

A Reflection on a Journey into The Real Life Gordon's in Huntly

The starting point of the residency was an invitation to consider a project which engaged with the history of the Gordon Clan/Family in Huntly, in as broad a way I considered appropriate.

Before I arrived I had proposed a couple of defined projects which had been politely rebuffed by DA. This was an unusual experience for me, particularly as I thought they were good projects. Consequently when I arrived I didn't have a hard and fast idea of how the project would develop. However this turned out to be very useful as it enabled me to really work my way into the project in an open and organic manner. This was a departure for me as I am more used to developing a project and then making it happen with the venue, to my plan, as it were. So this approach has been challenging but very refreshing at the same time.

The Story...

Huntly is the ancestral home of the Clan Gordon and the ancient seat of Huntly Castle. The rich and fertile lands around "Strathbogie" (later Huntly) were first granted to Adam de Gordon in 1318 by Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland. Gordon had been a loyal supporter of Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn and had for years guarded the ever-shifting border with England from his home in the village of Gordon in Berwickshire. Gordon was well rewarded for his loyalty – the previous "Lord Strathbogie" had decided Robert The Bruce had no chance at Bannockburn and had changed sides to the English at the last minute and was consequently stripped of his lands and his fortress. So Gordon was rewarded by Robert the Bruce with this vast estate 200 miles away to the North East where the real story of the Gordons begins.

The incredible story of the appearance of the Gordons in Huntly at this dynamic period in Scottish history was only the beginning of 500 years of the most extreme drama. For hundreds of years the Earls/Dukes were the most powerful men in Scotland, second only to the Kings and their heirs. Their story illuminates power shifts, battles, intrigue, castle building/ransacking and (dis)loyalty to the Kings and Queens, death, disinheritance and finally the lack of an heir leading to the passing of the titles with the death of the Last Duchess of Gordon in 1864. That is with the exception the title of Marquis, which remains nearby to this day with Granville Gordon, 13th Marquis of Huntly and Earl of Aboyne.

The history of the Gordons in Huntly is inexorably woven in and through the history of Scotland, from the tragic story of Mary Queen of Scots to James the 1/6, the Catholicism of the Gordon's meeting the Reformation head on, the two Jacobite risings, Culloden and raising of The Gordon Highlanders in 1794 by the Fourth Duke and on into the 19th Century with the establishment of the Gordon Schools, which amalgamated all the local education under one roof.

Having made works before which reflect on the identity and mythology of the Scots and Scotland this is a fascinating opportunity for me to examine, at close quarters, how this flow of history played out on a local level, which in turn often had National consequences in the turbulent history of this small Nation.

My aim, after I got my bearings was to work my way into a project that aims to activate, engage and illuminate this incredible story, of which many of the people of Huntly today are often unfamiliar. I undertook interviews, worked in the studio, made works, met many learned folk who are experts in history, local, national and international in order to expand my horizons of Huntly and the Gordons in Scotland and beyond

The story and history of the Gordons is now one spread around the world and genealogical tourism has become very popular in this part of the world.

At the very beginning of my stay I had the pleasure of meeting and interviewing Kim William Gordon, Head of the House of Gordon USA in town visiting his ancestral homeland and we shared an engaging tour of the town by the historian and author Patrick W. Scott. During that first week I undertook a fascinating tour of Huntly Castle with Anne Forbes, who has written a book, soon to be published, on the rise of the Gordons and made some film clips of her introducing this vibrant and energetic period.

This initial period of meeting people and touring round Huntly in interesting company helped me orientate myself in a dynamic way, divest myself of my initial, more rigid ideas about the project I had before I arrived.

***The Battlehill, The Ba'hill, The Clashmach and the Bin.
All form a circle, and Huntly lies within.***

I first went up the Clashmach and made some 'Real Life' photos looking over the town –to get the lye of the land. To get my bearings , I then worked on a painting/placard of the **Alexander 4th Duke**, who raised the Gordon Highlanders and planned out the formal grid structure of the town in the late 18th century.

