveness of various photo elicitation techniques for further exploring the role of the main street in Kirkwall in maintaining various aspects of local culture, place and identity.

Photo elicitation, as defined by Prosser and Schwartz (1998 p. 124), is where:

> "…a single or sets of photographs assembled by the researcher on the basis of prior analysis are selected with the assumption that the chosen images will have some significance for interviewees. The photographs are shown to individuals or groups with the express aim of exploring participants' values, beliefs, attitudes and meanings, and in order to trigger memories, or to explore group dynamics or systems."

Since it was first described formally by Collier (1957), photo elicitation (sometimes known as photo interviewing) has become regarded as an important technique in the social sciences, albeit one that is reported sparingly in the literature, according to Harper (2002) and Hurworth (2003). Its proponents argue that photo elicitation can evoke responses that verbal questioning alone can not, that it "mines deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews" (Harper 2002 p. 13). Historical photographs, in particular, are regarded as useful in stirring "ethnographic memory" (Harper 1998 p. 35), for, as Blaikie (2006 p. 60) suggests, "photographs collude with memory in identifying a relationship between childhood, values and place, so that to glimpse 'the way we were' is simultaneously to evoke both recognition and loss…" Photo elicitation is also regarded as a technique which can aid the rapport between researcher and interviewee; that the presence of photographs puts research subjects at ease by acting almost as a neutral

third party in the interview process (e.g., Collier and Collier 1986; Banks 2001). With these points in mind, the research team deemed photo elicitation to be eminently suitable for exploring Kirkwall residents' perceptions of, and relationship with, their main street.

The pilot study employed three different 'types' of photographs during the elicitation processes:

1) Historical, black and white photographs (provided by the Orkney Library & Archive) of different views of the main street, or of particular buildings or landmarks in the street. The photos ranged from those dating from the late 19th century to some taken as recently as the 1970s.[1]

2) Contemporary, colour photographs taken by members of the research team. These, too, contained various general views of the main street, or featured specific buildings or landmarks, but some others were taken in an effort to illustrate the themes to be explored during the photo elicitation processes. In doing so, however, the researchers remained conscious of the fact that photographs can be polysemous in nature, and that, as Norman (1991 p. 194) puts it, "their meaning can be tangible to the viewer independently of the photographer's intention."

[1] Many of the older photographs had been taken by perhaps Orkney's most famous photographer, Tom Kent (1863-1936). An extensive selection of his work can be found in the Orkney Library & Archive's online photographic archive at http://www.orkneylibrary.org.uk/html/photoarchive.htm.

3) A small number of ‘merged’ images, where an old black and white photograph of a particular part of the main street was inserted in a contemporary colour photograph of the same location taken from the same perspective (examples appear as Figures 1 and 3 in this paper). These were intended to act as an eye-catching talking point for research participants, and to illustrate the ways in which the main street in Kirkwall had changed — or indeed remained the same — over the last 100 or so years. In this latter respect, they compare with the ‘rephotography’ or ‘repeat photography’ method used occasionally in social studies to measure and illustrate chronological change (e.g., Rieger 1996; Smith 2007). These merged images were created digitally in *MS PowerPoint*, by cropping and re-sizing the old photographs and ‘layering’ them on top of the contemporary version.

Figure 1. Albert Street, Kirkwall, 'then and now'. The 'Big Tree', in healthier times, can be seen in the background. The historical element of this merged image appears courtesy of the Orkney Library & Archive. [Tom Kent Collection TK3221]

The inclusion of contemporary photographs of Kirkwall street scenes raised some interesting ethical issues, largely relating to the need, or otherwise, to obtain the informed consent of those individuals appearing in the photographs. The difficulty this presents when filming or photographing in public spaces has been the subject of recent debate amongst the visual research community. For example, Prosser, Clark and Wiles (2008 p. 13), whilst acknowledging the difficulties in gaining

