In the summer I spent a week in a village in Skye called Flodigarry. It is a very beautiful place between the hills and the sea, with many small islands around about on every side. The land is extremely fertile because of the deep volcanic soil which gathers in hollows between the low hills which are dotted throughout the township. This earth is always shifting and apparently the whole place is the largest landslide in Europe: they have to rebuild the road through the village a couple of times a year.

Scottish Gaelic is the mother tongue of the majority of the community, though it is mainly the older people who speak it nowadays. Many young people leave the village, and rich English-speaking incomers settle: the same story everywhere. There are still a lot of active crofts in the township, though they do not do as much crofting on them as they used to: now there are only sheep and there hasn’t been a cow milked in the village for more than twenty years. I was there with students from across Scotland for a Gaelic summer school, as we had a tour around the village with an old man called Archie. It was as if you were going round Cregneash more than a hundred years ago with Ned Beg Hom Ruy…except that he rode on a quad-bike! He told us all about life as a crofter and all the names of the hills and other places. He had a particular name for every corner of the village.
It was very good to hear such fluent and rich Gaelic, and opportunities such as this need to grasped for it seems unlikely that it will be possible to find places like this in a few years’ time, so fast is the language declining everywhere. The people of Flodigarry do a course like this for learners twice a year but many other areas in the Hebrides could take advantage of the desire of learners to spend time with people who speak the language natively. That would be of benefit to the people of these places, to learners, and to the language.