I carried this painting up the Clashmach (nearby hill) to make a 'Real Life' photograph as we survey the town together more than 200 years after he planned it's layout and raised the Regiment bearing his name which became Huntly's most famous export. (Though don't forget Deans Shortbread factory!) How can we engage with this past? How do we understand it? What does it mean today? And what would **Alexander 4th Duke of Gordon, "Cock o' the North"** think of it?

So I've been thinking a great deal about how to reflect on the residency in this report...and it all starts with the thought of...

WHERE ARE WE?

For the last part of my residency I worked in the 'closed down' Museum in the Brander building. This was important, though not without its tensions and complexities.

The Museum, the studio, the classroom, the past, the present - the future

I wondered - Why is this museum closed down? The town is open, people are open. But why are they not open for the museum? Are they open for Culture, for dialogue, for engagement - What am I doing here? Colonising, squatting, imagining a new use, a new museum - no museum?

But if the old model doesn't work then how do we try to make sense of the past and the present and future. What did we want to preserve here? In this museum, in this town, in this community what do we save, what do we lay down, set in store, what do we want to touch in the future, or even today, now - a museum of today, of now - Museum of talking. Or maybe it's a museum of 2 decades of art practice for me - Museum of despair, Museum of History, Museum of Geography, Museum of Art, Museum of people, Museum of beggars, the cabinet of beggars tokens there in the Museum cases, very interesting - Huntly's pre-eminent literary legend George MacDonald's chainmail is here too, the Provost's ermine gown - we saw it live in the Gordons' Film screening we did at the Ex-servicemen's club in a film showing the Gordon Highlanders being given the freedom of the town of Huntly in 1966 - coincidentally the year I was born - that was then - this is now - but what is now? Museum of the Civic - Museum of Ghosts - Museum of socially engaged art practice? Museum of critics, educators, educated, curators and commissioners and artists - well I guess it was when I made the performance lecture on the 15 Sept. to the curators and writers here for Amy Fung's writer's symposium.

But this museum in the Brander Building looks Victorian. Remember the Victorian model of improvement via museums and galleries - to acquire knowledge, experience, empirical understanding via a physical relationship with an art object in a space - its relation to you as an individual and your physical corporeal presence - making the work, changing the work. Completing the work. Doing a bit of work, gaining knowledge and understanding - self improvement - expanding your horizons - what's wrong with that? What you give is returned tenfold - not passive consumption or simply gaping at the spectacular. What if it really is true that the love you give is the love you get? Teaching and learning - it implies a relationship that seems very unfashionable, or even uncomfortable today.

But then again, how can one advocate Victoria with what she did to Scotland.

So now I'm the artist in residence currently residing in the museum, working in the museum residing in this particular town of Huntly, in the community?

But how did I get here? - and what does that mean? So a couple of years ago, Claudia Zeiske asks if I would like to come to Huntly to do a residency. I know about Deveron Arts, I am interested in context, passionately interested in the audience, in what ART looks like when you add people. So, I say yes. Some time later she says there is a summer slot coming up the following year, which suits

me with my other work/family commitments. But she says because of the way the money supports the residency there has to be a theme.

Stop - A theme I think, a theme, I've never been given a theme, I don't need a theme. My autonomy and individuality as an artist is surely my theme, my individual and unique voice which comes constructed from the world and then feeds back into it offering insight and dialogue and humanity is my theme. My 25 years of art practice, hundreds of exhibitions - catalogues, Real Life monographs, Real Life MONO-logues maybe. But these are my themes. They are mine.

But now my theme, for 3 months if I choose to accept it, is the story of the Clan/Family/ House of Gordon in Huntly, or maybe in History, or in the imagination, or in collective memory perhaps, or in Scotland - or in the world - that's up to me.

My theme is the Gordons in Huntly. However I want to cut it, any which way I want to look at it...mmm ok lets think - I think.

So I'm thinking - CAN I MAKE IT WORK this residency? It seems so random at first but the more I think about it this story weaves in and through lots of works I've made which reflect on notions and history and politics and people of a small damp northern European nation. We Love Real Life Scotland, City Chambers Glasgow, Real Life Rocky Mountain, CCA Glasgow, A Dream of the Hamnavoe Free State, Pier Arts Centre, Orkney, Journey to the Edge of the World - The New Republic of St Kilda, The Fruitmarket, The Real Life Rock Opera -Home, Faith, Real Life, The Travelling Gallery - everywhere - on a bus, Sinclair vs. Landseer, Aberdeen Art Gallery, and many more peppered throughout 20 years of work.