consent from everyone in a crowded street, argue that "it would still be considered good practice to gain permission of those featured in the images." Without such consent, they suggest that it may be "ethically questionable to record visual images of individuals in public places." Many of the contemporary images taken for this current research were of busy Kirkwall streets, and featured numerous residents as they went about their daily lives (e.g., Figure 4). Whilst acknowledging that, in a small, relatively close-knit community like Kirkwall, there was a high probability that viewers of the final selection of publicly available images would recognise individuals appearing within them, the researchers felt that it would be wholly impracticable to attempt to gain informed consent from each one, not least because the researchers took numerous photographs of street scenes before selecting those which they believed best illustrated the themes to be explored in the project. The research team therefore followed Harper's (2005 p. 759) counter-argument that "harm to subjects is unlikely to occur from showing normal people doing normal things," and that "the public accepts that being in a public space makes one susceptible to public photography." That is not to say, however, that due ethical consideration was not given to the photographs eventually used in the elicitation processes. These were all examined carefully and, where necessary, steps were taken to ensure that none would cause the subjects any obvious embarrassment or distress. For example, on photographs which happened to include vehicles parked illegally, *MS Paint* was used to 'paint over' the vehicle registration numbers; and, conscious of moves locally to formally prohibit public alcohol consumption in the town (this became law in March 2011), any photos that inadvertently included the

drinking of alcohol were excluded from the elicitation activities. In addition, if any viewers had observed themselves, or perhaps close family and friends, in one of the photographs, and had objected strongly to their inclusion in the study, then the researchers would have removed these from the elicitation processes immediately.

The Main Street in Kirkwall

Before proceeding to discuss in more detail the photo elicitation techniques used in this pilot project, it would perhaps be appropriate to present some information about Kirkwall and its main street — and about Orkney more broadly — and also to provide some background to the research.

For readers unfamiliar with Scottish geography and history, Orkney lies just a few miles off the north-east tip of the Scottish mainland and consists of around 70 islands of various sizes, 19 of which are currently inhabited. The largest island, known as the Orkney 'mainland', measures 25 miles across and is home to most of Orkney's 20,000 population. There is evidence of human habitation in Orkney dating back to 6700BC, and a group of three sites, known as the 'Heart of Neolithic Orkney', were granted UNESCO World Heritage status in 1999. Orkney also has a very rich Norse heritage, and indeed was part of Norway until 1468, when the islands were transferred to the Scottish Crown. The Norse influence is still obvious in most of Orkney's place names, as well as in the local dialect,

with many of the words and phrases believed to derive from the Old Norse language Norn (see Lange 2007, chapter three). Historically, farming and fishing have been Orkney's main industries. More recently, though, tourism, oil, renewable energy, and the arts and crafts sectors have all had major impacts on the local economy. The Orkney mainland is usually described in terms of its eastern and western halves, which are divided by an isthmus on which the town of Kirkwall (Orkney's administrative centre) is situated. First recorded in 1046AD, Kirkwall's name comes from the Old Norse *Kirkjuvagr*, meaning 'church bay'. Throughout the Middle Ages, Kirkwall developed as a port and trading centre; further expansion took place during the 19th and 20th centuries, leading to a current population of over 7,000.

The 'main street' on which the current study focused actually consists of four conjoined streets running through the historic heart of Kirkwall in a general south-westerly direction from the harbour, which is located at the northernmost part of the town. These begin with the narrow and irregular Bridge Street, in the oldest part of Kirkwall, which runs into the slightly wider, but equally irregular, Albert Street. The road then widens noticeably into the aptly named Broad Street, which is dominated by Britain's most northerly cathedral, St. Magnus Cathedral, and also contains Kirkwall's traditional market and meeting place, Kirk Green. The 'main street' then narrows again, becoming Victoria Street. Along all of the four streets that constitute the Kirkwall 'main street', many of the buildings have narrow, gabled frontages, with paved 'wynds' or 'closes' (i.e., narrower lanes) running between them. Bridge, Albert and Victoria

Streets, although allowing both pedestrian and vehicular access, do not contain raised pavements or sidewalks; instead, the streets are paved in a manner which attempts to delineate appropriate space for people and vehicles (this can be seen in Figures 1, 3 and 4).

The pilot project built on earlier work conducted by members of the research team, who had examined journey making and travel behaviour in Kirkwall as part of a wider study looking at car culture in the town (MVA Consultancy and Robert Gordon University 2009). That qualitative research (involving interviews and focus groups) had revealed the often 'ritualised' ways in which the people of Kirkwall (Kirkwallians) moved to and through the main street, and how such 'traditional' embodied practices were very much part of 'belonging' to the town (as well as being a cultural barrier to changing travel behaviour). For instance, there was a strong consensus that there exists a long standing and deeply embedded tradition of Kirkwallian motorists being able to drive to, and park directly outside, their destination, often a shop on the main street. This, they argued, is the way "it's aye been" (i.e., the way it has always been).

