

Network - Blethers 14 Spring 2007

Making the Connections - New Training Programme will offer greater opportunities

The Storytelling Centre's training programme takes on a new look this year. Options are offered for half and whole day programmes on a much wider range of themes. In addition, for the first time, people can follow a sequence of workshops through the year and log it on a certificate of attendance.

The themes for 2007-8 are:

- Curiosity, Learning and Imagination which will comprise three "national development days" looking at storytelling in the natural and built heritage, in libraries and in nurseries.
- Whole Person Learning looks at the contribution of storytelling to personal and social development from the Early Years to Secondary. Day options stretch from May 2007 through to early 2008.
- Storytelling Skills and Development – with "starter options" on animal stories and fairy tales, followed by Intermediate Skills and then Master Classes. These will be available as half day options and as whole day options during the 2007 Scottish International Storytelling Festival. Storytelling and music or song is an advanced skills theme in 2007/8.
- Communities of Story – This theme embraces local communities, communities of care (such as Life Stories work with older people) and faith communities.

For dates and options please visit our [Training page](#) for the "Connecting with Stories" leaflet. Three further specialist training options will be offered on a request or demand basis. They are individual mentoring in storytelling skills and the development of storytelling with children and young people in therapeutic contexts and storytelling in organisations. Contact information on these options is also on the website and in the leaflet. These changes constitute the biggest overhaul and expansion of the Centre's skills development programme since it began in 1996. "We have listened hard to the huge feedback we have received from the 2006 programme," commented Scottish Storytelling Centre director, Donald Smith. "Connecting with Stories represents aspirations and ambitions for storytelling in the twenty-first century."

Simply the best

Full of the Festival spirit - the stars of The Very Best Hallowe'en Show in the World. Alison Galbraith and Lesley O'Brien, presented tricks and treats a plenty when they were among the guests of the 17th Scottish International Storytelling Festival. Tellers from Ireland and Scotland shared a broad programme of traditional story, music, literature and drama.



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Storytelling Goes Global: Centre welcomes world interest

The work of the Scottish Storytelling Network is attracting growing international interest. During recent months delegations arrived from Norway, Bangalore in South India, Ireland and Poland. In addition, through The Village in Glasgow, the Scottish storytellers are participating in a European Union Grundtvig.

In February SSC's director, Donald Smith, spoke at a conference in Cardiff on 'Storytelling and Globalisation'. This involved Jack Zipes, the leading international folklorist and cultural critic, and Professor Mike Wilson of Cardiff University's George Ewart Evans Storytelling Centre.

Traditional

Mike's recently published book "Storytelling and Theatre: contemporary storytellers and their art" sees a continuum between the art of traditional storytellers and theatre. This is not always borne out in Scotland where storytellers have emphasised the informal nature of their practice and the dimension of personal and communal identity as a storyteller rather than as an actor. Another contribution to the international debate has been made by the Canadian Jewish storyteller Dan Yashinsky. His book "Suddenly They Heard Footsteps: storytelling for the 21st century" has recently winged its way to the Centre with a personal inscription: "to the tellers and listeners of the Scottish Storytelling Centre". Dan has set out in the footsteps of Ruth Sawyer's 1942 classic "The Way of the Storyteller" to define the storyteller's art. Both of these books articulate values and approaches that chime more closely with the Scottish experience so far, emphasising the personal nature of the craft and the alchemy of direct connection with listeners. In this context, dramatic technique might be a meaningful enhancement or simply a distraction. The quality of the shared experience is all. Clearly a healthy and stimulating discussion is underway as the storytelling renaissance goes global.

A Gaelic 'first' for writer Martin



Martin MacIntyre, who has been appointed the first Gaelic Creative Writing Fellow at the University of Glasgow, reflects on his experiences so far.

" Sgoinneil "(very stimulating) would be my immediate, one word Gaelic response. It's refreshing to be back west, even if it is only one day a week. I grew up in Lenzie and went to secondary school in the city and feel very comfortable there. Glasgow has a special atmosphere and its own way of doing things and addressing matters: I'd forgotten just how humorous and extrovert everyday interaction can be.

The Celtic Department in the University is a very lively, industrious place with keen students and I have been made most welcome. Essentially I have an extracurricular supportive role, available to students and staff who want to write, tell stories or simply 'talk literature.' I have been pro-active in certain areas and I'm slowly getting to know the students and them me.