And then all of a sudden I'm thinking, well, why shouldn't I have a theme - it's a new challenge, new ways of thinking, quick on your feet, lets get on with it. Let's do it - let's open up, open out - a different path - put your money where your mouth is. A fresh start - no gallery, no baggage, no infrastructure, just the audience, the people - the conversation. I'm going to make it mine.

So what am I thinking? I am out of my comfort zone. What do I want? Should we be making art for arts sake, simply on one's own trajectory, never a thought for the eye of anyone outside the studio? I hear artists argue for it and I can almost believe it. Follow the muse; chase the moment, the magik. The intuitive, the mystery.

But why am I here, really, why? My partner and 3 children are at home 250 miles away on the other side of the country. So what is this - a love affair with art, a break up song with Galleries and Museums? A way to rekindle a love of art and of people outside of the more venal manifestations of the Art World?

And I'm thinking - this is honestly the first time ever I have ever been approached to work with a theme, which is different in and of itself. But my mind has been so excited from taking in all the research that I'm not sure what I thought before about this theme and what my new understanding of the situation is. And all the time I'm reflecting how this plugs into my idea of the specifics of History and Geography. For me, the story of this family in this one

discrete location itself is almost literally incredible, from the beginnings through the Norman Conquest, this Family Gordon's wending their way North ending up in The Borders, guarding the English border for Bruce and before for Wallace, being then granted the lucrative lands up here in Huntly by Robert the Bruce after they supported him at the Battle of Bannockburn, while the previous Lord changed sides to the English at the last minute— What a story.

So here's how I think the theme can work in this scenario. What's really interesting for me is to engage an audience to unravel or explore being somebody, anybody, an individual who lives in a small country like Scotland, a place like Huntly in this small damp northern country. You could be from anywhere but if you're here now then you're a Scot as far as I can see, a component part—but then again this could be anywhere. Some of the related projects I've made before have not been exclusively Scotland-identified, but about a small country which has been politically and economically overshadowed by a more powerful neighbor and have had long spells of being an autonomous national state, but subsequently from a socio economic international point of view being subsumed by a greater nation state. Look at anywhere in central Europe, Scandinavia, South America - Scotland is just one of many, but it has its own unique story too. That's why I thought the theme of the Gordons was really worthy of this research, as essentially for me, Scotland is endlessly interesting because how we think about Scotland is virtually fictional. It's come from Walter Scott, from literature, from Queen Victoria coming back to Scotland with Edwin Landseer doing the visuals, Ossian the fictional poet of Scots folklore which of course was exposed as a beautiful scam "translated" by James Mcphearson in the 1760's, and yes, all these things are related to historical facts, but this re-emerging of the culture, the mythology, the identity if you like it comes after the last political force of the nation has faded, made impotent after Culloden, Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Stewart line disappearing back to Europe and by then it's all over. So the tartans and Clans are proscribed, then in 1822 Walter Scott stage-manages George the Fourth's trip to Edinburgh where he invents the short kilt etc. and it all kicks off again. Victoria follows twenty years after that, along with her Balmorality - or should that be Balamory-Ality? - but it's all fiction, arguably starting with the Waverley novels of Walter Scott. The international view point of Scotland comes from art, poetry, and literature, and because we're still at the moment part of the United Kingdom there's this latitude to make it whatever we want as it doesn't really exist in the first place,

Maybe that's really the biggest issue surrounding Scottish Independence - to advance towards this goal intellectually perhaps we have to find a way to knock the mythologised history out of focus - in order to ultimately make this *real* country Real. Maybe we can't have our cake and eat it?

So all that is already bubbling in my head anyways, and the Gordons story from the last 1000 years from the Norman conquest really fits well into this Scottish/British/European history and identity where every day has basically been a school day for me. All parts of a jigsaw coming together but making one of those wonky lenticular photos where there a 2 or more images underneath each other, only visible depending on which direction you angle it from which to view it.