Although having its origins in transport research, the pilot study discussed here was very much interdisciplinary in nature — reflecting the varied interests and specialisms of the collaborative team members — and included elements of not only transport policy but also anthropology, cultural heritage and information science. For example, it further explored Kirkwallians' ritualistic practices in inhabiting and moving through the main street, and the significance of these to local identity; it investigated

how iconic buildings and landmarks on the main street, and events and ceremonies that take place on the street, help to form part of the collective consciousness of the town; and it explored the role of the main street as an arena for maintaining social networks, and for exchanging and sharing information, opinion and gossip, and the extent to which this forms part of 'belonging' to Kirkwall, or to Orkney more widely.

Photo Elicitation Techniques Used in the Study

The photo elicitation techniques used in the pilot study took a number of different forms. Firstly, and most significantly, with the assistance of the Orkney Library & Archive the research team mounted a week-long photographic exhibition in the foyer of Kirkwall Library, which is located a short distance from the main street. The exhibition display boards were strategically placed, being the first thing visitors encountered when they entered the library building (see Figure 2).

The exhibition was manned constantly by at least one member of the research team throughout the week. Library visitors who stopped to look at the photographs were given a few minutes before being approached by one of the team, who then explained about the study and asked the visitors if they could spare some time to discuss the photographs. The vast majority of those approached agreed to participate, although the time they could spend with the researchers varied greatly, from a few short minutes to around half an hour. The two local, weekly newspapers,

The Orcadian and *Orkney Today* (the latter has since ceased publication), provided coverage of the research on the Thursday, publishing examples of the merged photographs, thus creating increased interest in the exhibition in the latter half of the week.

Figure 2. Photographic exhibition in the entrance foyer of Kirkwall Library. The three panels to the left contained the historical, black and white photographs provided by Orkney Library & Archive, the three panels to the right contained the contemporary, colour photographs taken by the researchers, while the middle panel displayed the merged images.

Overall, the exhibition proved very popular and 148 different individuals were spoken to as they viewed the photographs. The current authors would hesitate to describe these interactions as formal 'interviews'. They were decidedly informal and unstructured in nature, therefore might be regarded more as photo elicitation 'conversations' or 'chats'. In terms of capturing the data obtained during these conversations, the location and the circumstances — standing in front of exhibition display boards in a busy and sometimes noisy library foyer — did not really lend themselves to the informants' comments being recorded digitally or on audiotape. In any case, it was believed that making audio recordings, or manually taking fieldnotes during the discussions, would be something of a distraction and barrier to informant participation in such a public place. With this in mind, notes were written up immediately following each conversation, recording the main themes discussed, as well as memorable words and phrases used by participants.

On one evening of the fieldwork week, a pre-arranged discussion group, involving nine members of the local family history society, took place in a local church hall, and photo elicitation played a prominent role in this event. Here, prints of a selection of the historical, contemporary and merged photographs were distributed amongst the participants and used as the basis for the ensuing debate. Two researchers were in attendance, one to lead and moderate the discussion, the other to observe and take notes of the proceedings. In addition, the discussion was recorded digitally and subsequently transcribed in full. It is also worthwhile noting that immediately prior to and after the discussion group, as well as during a

short refreshment break, the participants were able to view a slide show of historical images of the main street, displayed on a laptop computer. This approach elicited a number of additional comments and memories.

As well as the pre-arranged event described above, one of the male researchers held a more informal, impromptu discussion group with three men in the 'Owld Men's Hut', a small building at the entrance to Kirkwall's West Pier.[2] Prints of the historical, contemporary and merged photographs were again used to elicit responses from the three participants. This session was not audio-recorded; instead the researcher took extensive fieldnotes as the discussion progressed. It is fair to say that the men-only nature of the location resulted in a somewhat different group dynamic from that encountered with the family history society, and a good deal of 'industrial' language was used throughout the proceedings.

