

2007 News Archive

Yule Feast for Duncan

Next Thursday, December 20th, will be the day we remember the irreplaceable Duncan Williamson with a Yule Feast held in his honour at the Scottish Storytelling Centre on the cusp of the midwinter solstice. Tradition holds that if this feast of stories and music goes unmarked, darkness continues to encroach on light so that the year will not turn.

This year's Feast is a special celebration of the stories and songs of Duncan, the Scottish Traveller tradition-bearer, who died in November aged 79, after a short illness. Duncan was a regular host and master of the Yule Feast, so it seems appropriate that his tribute should be a convivial storytelling ceilidh. Contributors include singers, storyteller and musicians Margaret Bennet, David Campbell, Alison McMorland, James MacDonald Reid, Heather Yule, Geordie MacIntyre, Lindsay Porteous and Donald Smith.

The Scottish Storytelling Centre is also gathering funds for a memorial in honour of Duncan. This will take the form, in the first instance, of a Storytelling Chair, flanked by two attendant chairs for musicians and singers. The chairs will be created to a unique new design by The Workshop of Tim Stead at Blainslie in the Scottish Borders, and will be crafted from native timbers. They will be installed at the Centre next spring.

The Yule Feast embraces music, ballads, stories, food and wine in the same ticket. This year's event promises to be a one-off night to remember, and a guaranteed darkness-buster. The evening starts at 6 pm.

Posted 12.12.07

Doh Ray Me, When Ah Wis Wee - Scots Children's Songs and Rhymes

One of Scotland's best-known storytellers and song writers, Ewan McVicar has collected together lyrics dating back to the early nineteenth century as well as from children today. This first publication of the 'hidden' songs of Scots childhood, "Doh Ray Me, When Ah Wis Wee" is his second book, and is published on 20th December.

Before Ewan was reincarnated as a storyteller he worked in many schools teaching old Scottish songs. Adults believe "the kids no longer sing in the playground, they just run about", but Ewan found that it was alive and roaring with rhyme, song and game. He began to collect the ones new to him, and was amazed at their humour and vitality. Eventually he became very mature indeed student at the School of Scottish Studies so he could learn more, and found in the School's library and sound archive old collections of children's lore rich in vibrant Scots.

When fellow songwriter Ian Davison learned of Ewan's interest, he passed on a card index of over 500 kids songs he had collected as a Glasgow teacher, most of them never seen in print. Ewan began to develop his understanding about these lyrics, how they develop, interbreed and die, how tunes are used, until he felt compelled to try and get a book published, which is in itself a story and a half. His biggest regret is that he could include less than half of the essential Scots ones and none of the Gaelic ones, his biggest pleasure is that the book with over 900 songs and rhymes of the last 150 years is at last out there and giving pleasure.

Ewan was born in Inverness and worked as a banker in Scotland and Africa, then as a guitar teacher in the USA. On his return to Scotland he was employed in various areas of social work before becoming a self-employed storyteller and songwriter. He has performed in over 200 schools and in castles, museums, folk festivals and other venues across Britain, as well as in

Canada, the USA, Holland and Russia. He has written some 40 songs which have been commercially recorded, including 20 for the Singing Kettle children's show.

Doh, Ray Me, When Ah Wis Wee, priced £14.99, is published by Birlinn. Information from Jan Rutherford, tel: +44 (0)131 337 9724 or jan.ppw@blueyonder.co.uk.

Posted 22.11.07

Duncan Williamson

Many of you will know that Duncan Williamson died on Thursday 8th November after a series of strokes. He was very peaceful at the end surrounded by his family.

The day before his first stroke he was in touch wishing all the best for the Storytelling Festival and hoping to come to the Centre for a special Christmas event.

Duncan's funeral was at Strathmiglo Church in the village of Strathmiglo in Fife on Tuesday 13th November.

On Thursday 20th December from 6.00 pm our Yule Feast will be a celebration of Duncan's life and achievements – details to follow. Duncan leaves a huge gap but his life's work must go on, just as his generosity of spirit is still with us.