So I spend a few weeks making these paintings of the historic lineage of the Gordon's in Huntly, from the Lords to the Earls to the Marquis' to the Dukes etc, etc. thinking about the history, devouring the books, the dates, the names, the honours, the hierarchy. Making objects, tools something to get the conversation started – a way to talk to folk.

But DEVERON ARTS says - The town is the venue

So I'm in Huntly working with Deveron Arts who are committed to a socially engaged art practice. But when I'm out and about making my socially engaged art the citizens of Huntly still say to me, "What's this for then?" And I can reel off the aspirations for the project, 'what I'm trying to do with it', but at the same time I sometimes wonder.

But I'm also imagining a place where Art didn't exist. Perhaps *observing* a place where art doesn't exist. *Wheras the gap that exists in the market of our imaginations today necessitates something called art to fill it.*

Where is the gap that exists in the market of our imaginations today that necessitates something called art to fill it?

If ART was a new invention how would you punt it on Dragons den? What would be the USP of an art invented in the 21st century? – No cave paintings – no high church – no renaissance – no reformation – no modernism – or the situation in the decades since when art has been flooding out sideways from the punctured water bed it collapsed onto at the end of this linear, hierarchical, vertical history – all of culture floating around like little islands on non conformity in this ever expanding sea of uncertainty.

So this makes me wonder what are the aims and objectives of the artist today? What does he or she think about in the studio? Who are the audience in the imagination of the artist? Or maybe there isn't one – maybe there shouldn't be one - Is it art for arts sake? A dialogue with itself, a feedback loop, a mere specialist interest, like stamp collecting or bird watching. Autonomous. A thing of rare beauty. An evocation of the sublime?

But the audience, the public, the participants, the citizens of Huntly in this case - what do they get? Entertainment? Distraction? Affirmation of what they thought already - are we simply singing to the choir – preaching to the converted? Or is a simple provocation enough? An exhortation to think again, to reconsider one's preconceptions about ones attitude to life. Or can we hold up a new paradigm of relational aesthetics where the audience truly are part of the artwork. They make it. They realise it. They ARE it.

It makes me wonder about all the things we say about art, "asking the viewer to think about things in a different way" – "holding up a mirror to society" – "creating a window to see a snapshot of something, not as it is but as it could be" - "some image of idea or event however fantastic and unbelievable that nevertheless illustrates the distance between how we live and how we could live better" – or maybe "how our aspirations for our lives could be ultimately

realised – or at least how through art we could begin to address the chasm in-between”. What do these things mean to people everyday, walking down the street, when they come across me parading round the square outside here with a painting of Robert the Bruce on a stick, as if I were protesting about something, and maybe I am, dressed only in shorts with a tattoo that reads ‘Real Life’ indelibly inked on my back – maybe that’s part of what I’ve been trying to find out - So I talk to them, tell them about the project, undermine their scepticism - usually it works – a bit of human connection...

Are the citizens of Huntly socially engaging with my socially engaged art practice? That’s quite a complex exchange.

I work at The Glasgow School of Art in the department of Sculpture and Environmental Art, and we force the students to go outside into the city of Glasgow to make projects and then we discuss them in terms of context, site, specificity and engagement. So all these same questions have been on my mind and I’m well versed in thinking in those terms as I’ve been part of that department from the very beginning of the story even before David Harding arrived to conjure the department out of the stagnating Murals and Stained Glass Department - and the story of *the context is half the work*. The Artist Placement Group and all that story worked very well for 10 to 15 years, but now, well, the situation is quite different now. The students now are far less interested in gaining permission and negotiating with institutions - they want to do interventions and do things on their terms, of course some still make thoughtful, considered collaborative works, but sometimes they just want to seem to say “fuck you” society – though often in really interesting ways and don’t get me wrong, that’s great too, but coming to a place like Huntly, those questions were really on my mind where *the town is the venue* and context is half the work, but implicitly from Deveron Arts’ point of view, the town is the people –not just the place - and so it starts to get a lot more messy. And maybe more interesting. But everyone needs encouragement in this process. And you’ve got to remember to be a human being. Maybe we all need encouragement in that.