During the week, three extended interviews also took place with local residents, again using photographic prints of the main street as visual aids. Unlike the exhibition 'conversations', these interviews followed a more traditional, formal, semi-structured approach, and ranged from 38 minutes to 88 minutes in length. These were all recorded digitally and subsequently transcribed.

[2] Also known locally as the 'Pierhead Parliament', the 'Owld Men's Hut' is maintained by Orkney Islands Council and is used as a meeting place for men over 60 years of age. Interestingly, a local magazine, *Living Orkney*, runs a monthly column, written in the Orcadian dialect, entitled 'View fae the Owld Men's Hut' (i.e., View from the Old Men's Hut), in which one of the regular occupants, under a pseudonym, gives his opinion on a range of historical and topical subjects.

Prior to the fieldwork commencing in Kirkwall, the research team created a Facebook group page devoted to the project. The creation of this site had two purposes: 1) to advertise and explain the research, and thereby encourage attendance at the photographic exhibition and participation in the discussion groups and interviews; and 2) to act as an additional photo elicitation tool, by providing online versions of the historical, contemporary and merged photographs and inviting users to add their own comments, reminiscences and insights.

Critical Reflection on the Photo Elicitation Techniques Used

During the course of the fieldwork week in Kirkwall, the researchers conversed directly with 164 different individuals, all of whom had viewed historical, contemporary and/or merged photographs as part of the process. Of these, 77 (47%) were male and 87 (53%) were female. And while the age of the participants was only asked directly of the family history society discussion group (as part of an 'ice-breaking' personal introduction), the research team estimate that around two-thirds of the overall informants were aged 50 or over, perhaps suggesting that the nature of the research was of more interest to older individuals. The researchers did, however, question participants about their birthplace and current residence. From this it was established that 90% of the participants were residents of Orkney, with 45% of these being born-and-bred Orcadians and the remaining 55% being non-native incomers, or

'ferry loupers'.[3] The period in which these incomers had lived in Orkney ranged from a matter of weeks to around 40 years. A further 3% of the participants were Orkney-born individuals who had temporarily returned to the islands on holiday or on a family- or work-related visit.

In his 2007 study of Orkney — *The Norwegian Scots* — the American anthropologist Michael Lange observed that Orcadians are naturally quiet and reserved individuals, unwilling to talk about or promote themselves; and that to do otherwise is viewed as being overly self-important, or "bigsy", and breaking a societal rule. This inherent reticence, Lange reports, can present a barrier to conducting research fieldwork on the islands, with Orcadians proving reluctant interviewees (see Lange 2007, chapter two). Certainly, some of the current authors had encountered similar difficulties when attempting to recruit participants in the aforementioned research into Kirkwall's car culture (see MVA Consultancy and Robert Gordon University 2009, section 5.3.3). In the project discussed here, however, the use of photographs as the basis for the interactions between the researchers and the residents of Kirkwall seemed somehow to help to overcome any natural diffidence on the part of the participants. On the whole, those approached to participate appeared keen to take part and were open and detailed in their responses. This may have been in part due to Collier and Collier's (1986 p. 105) concept of the photograph as a dominant, yet neutral, third party in the interview

[3] The term 'ferry loupers' (i.e., 'ferry jumpers') is sometimes used in a derogatory manner and refers to someone who has arrived on the ferry from the UK mainland and has 'jumped ship' in order to remain in Orkney. The Orkney Population Change Study (Hall Aitken 2009) noted that 20% of the Orkney population and around 13% of that of Kirkwall were 'in-migrants' who had moved to Orkney from elsewhere within the previous 10 years.

process. In contrast to a typical face-to-face interview, where the interviewee may feel intimidated and inhibited by the continual probing of the interviewer and a perceived need to maintain eye contact throughout, the use of photographs in this study allowed both the interviewer and the interviewee to turn to the images simultaneously and to explore their contents together, in a collaborative approach. This, it is believed, played a significant role in dispelling any unease the participants may have felt in taking part in the research, and helped to trigger responses that would have remained unmined using traditional verbal interviewing techniques alone.

The inclusion of the merged photographs, in particular, appeared to draw people into the study. Indeed, some visitors expressed disappointment that there were so few merged images in the library exhibition. Had time allowed, the research team would certainly have prepared more images in this style. For a small number of elderly visitors, though, the merged photo approach caused some confusion. For example, one gentleman, on seeing the image of Albert Street (Figure 1), but not realising it was a combination of historic and contemporary shots, "wondered why there was a lad pulling a handcart along the street in this day and age."