It would be good to attract other Gaelic speaking students from outwith the Celtic Department: - law, science, medicine, other arts departments and re-engage them through literature. I'd also like to build bridges with the Departments of Scottish Literature and Creative Writing and thus widen access to contemporary Gaelic literature beyond traditional Gaelic domains. One major success so far has been a fortnightly Community Writers' Group in the CCA on Sauchiehall Street.

The Fellowship is currently a two- term Pilot project and was helped greatly by external GASD support - funding for innovation in the arts administered by The National Gaelic Arts Agency.

Witches and Wizards at Auchendrain

Over sixty children and adults took part in Auchindrain Museum's Witches & Wizards Hallowe'en. The event included a craft activity and spooky storytelling by candle-light in MacNicol's House, the oldest surviving house at Auchindrain and one of the best preserved examples of the way in which many of the buildings there were originally constructed. The storytelling, which featured spooky stories from around the world celebrated both Hallowe'en and National Tell A Story Day. The leader was professional storyteller Patsy Dyer, who lives in Ardfern and who is accredited by the Scottish Storytelling Centre.



Children fare well as Aberdeen Bus puts readers on the right route

Teacher Jenny Watson's vision brought The Reading Bus to the centre of Aberdeen where it is serving a number of city centre schools and communities. It promotes reading as a source of life- long pleasure, raises attainment and achievement of children at risk of early failure and encourages family learning in a nonschool environment. It also involves and empowers parents in their children's learning.

A committee was formed for the "Friends of the Reading Bus" and has been meeting regularly for two years. Its twenty members include representatives from education, health and community education as well as councillors, business partners, community members and interested people. It has its own constitution and charity status.

The committee involved the community as much as possible to turn the vision into reality and included P7 pupils from local schools. Through funding from "Determined to Succeed", the youngsters were given a voice in shaping the project, were involved in enterprise initiatives which included fundraising, marketing, designing and broadcasting as well as becoming very skilled at giving presentations.

A wide range of organisations has been involved and the teamwork is developing to provide a comprehensive service locally. Already there has been very positive feedback from the pupils on how much the Bus has encouraged them to enjoy a book outside school hours.

So far the team has visited eleven schools, three nurseries and family groups and is now developing programmes for each school, working alongside the teachers. With some it has been straight storytelling, others puppet shows and radio broadcasting and still others blogging. Many just go along for a good read.

The new Bus team is led by the coordinator, Jenny Watson. Grace Banks and Sheena Blackhall provide a few days' support mostly with story and song while other partners, including a teacher, a health visitor, a librarian, the radio team and a curriculum support teacher help where they can.

A major aim this term is promotion and to help the children prepare presentations to their peers and hopefully to Aberdeen University, where 100 first -year students have already heard about the journey of the Reading Bus. They were supported by Jenny Watson and Grace Banks, storyteller.

P7 pupil from Finland, Juuso, of Kittybrewster Primary and Grace finished the hour- long session with a puppet show. Grace says : "It is exciting seeing children in a space of so little time developing their talents, gaining confidence and generally enjoying themselves. There is great feedback from the schools, and we hope that this is just the beginning". The Reading Bus: www.readingbus.co.uk

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Gift from Orkney takes pride of place as poet and patron is honoured

Popular storyteller and lover of Orkney, Audrey Parks, found plenty to smile about when she was invited to occupy the newly presented Orkney Chair at a ceremony at the Storytelling Centre where it will become an inspiration to many tellers of tales.

Orkney Islands Council has commissioned and donated it for the main public space in the Centre and it will stand beside the George Mackay Brown memorial window, honouring the Orkney poet who was its founding patron.



The new chair was made by Orkney craftsman, Robert H Towers and follows the distinctive traditional design.

The chairs were originally round stools covered in straw, but as timber became more readily available they were developed as low-backed chairs with a rounded straw shield. The result is a chair that is perfect for storytelling - excluding draughts and gathering people to the hearthside.

The director, Dr Donald Smith, says the Centre is honoured to have it. "It is a handsome acknowledgement of our link to Orkney and a tribute to George Mackay Brown. His vision of a web of stories connecting humanity is our twenty-first century inspiration."

Audrey has a huge repertoire of stories which she gathers widely and she retells George Mackay Brown's tales. She is a frequent visitor to Orkney.