And to go back to the way some of my students are thinking these days in terms of public work as intervention I got to say that in an extended project like this you can’t really stick 2 fingers up in some petulant art statement and then see the same folk the next day in the pub watching the football after you get down from your high and mighty artist soapbox. Nor would I want to. You can’t get away with that here as you ARE part of a community here, like it or not – you stand for something. And it really makes you think about the idea that these are the people who might casually walk into a gallery, keen to have an experience of your work in a different scenario –and here they are in the flesh – real –standing in front of you – lets talk to them. Sure it’s only 3 months, it’s a somewhat hypothetical snapshot, and the subjects and themes I’m dealing with could take you 30 years and still not scratch the surface,

But WHO ARE THE this AUDIENCE/WHO ARE this Scottish PUBLIC/Are you the audience/the public/participants? On one level I think the whole residency and all the people I met became part of an artwork, which sometimes took the form

of/a lecture/pedagogy/dialogue/monologue. Are all these people the audience or were they participants – maybe I'll talk about the talks I made while in Huntly at my next talk – maybe I'll talk to my students about it in a few weeks in a talk to illustrate different models of talking about art practice. WHAT are we all trying to do here - CAN HIGH QUALITY, challenging, engaging, dialogic ART ONLY BE A CLUB, A CLIQUE – or can it be for general audiences/PARTICIPANTS too? And what is HIGH QUALITY ART anyway? And how does it relate to 'community art' and what's the difference?

But DEVERON ARTS WANT PARTICIPANTS NOT AUDIENCE – it's a noble aspiration. Three months on a project, 600 years of History, expectation, everyone has a different voice, a different story, with the same core subject of the Gordons. But class, it's still critical – it never goes away. Working class/middle class/upper class/collector class/could get you some funding for your new project class...

2 case studies -

OK so I wanted to explore the situation in Huntly where there's still quite a big constituency of this family, this 600-year-old story, the Gordons – that's really interesting. We hosted this event down by Huntly Castle where we called up all the Gordons in the phone book and we invited them to have lunch together. I set up this carnival style tableau facade constructed from portraits I made of the old Nobility, that I'd been previously carrying around town, chatting to folk and up local hills, one of which, the Clashmach is owned (as part of their farm) by one of the Gordon families attending, so anyway we invited them and asked them to bring mementos memories of their Gordon heritage/lineage to share. It was a really lovely day where everyone met each other as they didn't all know another before of course, and I made a performance of Gordon songs and the song that charts 12,000 years of history – the one I wrote and used in a fragmented, truncated form over the residency and recorded as part of the Huntly History Song with "A Gordon for Me" and "Cock o' the North". After lunch and the 'entertainment' we made photos of all the present day Gordons in Huntly with the tableaux of their illustrious forebears in the background and the castle as the backdrop, as individual family groups and as a whole, all together. We made a poster and sent it around.

It was this very simple way to picture the Gordon Family here in 2011 and the castle bearing their family name and here's me as the artist in residence bringing it together and Deveron Arts hosting it most generously and looking back it's interesting as at its core this work enabled a simple human moment of a really elemental exchange like sitting down across the table and talking, talking with a constituency of people that really had little interest in Art per say. And this experience really only lives in the memory, but it was quite a rich and dynamic moment. Through the work one can reflect on questions of identity, what's in a name, what's family, nationality, where do we come from and where are we going? How can we understand and engage with Identity/geography/history/time/class/ownership. What are they? We see pictured "All the Real Life Gordons in Huntly"- are they participants/audience/unknown artists – or are you the audience for this work,

suddenly now, at this moment? It exists in the memory of these Gordons. Does it now exist in an art dialogue – relationally?

And throughout it all at the same time I'm always thinking about a meta view of the event where I'm considering whether the Gordons are still part of the work, or participants, or viewers as the piece is documented as an artwork.