Aside from the merged photographs, most of the images used in the various elicitation processes were selected in a conscious effort to illustrate the themes the researchers wished to explore during the pilot project. For example: photographs of cars and pedestrians sharing the narrow confines of parts of the Kirkwall main street (e.g., Figure 4) were

displayed in order to act as a talking point when exploring 'ways of moving' through the main street; images of various events and ceremonies taking place on the main street were presented in order to prompt discussion on the importance of the street as a social arena; a photo of two women chatting outside a shop (see Figure 5) was designed to elicit comments on information exchange on the street; while it was anticipated that images of local landmarks, such as St. Magnus Cathedral, the town hall, the war memorial, and the 'Big Tree'[4] would encourage participants to discuss iconographic aspects of the street.

Generally speaking, the selected photographs had the desired effect, and these elicited a significant quantity of rich, detailed, qualitative data on the role of the main street in the informants' everyday lives. These might be summarised under the following broad themes:

The changing face of the main street. Prompted by the merged images (such as that of Victoria Street in Figure 3), participants observed how little, structurally, the main street had changed over the years. Photographs showing particular shops and businesses (both past and present) elicited numerous comments on the changing commercial nature of the main street, which in turn was believed by many to have adversely affected the "character" of the street. Here, the informants lamented the general demise of small, independent, family-run businesses, which were

[4] The Big Tree is a solitary sycamore located *on* Albert Street (see Figure 1). Once in a private garden surrounded by a wall, the tree is thought to be around 200 years old and has been classed by the Forestry Commission as one of the Heritage Trees of Scotland. It is now in poor condition, with its hollow trunk being supported by a metal beam.

being replaced, they claimed, by "trinket-type" shops aimed largely at tourists. The photographs of main street businesses also prompted several participants to speak about the impact (both positive and negative) of three supermarkets, located together on the edge of Kirkwall town centre, a few minutes walk from the main street.

Figure 3. Victoria Street, Kirkwall, 'then and now', showing how little structural change there has been on the main street over the years. The historical element of this merged image appears courtesy of the Orkney Library & Archive. [Tom Kent Collection TK3405]

Traffic and 'ways of walking' on the main street. The photographs of vehicles and pedestrians sharing the narrow and irregular Bridge, Albert and Victoria Streets prompted a wide range of comments on the traffic situation in Kirkwall, including: pleas for the pedestrianisation of parts of the main street; concerns about air pollution and the potential structural damage to historical buildings caused by passing vehicles; and tales of Kirkwall's "boy racers" or "cruisers" — young men in powerful cars who spend time in the evenings driving (often quickly) around the centre of the town. Interestingly, a number of Kirkwallians suggested that the (sometimes tense) relationship between cars and pedestrians on the main street was in itself an intrinsic part of the "character", and indeed the "culture", of the town.

Iconography of the main street. Of the specific main street buildings and landmarks featured in the photographs, two — St Magnus Cathedral and the Big Tree — elicited the most significant response from the research participants, suggesting that they have attained something of an iconographic status amongst Kirkwallians. Indeed, these photographs evoked some of the most emotive and personal observations encountered during the research, which arguably would not have emerged in a typical interview setting. For example, on viewing images of the cathedral, some informants spoke of their own spiritual experiences within its walls; while several discussed the Big Tree in very affectionate terms, regarding it almost as a lifelong friend and arguing that it forms an integral part of the town's heritage.

Figure 4. Car and pedestrians on Albert Street, Kirkwall. This photograph shows the irregular nature of much of the main street and the often extremely narrow spaces shared by vehicles and pedestrians.

The main street as a social arena. On viewing photographs (both old and contemporary) of various events taking place on the main street, participants freely shared their perceptions of the street as a social arena. Most regarded the main street as an important place for meeting acquaintances, often serendipitously. However, a number of older, Orcadian residents felt that the importance of the main street as a place for sustaining social networks has been gradually eroded by the influx of both incomers and tourists. Several informants spoke of specific events taking place on the main street that do much to cement the street's role as an important civic and cultural space. These included elements of the St. Magnus Festival (a midsummer arts event), performances by a local pipe band, the annual Remembrance Day service, and, most significantly, the Ba' Game, a traditional street rugby match played on Christmas Day and New Year's Day each year, with membership of the two teams ('Uppies' and 'Doonies') historically being decided by birthplace within Kirkwall.