Donald Smith

Posted 16.11.07

Duncan Williamson (1928 -2007)

The Ancestral Voice

Duncan was born in Furnace, Argyll, on the shores of Loch Fyne, the seventh son of a seventh son. He was a shining example of the authentic cultural carrier who actively engaged with a living tradition, with orality at its core.

"I'm a storyteller, a singer and a bard, I'm one of the Travelling People." Duncan was a king among storytellers. His influence has been significant and he has contributed, in diverse ways, to what has become an unstoppable storytelling revival in Scotland and beyond. To quote one of the younger generations of storytellers Paraig MacNeil, "without Duncan there would be no us".

Duncan's treasure house of story, song and lore came from: his immediate and extended family particularly his two grannies, friends, workmates, crofters, fisher folk, and not least 'an old Irishman' Patrick O'Donnel. His meeting and friendship with Patrick, for me, reveals a great deal about Duncan's learning process: conscious acquisition of lore, values and philosophy. He met Patrick at the age of thirteen and later in life wrote, "I've never met a man more intelligent than Patrick, he had a mountain of knowledge. He could tell you about the smallest insect that creeps in the bog and the largest fish in the sea, the great Blue Whale. To me there seemed to be nothing he didn't know and he knew more songs and stories than any man I ever met. He was my master..."

The young Duncan absorbed, like a sponge, songs and tales from Patrick (as he did with everyone he met!). Patrick was non-literate and had worked as: a deep-sea sailor, a farm worker, a tram driver in London and a timber man in Canada. The literate Duncan would read to his new found friend, usually from the Bible, and in turn, Patrick would teach him an Irish song in the classic oral manner. Duncan states "and when he sang a song to me he would get me to sing it back to him... 'Good man' he'd say 'Good man'.

Elsewhere, Duncan writes “ stories from tradition are magic – because they are given to you as a present – you are let into the personal lives of your friends. It is my responsibility to tell the story again to you with the love and respect for their forbears”

Duncan, with the enduring wonder of a child, time and time again, demonstrated this love and respect, which embraced pride of family, homeland and heritage. He was born to be a remembrancer.

I first met Duncan and some of his family on a sun-drenched day in 1967. It was at his mother's hut in the Duke of Argyll's forest behind Inverary. There they were gathered around a roaring fire adjacent to the hut. We received the warmest of welcomes from both family and fire and a ceillidh naturally followed. It was an occasion to remember. I recall mother Betsy and her exuberant cantering of 'The Drunken Piper', brother Dodie (George) with guitar and moothie with his country and western numbers, and his sister Mary's fine singing of 'I wish, I wish' and Duncan and Betsy in a rollicking duet of 'The Tinklers'Waddin'. And so much more. Duncan sang one of his own songs written by him in 1960, the poignant 'Hawker's Lament' also now known as 'They're closing our camping grounds down'. Here is the last verse:

But maybe someday when we're gone from this world
And buried deep down in the ground
Will God make us welcome, will he give us a home
Or will he tell us to keep moving on?

I first knew Duncan as a singer, albeit a story – singer and of course the Scots traditional song repertoire is infused with narrative. Duncan was as effective a singer as he was a teller of tales. I've just listened again to some of these earliest recordings and in terms of vocal style and delivery the influence of 'auld Betsy' on Duncan and sister Mary is very obvious.

It was my dear and life-long friend Helen Fullerton (1928-2005) who had introduced me to the family on that most memorable day. Helen was a song collector, left-wing poet and true Champion of the Travelling People – and much, much more! She had known the family for nearly ten years by this time when she met several of the brothers and sisters at the Glen Shira Hydro-Electric Scheme cookhouse circa 1958. (Helen worked for a spell in the cookhouse and produced a fine clutch of songs from this period in her life including ' The Shira Dam and Traveller's Joy).