Colin puts storytelling at the top of the class

Chairman retires from leadership of Forum



A description from a child probably best sums up Colin Mackay: "The man with stories coming out of his head". The former headmaster feels honoured for storytelling has become his major interest after a lifetime of teaching in Edinburgh schools, more than forty years in the scout movement and a commitment to children with a disability as well as his work for Clan Mackay which includes the editorship of its magazine.

He has always told stories but it was not until his early retirement, when he was talking to Joanna Bremner-Smith, at the Netherbow, about storytelling that he pursued it - a move which was to lead to five years as chairman of the Scottish Storytelling Forum, a post from which he retires this Spring. The period saw the £3.4 million development of the new Centre and John Knox House which culminated in an opening day which moved him profoundly. "The scene in the garden, with all the storytellers, the flags and the blessings from around the world - that I will not forget."

Lord Cockburn has a story for tourists in the Capital Picture : Claire McIntyre

What most appeals to Colin is storytelling's potential for crossing boundaries and barriers. "I believe it is hugely powerful and that, without too many problems, it can create good feelings and offer a warm hand. The great thing about it is its inclusiveness and I hope more and more people are going to benefit whether they are elderly folk, schoolchildren, asylum seekers, people in need or those who are ill. It has also brought back oral telling traditions which were so fundamental to Scottish culture. I cannot praise the storytellers enough nor over-estimate their value".

Audiences

The directory of storytellers in Scotland included 47 entries when Colin joined. Now the figure stands at around 110 and there are new applicants for accreditation all the time. There are new audiences all over the country and the excitement of the tellers as they discover they are good at it is palpable. The SSC web site is playing a leading role in raising awareness and every day there are storytellers in schools, old folk's homes, hospitals, centres for special needs, in churches, community centres, colleges, woodlands and gardens, in guid crack clubs and even at home. Visitors from India, Norway, Scandinavia, Ireland and Palestine have been through the doors in recent months and there are links now with Poland.

Colin tells everyone he meets: If you have a good story, tell it to someone and it becomes yours. "What is so marvellous is that you can tell the same stories to threeyear- olds and to ninety-three -year olds. Storytelling is a tool that links the generations" . For him it has been life changing. Over the past year or so he has been Hans Christian Andersen, John Paul Jones, a prisoner of war in Edinburgh Castle, John Knox, and many others - transformed by costume and plenty of research into his characters.

One intriguing foray was as Lord Cockburn for highly popular tours of the capital at the time of the Storytelling Festival. But one of his most closely researched projects was on the life of Anne Frank. He has prepared teaching material for this vital part of twentieth century history and visited schools in the West of Scotland to accompany an ambitious exhibition. More recently he recalled her experiences at an exhibition by artist, Myer Lacombe at the Netherbow Centre to mark Holocaust Memorial Day in January. A research bursary took him to Amsterdam for the original work. His talents are now being used preparing inter-active material for children visiting John Knox House. "I think John Knox would have thoroughly approved" he says.

The development of the House has been the great bonus he says - the welcoming desk, the open entrance, the atmosphere have all added to the appeal for visitors from every land and of every age. This inspired vision, of Netherbow director, Dr Donald Smith, coupled with his achievements on World Capital of Literature and the Literary Quarter, now established in the historic Royal Mile, has raised the profile in ways the Storytelling Forum could only have dreamed about.



Ann Davies

Edinburgh Castle and Colin tells of Prisoners of War. Picture: Sheila Mackenzie

Capital inspiration for Irish Guests as Festival formula proves a winner

Edinburgh and the Lothians were alive with stories, music and song for the annual Scottish International Storytelling Festival and the Storytelling Centre's new home on the capital's Royal Mile became the focus for a range of storytelling, theatre, literary and family events.

The main theme of the 2006 festival, *Across the Water* drew on Scotland and Ireland's great heritage and thanks to generous support from City of Edinburgh Council, Scottish Arts Council and Culture Ireland, there was a warm welcome for seven guest tellers from Northern and southern Ireland – Pat Speight, Niall de Búrca Jack Lynch, Kate Corkery, Bisi Adigun and Len Graham – who joined Scottish colleagues to draw on centuries of Scottish-Irish storytelling. The Festival also featured film and book events, debates and discussions on migration, cultural exchange and Traveller traditions while four events featured in REEL 2006, the first Scottish and Irish film



Festival.