Information exchange on the street. The photograph at Figure 5 generally proved successful as a catalyst for discussions on the nature of information encounter and exchange on the main street. Here, however, there was a noticeable difference between the effectiveness of the image's use at the photographic exhibition and in its use in the group discussion situation. At the exhibition, visitors were clearly more willing to talk in detail to a researcher, on a one-to-one basis, about the types of information exchanged on the street, noting that it might relate to:

personal family events; local births, marriages and deaths; local social and sporting activities; or local council or business affairs. A minority of participants also discussed more sensitive examples, such as criminal activity and extra-marital affairs. At the discussion group involving members of the local family history society, however, participants were reluctant to go into any details about the nature of information obtained 'on the street', preferring instead to describe it simply as "news" or "gossip." Indeed, at this point in the discussion the unease amongst the group was palpable. In this respect, the researchers' experience was similar to that in others' photo elicitation studies undertaken with groups (e.g., Collier and Collier 1986; Schwartz 1989) when potentially controversial and delicate local issues are raised.

Figure 5. Information exchange on Broad Street, Kirkwall. This photograph was displayed in an attempt to illustrate, and provoke responses on, the role of the main street as a place for serendipitous encounters and information flow.

When discussing photo elicitation, Prosser and Schwartz (1998 p. 125) struck a cautionary note about the selection of images to be used in the process:

> "Researchers are often clear about their intentions as they go about constructing a set of images to use in the course of the interviews, but they may just as often be surprised (pleasantly or disappointingly) by the nature of the responses their photographs generate. Confessions regarding serendipitous or disastrous interchanges rarely make there way [sic] into research narratives."

In the research discussed here, we would argue that the photographs selected were largely successful in eliciting data related to the key project themes. However, throughout the visually-aided encounters, there were some examples of the polysemous nature of photographs; when, for instance, one man viewing an historical photo of street musicians (selected by the researchers to represent the main street as a social arena) chose instead to focus on a (now vanished) doorway in the background of the image. The participants also included a small number of what Becker (1998 p. 6) describes as "sophisticated" or "deliberate" readers of images, whose main interest in particular photos appeared to be in identifying the place and angle from which they had been taken, rather than their subject matter.

The current authors would also have to acknowledge their surprise at the one photograph which elicited the most significant response throughout

the week-long fieldwork period. It had been anticipated that images of St. Magnus Cathedral, or of the Ba' Game, might have generated the greatest interest, with both the building and the event regarded as perhaps being synonymous with the town's cultural heritage. In actuality, the image which provoked the most frequent, and most extensive, comment from the participants was that of an outdoor clothing and goods shop located in the premises of the former Woolworths store (or "Woolies") on Albert Street, which closed in December 2008 following the collapse nationally of the Woolworths Group (see Figure 6). Indeed, an overwhelming majority of the participants spoke, in regretful terms, about the closure of Woolies. The reasons for this sense of loss were many: some participants discussed the extensive range of goods it used to sell; while others spoke about the economic impact of the closure, in terms of local unemployment. Some described Woolies almost as an extension of the street, because, with front and back entrances, it could be used as a thoroughfare; and many emphasised the store's social function, as a meeting place, or as a shelter during inclement weather.

Figure 6. 'Woolies', Albert Street, Kirkwall, 'then and now'. The image on the left appears courtesy of Mr Fraser Devine. The image on the right elicited the most extensive response throughout the research.

With regard to the ethical debate (discussed above) concerning the need to obtain the informed consent of everyone appearing in those photographs that were displayed publicly, any fears that objections might be raised about their inclusion proved unfounded. Although none of the participants identified themselves in any of the images, many did spot family, friends and acquaintances in both the contemporary and the (more recent) historical photographs, and appeared to take great pleasure in doing so. In one notable case, a gentleman made several repeat visits to the library exhibition (on one occasion equipped with a magnifying glass), convinced that he recognised his late mother in one of the photographs, taken in the 1960s. In this respect, the methodology had an impact similar to that reported by Ireland and Ellis (2005) in their study of the

fishing communities of West Cornwall in England, where they claimed that old black and white photographs of the area, particularly those in which ties of kinship are illustrated, can "stimulate the conscience collective among indigenous peoples." In the research discussed here, the very act of identifying family, friends and 'weel kent faces' in the photographs of the main street seemed almost to reinforce the participants' Kirkwallian and Orcadian identity. We would therefore argue that, subject to some care being taken in the final selection process, the inclusion of photographs in which potentially recognisable faces appear can add significantly and positively to participants' intellectual and emotional engagement with photo elicitation research.