Later that year, in November, Helen and I recorded Duncan at a caravan, near Star in Fife where he was tattie-howkin for a spell. We recorded a number of songs including a five verse fragment of Lady Margaret (Tam Lin, Child 39) and an equally valuable Hind Horn (Child 17) which Duncan had learned as a boy from one of his Grannies. This material was promptly deposited in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies of Edinburgh University. The eminent Ballad tune scholar Bertrand Bronson published Lady Margaret or Tam Lin in the abridged volume of his monumental four volume work. In time Duncan rebuilt a complete Tam Lin, drawing from other members of his extended family. This is one of many examples of his resourcefulness as well as an instinctive act.

In April 1968 Duncan shared the stage with A.L. (Bert) Lloyd (towering figure in the English folksong revival dating from the 1950's) at Folksong and Ballad, Glasgow a singer's club run by Carl McDougal, Ian Philip, Ron Clark and myself. This I 'm sure was Duncan's first appearance in front of a folk audience. Thereafter he reached an ever widening circle in Scotland. He was of course highly esteemed within his own community long before this.

Since these early days, we now have a plethora of books published with the invaluable help, support and guidance of his second wife Linda. We also have a substantial number of recordings which provides easy access for this and future generations.

Duncan was a much loved character of high artistic integrity who had a significant influence on such gifted tellers as: David Campbell, Donald Smith, Bob Pegg, Taffy Thomas, Helen East and many, many more. I'm confident that they would acknowledge his open 'Pass It On' spirit be it song or tale and his encouragement.

Above all, Duncan demonstrated that songs are for singing and stories for telling. In the words of Irish poet Brendan Kennelly "All the songs are living ghosts and long for a living voice" I can think of no better statement that helps place Duncan's life long passion in Global perspective than that from novelist Frank Delaney "storytelling – from wherever it comes forms a layer in the foundation of the world, and glistening in it we see the trace elements of every tribe on earth". This then, is the carrying stream to which Duncan's ancestral voice contributed to, in such large measure.

Geordie McIntyre 12-11-07

References:

Voice of the Bard edited by Timothy Neat; Canongate 1999 ISBN 086241 392 (page 3)
Storytelling Scotland (A Nation in Narrative) Donald Smith; Polygon 2001 ISBN 0 7486 6310x ((p 158 – 166)
Voice of the Bard (p236 - 238)
ibid (p239)
Tales of the Seal People Duncan Williamson; Canongate 1992 ISBN 086241 3737 (p3)
The Horsie man (Memoirs of a traveller 1928-58) Duncan Williamson; Birlinn 1994 reprint 2002 ISBN 184158 214 (p273)

A Thorn in the Kings Foot (Stories of the Scottish Travelling People)Duncan and Linda Williamson: Penguin 1987 (p27)
The Singing Tradition of Childs Popular Ballads edit Bertrand Bronson; Princeton University Press 1976 (p101)
A Thorn in the Kings Foot (p258)
The Democratic Muse (Folk music revival in Scotland) edit Ailie Munro;Scottish Cultural Press (1978 and 1996 reprint) ISBN 1852246626 (p36)
Familiar Stranger (New and Selected Poems 1960-2004) Brendan Kennelly; Bloodaxe Books (2004) ISBN 1 825224 662 (p463 from his poems Living Ghosts)
Ireland (A Novel) Frank Delaney; Time Warner (2004) (author's note/preface)
Posted 16.11.07

Duncan Williamson - Obituaries

We have found these online obituary notice links for Duncan, do email us if you know of any others:

The Guardian
The Independent
The Herald
The Scotsman
The Times

www.footstompin.com

www.mudcat.org

George Ewart Evans Centre for Storytelling (University of Glamorgan)

Posted 20.11.07

Islandmen at the Storytelling Centre

St Andrew's season begins early at the Storytelling Centre with two evenings of sea and island tales. On Friday 23rd November Lawrence Tulloch from Shetland and Tom Muir from Orkney will be on hand to launch Lawrence's stunning new collection of tales entitled "Da Foy". However, the entertainment will be strictly old style with fireside yarns and magical spells from the enchanted deeps. Those are also the themes on the following night when Celtic yarnspinner David Campbell evokes the "Music of the Deep" with harpist Ailie Robertson, and singer Wendy Carle Taylor. After all, Scotland's patron saint was a fisherman! For details, go to Events.