So another example of a model *was* this project I with the great help of Gayle Meikle did in the mart on a weekend where Huntly had its farmers' market on Saturday, in the town square and then the local livestock mart on the Sunday hosted all of Huntly life in a kind of Gala Day, with the bouncy castle and the tractor show, rare breeds, sheep shearing and rabbit skinning amongst the Guides and Brownies and people selling landscape photos and all sorts of other things, and then in the middle of the livestock mart, there's this artist in residence too. I brought all the stuff I had been working from the "studio" - the museum - into the pen, my pen, and I was sitting there painting away and making music with my back to the audience, Real Life tattoo to the fore and for me I really did feel like I was just one of the other exotic 'rare breed' animals in the show. On one level it was surreal and bizarre. But the question after all in the end is whether this idea of culture and art can be just another aspect of what goes on in the town - as much as anything this day long project was for me - trying to answer: What really goes on in there? What's my job? What's my role? Of course in Huntly in plain view of the people, this question is considerably more complex, challenging and engaging than it might be in a gallery. Bringing any notion of the artists' studio to an event like this. What is an artist – what do they do, what are they for? Are they a constituent part of the community like the guides/farmers/rare breeds/sheep shearing/rabbit skinning we see displayed at this event? We show what we do. Are we just the same? It's a messy business – there are no real answers - only more questions, but good questions, valuable questions.

But at the same time as all this its been on my mind is that you could illuminate a really important aspect of this kind of work in a way impossible to do *IN* Huntly and I am projecting myself thinking about all these things again six months down the road, and thinking about this whole project where for 3 months I came to Huntly, made all these things, talked to all these people, and did all these events but really for whom and to what end. Artist in residence – but where is the real constituency – the true audience? I'm looking forward to thinking about it all again retrospectively, perhaps in a completely different context, to think about bringing it all together under this slightly different umbrella of unpacking all this information. Maybe it's a 2 part thing – a body with 2 or more limbs - The paintings I made aren't really the art works, I don't quite know what they might be yet, but it's interesting to see what this endeavour might mean afterwards, how it might come into sharper focus. We're going to do a book of the project – that will broaden that out a bit more, start with the different works I've made over the last 20 years about the idea of Scotland like this one as a premise then contextualise these in a much wider expanse of geography and history and politics and culture. How would the evidence of the project look in a more mainstream gallery space, how would one unpack it there?

But for me, it has been about the people I've met since being here and you can critically say a lot of those people are already associated with an organisation like Deveron Arts (in a preaching to the converted way) and interested in culture and in the history of Huntly and The Gordons, but all of them have very different voices and are coming from different classes and backgrounds and that's been really interesting to assemble a jigsaw puzzle with all these different parts or a version of History that don't really fit, but are all just as believable as the next contribution through the sincerity of their convictions held. They might not be the voices normally heard in History, but they can be in THIS History.

I think, of course, the responsibility of the artist in this context is also to make sure the projects that develop are, on balance, first and foremost artworks that involve mixed audiences/participants rather than simply entertainment or diversion, especially in the often robust shadow of funding imperatives and a bums on seats demands/mentality of post project reports and review. However I think that's why the project with the "All the Gordon's in Huntly 2011" worked well because there was a clear premise for their invitation, i.e. simply their name in relation to 600 years of history I was working with but they were a completely diverse demographic right across the social spectrum. In a sense the family name here is completely arbitrary, but defined and critical at the same time in relation the notion of this event as an artwork - so everyone was in it together, equal, perhaps unsure what they were part of at first, then slowly coalescing into some kind of definable group in relation to and through the artwork, the event. That was a rich and interesting journey through that day - a new community - a sense of place - a belonging - created in the moment that didn't exist at the start of that day and thereafter exists only as a memory, a feeling, an idea one can build into a Real Life. An idea that you can carry with you always - forever. To assist in locating where we are here in Scotland, right now, locally, nationally and internationally.

On the last weekend I was in Huntly I made a 'Real Life Portable Museum Tour' with a group of the various people I met and worked with during my stay in Huntly. I had experienced many different histories of The Gordons in Huntly with the many interesting people I had met during my residency and I wanted to make a work which brought some of these people together along with the work that I had made, so that we could experience together many different ideas and impressions of this History, some of which may appear contradictory and even in conflict with each other. But this would present a dialogue, which we invite the people who come on the tour to join. Then we could reflect on the tenuous grasp on a factual history of The Gordons in Huntly, in Scotland, in Europe etc and begin to reconstruct it in a more communal, enquiring manner.