Whilst most of the photo elicitation methods described above were extremely successful in aiding the collection of participants' insights and perceptions of the cultural role of the Kirkwall main street, two particular elements proved less effective than had been hoped. Firstly, with regard to the family history society discussion group, the process of physically circulating photographic prints amongst the group usually led initially to concurrent conversations taking place, where smaller groups of two or three participants would discuss particular images amongst themselves. After allowing a brief period in which these more intimate interactions could take place, the group moderator would then steer the group back to the broader, group-wide discussion. These smaller group discussions did tend to encroach upon the two-hour period allocated for the event. In retrospect, and for future reference, a more effective approach would have been to show just one image at a time, to the entire group, using a

data projector and screen. Secondly, the current authors would regard the Facebook page as being only moderately successful. Despite the research team's best efforts to advertise its existence (through, for example, links from the Facebook pages of Radio Orkney and the Orkney Library & Archive), it attracted just 43 members, and early efforts to begin online discussions and elicit comments proved unfruitful. Once the fieldwork was completed, additional photos were added to the site, and some illustrative quotes from participants were presented as captions to many of the images. Although this did encourage two group members to add comments of their own, the overall public response to the Facebook site was rather disappointing. Whilst it was felt, perhaps, that the natural Orcadian reticence, referred to earlier, may have been a factor in the group members' reluctance to share their comments online, this does not appear to have affected public commentary on another, far more extensive, image-based community site, the *Orkney Image Library*.[5]

Conclusions and Further Research

This paper has provided a critical evaluation of the use of photo elicitation techniques during a multidisciplinary pilot study that investigated the role of the main street in Kirkwall, Orkney, in sustaining cultural identity, community, and a sense of place. With the possible exception of the study's Facebook page, the techniques described here were extremely successful in stimulating a significant quantity of rich, qualitative

[5] At http://www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/imagelibrary

commentary — data which, we would argue, might have remained largely untapped through the use of conventional interview techniques. The process of identifying, and commenting on, familiar buildings, landmarks and faces from photographs (both past and present) at times triggered a tangible emotional reaction, and appeared almost to reinforce the participants' Kirkwallian and Orcadian identity. The novel inclusion of merged images, combining both historical and contemporary photographs of the main street, proved a particular talking point for participants and, we believe, is an approach worthy of future use in photo elicitation research.

Through the use of the historical, contemporary and merged photographs, the researchers established that the Kirkwall main street is regarded by residents as an important civic space and venue for local cultural and social events, and one which contains several locally iconic features. It is also an important place for serendipitous meetings with acquaintances and for the exchange of information and news, which in turn adds to the feeling of 'belonging' to the town. Yet, the 'character' of the street is perceived to have somehow changed in recent years, with suggested reasons for this change including the influence of incomers, an increased tourist trade, the opening of edge-of-town-centre supermarkets, and the closure of the local Woolworths store.

Following this successful pilot, the research team is in the process of attempting to attract funding which will allow more extensive, comparative studies to take place in other small Scottish island towns.

Photo elicitation techniques will remain key to this future research. In particular, more extensive and sophisticated use of the merged image approach is proposed, perhaps using *Adobe Photoshop's* layer mask and opacity features to create images similar in nature to those of the World War II 'collages' of the Russian photographer Sergey Larenkov (see, for example, Vincent 2012). The use of social media beyond Facebook is also planned, with the anticipation that the use of dedicated photo-sharing sites, such as Flikr and Instagram, may prove more fruitful in terms of photo elicitation. The research team also propose to incorporate the use of participatory photography (or the 'photovoice' method) in this future research, where local residents will be encouraged to walk through the main street capturing images which they feel best represent their own feelings about the street, with the resultant images then being used in photo elicitation processes.

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