Posted 16.11.07

Storytelling Festival Prize Draw

Congratulations to Linda McVicar, who's won the Storytelling Festival Prize Draw. Linda has won a large selection of books from the Scottish Storytelling Centre shop.

Posted 12.11.07

Stories for Transformation and Resilience - Residential Workshop

Running from Friday 11th April to Sunday 13th April 2008 at Wiston Lodge in Lanarkshire, "As Old as the Hills: Stories for Transformation and Resilience" is a residential opportunity for storytellers to deepen their practice and develop skills for using story in a consciously therapeutic way. The traditional function of stories, as aides to helping build resilience in individuals and communities in order to help them deal with complex and painful feelings and experiences, will be considered.

Led by storyteller, social worker and trainer Ruth Kirkpatrick and storyteller and psychotherapist Nancy Mellon, the course will be participative and experimental, looking at how ideas can be applied in practice and adapted to different settings.

Posted 9.11.07

Story Explorer

This summer has seen a series of storytelling events at Historic Scotland properties all over the country. From Stirling Castle to Dun Carloway Broch on Lewis, storytellers have been on site to provide unique illuminations of Scotland's past. Tourists and local visitors alike have enjoyed this twist on the guided tour, bringing history to life in an unforgettable way.

Storyteller Bob Pegg encouraged audience participation at his sessions at Corrimony Cairn, near Glen Urquhart as these pictures of spinning yarns and banging drums show. Thanks to Bob for sending us these photographs. Other venues that took part in the programme were Dunstaffnage Castle in Oban, Corgarff and Balvenie Castles in Aberdeenshire and Scotstarvit Tower in Fife.

Posted 6.11.07

Jekyll and Hyde To Get City Reading in 2008

Following the success of Kidnapped earlier this year, Edinburgh City of Literature have announced their 2008 One Book One citywide reading campaign which takes as its subject the classic Robert Louis Stevenson novel, The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

This dark masterpiece will, like Kidnapped, be turned into a graphic novel by Alan Grant and Cam Kennedy, released in February 2008 with free copies available from the city's libraries. The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde will no doubt enthral a new audience, familiar perhaps

with the story and its imitators, but unaware of the power of the original novel, with its atmospheric setting in the Old Town of Edinburgh.

The Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust is looking for book groups, community groups and partners to join them in encouraging as many people as possible in Edinburgh to read the same book at the same time. If you are interested, and want to get your friends, staff or colleagues involved, please register by contacting either jekyll@cityofliterature.com or hyde@cityofliterature.co.uk.

Posted 6.11.07

Uisge

The Scottish Storytelling Centre was flooded - not quite literally - with watery wonders for a ceilidh event celebrating a visual art project run on a voluntary basis over the past few months by members of the local Gaelic community.

Uisge (Gaelic for rain or water) is an exhibition using over 200 suspended transparent trairdrops encapsulating vivid artwork from children in the Gaelic Medium Unit at Tollcross Primary School. Alongside these are old photographs, fragments of reminiscence, Gaelic song, poetry and proverbs which were contributed by the wider community, bards, and the School of Scottish Studies and SCRAN.

Celebrating the beauty and vibrancy of Gaelic language, culture and community and its close relationship with water from the past, the exhibition concept is based on the belief that water, language and culture flow. Artist and parent Sheila MacLean said "Youngsters learning Gaelic are the language's future and it is important and exciting to see their imaginative contributions dancing and mingling alongside some of the Gaeldom's finest bards.

The project was funded by Taigh na Gàidhlig, Comunn na Gàidhlig and Com-Pàirteachas Gàidhlig Dhùn Èideann.

Posted 5.11.07

Wisdom in the Words

The Society for Storytelling are organising their 2008 Gathering, to be held on 4-6th April of next year at St Lukes Campus, Heavitree Road, in Exeter, Devon. For more details, visit [Wisdom in the Words](#). The theme of this year's event is sharing wisdom and the part that storytelling and storytelling Skills can play in facilitating and enhancing any learning/social experience. Guest storytellers and facilitators include Shonaleigh and Debbie Guneratne.