I had an interesting discussion before the event with Claudia, where I explained that around 40 people would be ideal, as I wanted everyone to be able to hear each contributor speaking, without the aid of a microphone. And the group would operate like a strange hybrid tour/seminar group where 40 was about the maximum possible to make the dynamic function - a critical mass, if you will. So I explained to Claudia that in the construction of this artwork, more 'audience' involved would, in fact, make this work worse, not better. I felt this was a bit of a

new way of thinking for DA where 'the more the merrier' is usually the preferred method. A simple dialogue resolved the situation.

So the public were duly invited and a group of around 40 (just the right amount!) met in the museum where I'd been working. This now appeared as a strange space, a mix of the studio/museum/history/contemporary. I introduced the whole notion of my residency to the assembled visitors and we kicked off the tour with a skype conversation with Kim William Gordon. He lives in St Louis Missouri, USA and I first played the visitors part of an interview with him I made at the start of my residency when I met him in Huntly where he had passionately articulated his relationship with his Gordon heritage, Huntly and Scotland, as Head of the House of Gordon USA. He wished us luck for the tour and set us off in good spirits.

I had prepared all the works I had made over my residency and everybody grabbed something from my 'Museum', there were large paintings, t-shirts, small paintings, signs, sing along song lyrics, posters, 'Real Life Tour' signs etc which made for a bright and lively looking tour group. Everyone had something to carry along and I reckon the age range was about 5 yrs to 80 something. I was interested in how the group would look to the general citizens of Huntly who would see us as we perambulated round the different stations. Not immediately comprehensible.

We first of all went round to the town square and had an introduction to the history by Patrick Scott, unofficial town historian and author of the timeless, "A History of Strathbogie", We crowded round as he jumped up on one of the benches in front of the library and gave us the story of the square. We then processed along to the war memorial where he informed us about the history of the memorial and the town's long and intimate relation to the military, imploring inclusion on the memorial for recent casualties for Afghanistan. Then it was along to the Gordon Highlanders memorial where I talked to Private Darren Sharp (whom I had got to know over the previous weeks) and Major Mike Taitt of the Gordon Highlanders regiment and unveiled and presented Darren with a painting I had made of him as a symbolic painted image of a regular soldier, in contrast to the many paintings of commanding and high ranking officers we had seen on a visit to the Gordon Highlanders Museum, some weeks earlier. He seemed very happy with the picture and I think it sat well alongside the other many images clustered around the memorial at that moment, including one of the 4th Duke, who founded the regiment in 1794. From there we made our way to the Gordon Schools Arch where we had the pleasure of seeing two students from the Brenda Gordon School of Dance entertain us with some Highland dancing for which I supplied some live music, the traditional bagpipe tune 'Cock of the North', played on guitar. This tune was named after the 4th Duke of Gordon. We went through the arch and traveled down the grand avenue in a novel procession of portraits and colour. We continued down to Huntly Castle where we were treated to a succinct though comprehensive introduction to the Gordons and the Castle by Anne Forbes based on the forthcoming book on the rise of the Gordons. She stood and spoke on the upper level of the castle grounds flanked by myself, Anna and Gordon who held up her annotations as required – it was quite a spectacle. As the light began to really fade we then retraced our steps

up the avenue where we were accosted by a dark stranger who sang a Broadside Ballad to the throng concerning the dastardly deeds of the 4th Duke – in contrast to his shining public image, alluded to above. These ballads would have been sung in the town squares across the country during the time of the improvement (circa 1800/industrial revolution) and the words sold to interested listeners for a small coin. Our stranger handed us our song-sheets free, gratis. The stranger was none other than esteemed local archaeologist Colin Shepherd. From this encounter we went into the Gordon Schools (primary) where we had a talk from Norma Hunter and Sarah who discussed the projects they had made with the schoolchildren in relation to my project and displayed some of the results on the windows around the entrance. Then with the help of Mina (P5) and her friend we tried to teach the assembled crowd 'A Gordon for Me' which I had been rehearsing with the primary school choir for use on my Huntly History song recording I had been making at a local recording studio. The kids were much better students – adults are hopeless. After a couple of verses and a wobbly key change we hurried through the gloaming up to St Margaret's Chapel, the first church built in Scotland since the reformation with a spire and bell. This institution was built with support from the so-called *Sherry Gordons*, who moved to Spain from Aberdeenshire and started the successful Gonzalez-Bayez sherry empire. They later sent an impressive suite of paintings to decorate the Chapel and tell the story of important scenes from the bible. We took all my paintings in there and they mingled awkwardly with the sacred art. We were treated to a potted history from Ann Dean, who had written a pamphlet on the chapel and after a short Q and A we retired to the hall next door for a well earned drink (of sherry) and tasty tapas supplied by Daisy Williamson.