Edinburgh as an Inspiring Capital was a fitting theme as the Storytelling Centre joined arts and culture organisations across the city and beyond in a full programme of family events.

All the way from Kerry, Irish guest Kate Corkery - a popular musician and storyteller who scored a hit in Edinburgh.

The Festival's schools outreach programme drew on all three themes to allow children to experience live storytelling. An extended Festival training and the personal development programme was greatly appreciated providing opportunities for aspiring and more experienced storytellers. A particular success was an education best practice day, "Storytelling for Excellence", with over 85 local authority, teaching and library staff from across Scotland taking part.



In its 17th year, the International Festival was a celebration of traditions and culture and of the vibrant artform storytelling has become across the world.

Drawing on her own experience - one of the inspired artists at a Halloween themed event at the Centre.

For more information on events, outreach and training options at the Scottish Storytelling Centre call +44 131 556 9579 or visit www.scottishstorytellingcentre.com

Gosia gets weaving



Polish storyteller, Gosia Litwinowicz, is to spend a month in Scotland on the mentorship programme and she hopes to meet up with lots of her countrymen and women. Gosia was the chief organiser of the first international storytelling festival to be held in her country last November when she welcomed guests from many parts of the world to Warsaw.

Her own contribution to the series of events was an evening of Lithuanian tales accompanied by archaic chants. These rhythmic tales, told to the spinning of wool, were full of meaning and conveyed a landscape populated by ancient goddesses weaving the course of one's life, says Peter Vallance who took part in the festival. For further information about Gosia's visit please contact the Storytelling Centre.

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Major study of support for storytelling

The Scottish Storytelling Forum is starting a major twelve month study of storytelling in twenty-first century communities in two stages.

Where are storytellers working in Scotland, and how are they supported and how is storytelling working in communities and how can that be stimulated and supported?

These initiatives were proposed by the Ross-shire based storyteller, Bob Pegg and the new SSF chairperson, Russell McLarty.

The purpose is to find out who are the storytellers, the skills and traditions they can draw on and the ways in which modern storytellers should be recognised and supported.

The study will look at the work of professionals, those within professions and of community and voluntary storytellers. The Forum has agreed that the study should be carried out jointly by the Storytelling Centre and The Village Storytelling Centre in Glasgow.

Three way link

The Village, led by Rachel Smillie, has joined up with Grundtvig, an international organisation which seeks to strengthen the European dimensions of adult education and life-long learning.

Already Rachel, Colin McAllister and three members of the Village have attended the storytelling festival in Munich, taken part in learning exchanges and toured events led by German storytellers.

Now the Germans are to pay a return visit and a programme has been organised for them and their leader, storyteller Norbert, who is the only paid member of the Goldman group behind the project .

It is a three-way exchange which will also link with Riga in Latvia and Colin will be going to Latvia in June where the group will assist with work with the elderly and children in their communities. Meantime, it is hoped that more funding applications can be processed for this international project.

Deacon Brodie's 'ghost' links old and new in the High Street



Historic resident of the Royal Mile, Deacon Brodie, was brought to life by Robert Howat as part of the International Storytelling Festival. Robert's tours of the places frequented by Brodie attracted plenty of visitors and here he is seen near the newest development on the High Street, the world's first Storytelling Centre which has its ancient base in the original Netherbow.

Picture : Claire McIntyre

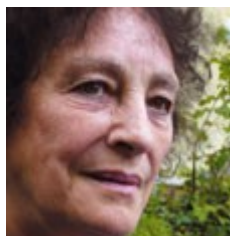
Leading team at the helm

Last year the Storytelling Centre was delighted to welcome Esther Kent as programme manager of the new building. This year it is a familiar face that returns to the High Street. Following the happy arrival of her son, Samuel, Joanna Bremner Smith is rejoining the storytelling team as education and training officer, a new part-time role.

Joanna's previous post, as national storytelling coordinator, will now be filled on a permanent basis by Caroline Budge, who, with Jill Bush, marketing and communications officer, staffed the network office over the past turbulent year. Moira Hay continues to be the Centre coordinator.

Turn over a new leaf: Book here for stories and songs

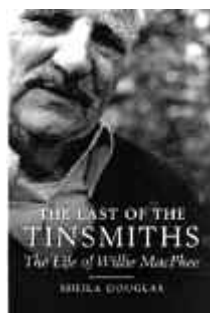
The winter produced an amazing crop of books from storytelling and song traditions – truly an abundant harvest even in the dark season. Though we have space for only a brief notice of each, do not be fooled – these words are an “open sesame” to remarkable treasures.