Posted 19.10.2007

Hands up for Sheila!

The Fifth 'Scots Trad Music Awards' on Saturday 1st December will this year feature a very special guest in the shape of acclaimed Scots singer and storyteller Sheila Stewart.

Sheila has been included in a group of outstanding musicians who will this year be inducted into the Scots Traditional Music Hall of Fame, in recognition of their amazing contribution to traditional music. The ceremony will take place at the Nevis Centre in Fort William, highlighting Scotland's wonderful traditional music industry.

A portrait of Sheila has been commissioned for her inclusion in the Hall of Fame exhibition (also at the Nevis Centre) from photographer Louis De Carlo and music writer Rob Adams is writing a

short history. Fellow inductees are Ian Powrie, Aonghas Grant, The Corries, Iain McFadyen, Eric Bogle and Morag MacLeod. For more information, visit www.tradmusichall.com.

Posted 19.10.2007

Calling Grampian Storytellers

Aberdeenshire Arts Education team are currently building up a portfolio of freelance artists that are specifically interested in working with children and in collaboration with teachers to deliver specialist skills that support and enhance the curriculum in creative ways. If this area of work appeals to you, please forward your details and examples of your work, via email or post to: Dianne Sutherland (Cultural Co-ordinator), Education, Learning and Leisure, Woodhill House, Westburn Rd. Aberdeen, AB16 5GB. E: dianne.Sutherland@aberdeenshire.gov.uk, T: +44 (0)1224 664307. For further information visit www.aberdeenshirearts.org.uk/opportunities/index.html.

Brainheart

Storyteller and poet Paraig MacNeil performed extracts from his new book 'Brainheart' at the Leith Festival on June 6th. 'Brainheart' celebrates Scottish innovators in a new voice that combines English and Scots in an authentic and engaging manner and has been described by fellow storyteller and singer Margaret Bennett as "Inspirational, witty, catchy, and amusing". Copies can be purchased from Luath Press, on +44 (0)131 225 4326. Congratulations to Paraig on the publication of this 'salutation in rhyme' to Scotland's heroes and heroines.

A Novel Debut

Scottish Storytelling Centre Director Dr Donald Smith's first novel, "The English Spy" was launched at the SSC in March. It's a fast-paced and vivid imagining of the shenanigans of Daniel Foe (better known as Daniel Defoe) in Edinburgh at the time of the Union of Parliaments. The author of "Robinson Crusoe" lodged in Moubray House, next door to John Knox House and the site of the modern SSC - and was in the pay of the English government to report back on the Union negotiations. Adding to this heady brew, "The English Spy" also has an appealing Jacobite heroine and brings to life some of the shadier Scots figures of 18th century. The star of the book however is Edinburgh itself: secretive, shadowy and alive with intrigue. "The English Spy" is available at £8.99 from Luath Press on + 44 (0)131 225 4326, www.luath.co.uk or direct from the Scottish Storytelling Centre on +44 (0)131 556 9579. [Click here for a special offer.](#)

Tall Tales Oscars 2007

On 16th March the Tall Tales Oscars played once more to a full house. Hosted by Edinburgh favourite Noel Cochrane, contestants this year came from far and wide: Elma Johnson from Shetland, James Spence, David Campbell and John Fee of Edinburgh, Millie Gray from Leith, Jack Martin of Morningside, Gerry Durkin from Blantyre, Liz Wilson from Linlithgow, Michael Kerins from Glasgow, and Heather Yule of East Linton took the Netherbow Theatre stage to convince the audience their tale was by far the tallest.

The annual event took place as usual on the Friday closest to St Patrick's Day and sure enough, the tales brimmed with blarney. The audience enjoyed tales of ministers from Shetland, magical trousers, close encounters in the Waverley Bar, native american romance, boyhood adventures, good news and bad news, a Wee Tom adventure, a warning tale for dogs and a heart-warming tale of animal passion.