From then we carried all the paintings and signs and t-shirts and posters and songs etc round to the Gordon Arms to display then around the hall, where the Gordon Family Ceilidh was already in full swing. A great night was had by all.

The next day Norma hosted her world record attempt Gay Gordon's in the Stewarts Hall. We took the paintings etc along to flank the hall for this ambitious challenge. Again Mina and her friend helped me galvanise the dancers with a round of *A Gordon for Me* after we had been piped along in our dance to narrow defeat in the world record attempt by the Huntly Pipe Band. What the dancers lacked in numbers we made up for in enthusiasm.

Ross Sinclair, October 2011

Chronology of Events - Ross Sinclair in Huntly

Arrive in Huntly, meet lots of folk, tour Huntly Castle with Anne Forbes, visit her at home, meet Steve Brown, visit Fiona Manson at her guest house home to discuss Gordon 2000, genealogy tourism, hosting etc.

8 July -Real Life Trip up the Clashmach – make Real Life photos on top looking over the town.

10 July –begin work on painting of 4th Duke of Gordon, founder of the Gordon Highlanders, modernizer of Huntly

12 July – Meet and interview Kim William Gordon, Head of House of Gordon USA, tour town with Patrick Scott etc etc.

13 July -Real Life Trip up the Clashmach carrying the Painting of 4th Duke – photographed from the top, surveying the modern Huntly, which he had laid out 200 years previously, meeting and talking to the public along the way

14 July – talk at Deveron Arts, describing my proposed project after a couple of weeks of reflection

25 July - meet and interview Sandy Duffus, family history in The Gordon Highlanders.

26 July - Artists talk to the public in empty shop, Bogie St.

3 August –Public Visit to the Gordon Highlanders Museum

13 August - “All the Real Life Gordon’s in Huntly” – all the remaining Gordon’s in Huntly from the phone book invited to a lunch at the Castle, with chat, memorabilia, performance, discussion, photographed for poster in front of Painting tableau of their illustrious predecessors in front of Huntly Castle.

17 August - Walk up Clashmach from the ‘empty shop’, Bogie St. around the town/square with painting of Robert the Bruce. Make Real Life photos around town, at Deans Shortbread Factory, chatting to the Huntly Citizens.

26 August - Meeting with Darren Sharp in empty shop, photograph portraits.

1 September -Visit to The Gordon Schools (secondary) performance/talk

4 September (Site visit 16 August) - We Love Real Life Huntly Market Stall – Day long performance in stall in market, painting/performance music chatting to the visitors as part of Gala Weekend in Huntly.

8th September - Film Screening at the Ex Servicemen’s Club, “Tunes of Glory ‘ with Alec Guinness based on The Gordon Highlanders and Gordon Highlanders archive original footage and films shot in Huntly 1966/1980

13/20/26 Sept - PHI Studios to record Huntly History Song

14 September - Visit to The Gordon Schools (primary) working with Norma/Sarah on students portrait and town planning projects

15 September - Large Scale Performance lecture, "Real Life Artist in Residence" in the museum/studio including songs and video for invited/public audience in Museum as part of Amy Fung's *'Who Are We Writing For?'* workshop.

16/23 September - Visit to The Gordon Schools (primary) introduction of song with choir/revisit to record the kids singing.

29 September - Real Life Trip up the Clashmach with painting of Darren Sharp Real Life Photos.

30th September - Real Life Portable Museum tour of Huntly Gordon History.

1st October -Real Life Gay Gordon's world record attempt.

2nd October - Farewell dinner at Deveron Arts Studio.