Queen Among the Heather by Sheila Stewart (Birlinn ISBN 1841585289) £7.99. Sheila's memoir of her mother, Belle, fully lives up to its star billing. It is gutsy, honest and moving and places some great songs in their human context. Sheila can write, sing and tell stories – whit a wumman.

The Foy and Other Folk Tales by Lawrence Tulloch (The Shetland Times) £10.99. This long awaited book represents the cream of an outstanding storyteller's repertoire. It includes some of Lawrence's rich inheritance from the Shetland tradition but also illustrates the growth of his own repertoire. There are a clutch of unbeatable classics here and The Shetland Times has done Lawrence proud with the production and fine illustrations by Sheila Faichney. Not to be missed!

Bruar's Rest by Jess Smith, Mercat Press ISBN 1841831050 £8.99 (cheaper online). Fans of Jess's Tales of a Tinker trilogy will not be disappointed but there is a new dimension here – a fully formed novel and a moving love story. It comes from the heart of Traveller culture but also, I think, echoes Jess's own life. A great read.



Last of the Tinsmiths by Sheila Douglas (Birlinn ISBN 1841585114) £7.99. Another Sheila, this time in tribute to Willie McPhee, traveller, piper, tinsmith and storyteller. No-one could have done this job better, putting Willie in the heart of his culture and yet revealing the rich substance of the man. The stories are here, the songs, the pipe tunes and the memories. We owe Sheila Douglas a debt of gratitude for creating what Willie would never have asked or demanded for himself – an allround study and tribute.

Herd Laddie of the Glen collected by Alison McMorland (Scottish Borders Council Library Service, (tel: 00+44 1750 724901) £9.99 + £1.80 P&P. Another beautifully produced book, the songs of Willie Scott, the Borders shepherd, lovingly transcribed, introduced and annotated. This classic of Scottish folksong has now been given the treatment it deserves by the Borders Council Library Service as publisher, with Alison and her husband, Geordie MacIntyre, as the editorial team.

Rum, Scum, Scoosh by Stanley Robertson, double CD (The Elphinstone Institute, Aberdeen University, AB24 5UA) £16.00 + £1 P&P. We cannot have enough of Stanley Robertson and these CDs are full of rich song, rhyme, and story material. The recordings stem from Stanley's period as a researcher at the Elphinstone Institute and we are grateful to all concerned for proving once again that Stanley is a national treasure, brimful of linguistic zest, imagination and love for humanity.

Donald Smith

All titles are available at the Scottish Storytelling Centre

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Grandma's pipe proves popular pick for Peter

The chief organiser of the first Polish International Storytelling Festival in Warsaw will be exchanging stories with the Scots this Spring when she visits the Storytelling Centre as part of its mentoring programme. Gosia Litwinowicz, who hopes to meet Polish residents in Edinburgh during her visit from March 8th to April 8th, welcomed UK guests as well as visitors from Turkey and France to the Warsaw event which attracted audiences of more than five hundred. . Peter Vallance, of Findhorn was a guest and he says that successes included Jan Blake of Jamaican descent but now living in the UK and Etol Guaydn, Istanbul's last "meddah" combining storytelling with the one man show tradition.



Peter presented a wide range of tales from the hearthside against a background of photographs of his grandfather's family at home in Shetland -one of the last ceilidh houses in the islands - where people listened to his grandmother telling tales by the fire in the old blackhouse while smoking her pipe. Some of the performers and audience are associated with the Institute of Polish Culture, a part of Warsaw University which has a "culture animation " programme. Part of the result is that storytellers tend to be younger than is usual in Scotland,says Peter.

Gosia presented Lithuanian tales accompanied by archaic chants and there was plenty of evidence of the varied style and forms of storytelling. The revival in Poland is spearheaded by a group called Studnia O.

Beasts in the Park



The spectacular sculptures of Ronald Rae proved an irresistible attraction for children on their tour of Holyrood Park in the company of Storytelling Centre director, Donald Smith, seen here with the Lion of Scotland . The tours were part of the International Storytelling Festival. Twenty-one of Rae's famous sculptures are on view until May.

The Centre acknowledges support from the Scottish Arts Council, the City of Edinburgh Council and the Church of Scotland.