Although all stories were very well received, and each contestant was nominated as first choice by someone in the audience, as always there can only be one winner. At the end of the night, Jack Martin's tale of rodent romance won the audience's heart and he was duly awarded the

coveted Tall Tales Oscar - his to keep until next year's competition. Thanks and congratulations go to all who took part. TTOscar goers are advised to book early next year!

Storytelling for the Third Age

The Life Stories group, in partnership with the Scottish Storytelling Centre, has extended its storytelling and reminiscence work with older people and their carers across Edinburgh and is actively working to increase arts participation for the active and frail elderly and those with dementia across the country. The group has just released a programme of community and training events tailored to meet the needs of older people and care staff, two of which were held recently at Drylaw Parish Church. The next event – a Sharing and Listening workshop for anyone working with older people – will be held at the Scottish Storytelling Centre on Friday 20th April.

Older people, including dementia sufferers, form a traditionally and increasingly marginalised group within our community, with many of our older people and their carers having little or no access to arts experiences. With this, and the increasing demand for storytelling, in mind, 'Life Stories: Storytelling for the Third Age' was established in 2003 in partnership with the Scottish Storytelling Centre. The aims of the project are to provide opportunities for inclusion for older people and their carers, and to offer a means of recognising, valuing and affirming their memories, life experiences and contribution to the wider community. Through storytelling and, where appropriate, reminiscence, the storytellers involved aim to entertain, combat loneliness and feelings of isolation, rekindle imagination, trigger memories, help with depression, increase communication, initiate conversation, and build confidence and motivation.

Over the three year's since the birth of the 'Life Stories' group, thanks to generous funding from the City of Edinburgh Council, members have delivered storytelling and reminiscence sessions to older people and their carers at a variety of clubs and groups across Edinburgh in Lunch Club, Social Club, Sheltered Housing, Sheltered Housing, Day Centre, Residential and Church settings. As well as storytelling and reminiscence sessions, the group has led regular skill development workshops for storytellers and carers working with older people at the Scottish Storytelling Centre and in various community venues, as well as public storytelling events. After successful development of the project within Central, North & Leith and East areas of Edinburgh, the group extended their work in 2006 to the West of the City, and hope to carry out a similar project in the Pentlands area later in 2007.

For more information on the work of the Life Stories group or for community events and training enquiries, contact Millie Gray on +44 (0)131 657 3366 or Caroline Budge on +44 (0)131 652 3272.

Traveller's Joy

Traveller's Joy is a celebration of the extraordinary and ultimately unique musical legacy of the Gypsies and Travellers of England and Scotland. The eminent singers and folklorists Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger once wrote that 'the travelling people have become the real custodians of English and Scots traditional song'. No wonder, then, that over the years folk song scholars and collectors have been fascinated by this rich heritage.

Mike Yates is well known to the Scottish Storytelling network, having worked with many tellers including George MacPherson and Audrey Parks. This latest book with accompanying CD is a collection of over fifty songs to be learned, sung, and enjoyed by the reader. It is not meant to be a scholarly dissertation, though the intention is to portray the singers and their music with honesty and sensitivity. To enhance and complement the texts and musical transcriptions, the twenty two track CD allows the reader to hear some of the performers themselves. In addition, there is an authoritative introductory essay by Mike Yates, along with biographical sketches of

the singers, notes on the songs, photographs of the singers and of travelling life, and a bibliography and discography.

Traveller's Joy available from the English Folk Dance and Song Society via their website: www.efdss.org, or on +44 (0)20 7485 2206, priced £18.50 + £2 p&p (UK only, overseas rates available on request). For more information about Mike, visit his website: www.kyloerecords.co.uk

How the Devil formed the Whangie... and other stories

Storyteller John Barrington has drawn on his wealth of knowledge of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs area and created a compelling historical, mythical and linguistic guide to the region. An A-Z of the area. the book is an ideal guide for those interested in Scotland's first National Park.

This is John's second book; his first "Red Sky at Night" won a Scottish Arts Council book award. Copies of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs are available from Luath Press, tel: 00 44 (0)131 225 4326 or from their website www.luath.co.uk.