

## Network - Blethers 15 Autumn 2007

### Festival Opens a Window on the World



Scotland and Africa are the related themes for the 2007 Scottish International Storytelling Festival, "Out of Eden", which runs from October 26th to November 4th.

The first weekend will explore the rich regional storytelling traditions of different parts of the Highlands such as the Outer Hebrides, Skye and the Northern Highlands.

There will also be a celebration of the visual heritage of the Highlands in relation to storytelling and of the contribution of Scotland's Travelling People to sustaining story, music and song. A Highland Hallowe'en or Samhain will be hosted by Seoras MacPherson from Glendale in Skye.

The African side of 'Out of Eden' will feature principally during the second half of the Festival.

### Heritage

A series of 'African Legacy' events will explore some of the continent's rich historical heritage. The traditions of Ghana, Sierra Leone, Botswana and Malawi will all be represented. The relationship of modern storytelling in Africa to climate change, the experiences of African children, film-making, written literature and issues still surrounding slavery, will be explored.

The Festival will feature a range of workshops, a spread of partner events and a drop-in get-together point for storytellers. This year's masterclass will be led by Caribbean storyteller Jan Blake.



If you are not on the mailing list you can email for a brochure ([reception@scottishstorytellingcentre.com](mailto:reception@scottishstorytellingcentre.com)) or click on the **Festival programme** page of the website

### Global warming to tellers of tales

This Autumn edition of Blethers emphasises the growing international interest in storytelling.

There are stories from Slovakia, Poland, Canada, Africa and Scandinavia while a wide range of innovative events are reported from all over Scotland.

### The magnificent seven

The Scottish Storytelling Internet radio station is proving a great success with a hundred new listeners tuning in every month to over seven hours of tales from twenty Scottish storytellers.

## Day of Nostalgia as Phyllis Takes a Scottish Song and Story to Ontario



Storyteller and Scottish/Canadian Phyllis Davison, was honoured to be asked to direct a show in Sudbury, Ontario.

Linking story, song, dance and poetry, Phyllis steered "Scotland on Sunday" through a nostalgic programme led off by Caledonian Scottish Country Dancers and, says Phyllis, there were some very special - and moving - moments.

"A story introduction referred to George Campbell Hay who wrote a slim book of poetry, 'Wind on Loch Fyne' and I chose one of his poems, 'The Old Fisherman', with the repeated line 'my dancing days for fishing are over'. This was particularly poignant to deliver as I looked towards our front row audience of seniors and our dancers demonstrated the beautiful strathspey, 'Wind on Loch Fyne', " Phyllis says. Her recitation of her adaptation of a poem by a member of Linlithgow's Scottish Country Dance Club, served for the acting out of a typical Sudbury dance practice.

'Following this, members of the audience became increasingly convinced that they could participate and, after a simple dance, 'Bell Park' choreographed for the occasion by dance instructor Moira, that is exactly what we had hoped would happen and did".

The band marching back into formation to the rhythm of a single snare drum and "Auld Lang Syne" created a thrilling finale. "It was my first public attempt at singing the 'other/original' version and this had been worrying me. However, the evening had been so wonderful and as I embarked on the first few acapella notes I was transported back to Edinburgh and a Cafe evening when I heard Liz Wilson sing it and I knew I had to make it part of who I am. That I have now done."

## Ours and Theirs - a Celebration of Birds with the 'Travel Bug'

The theme of the 2007 International Storytelling Festival, "Out of Eden: Scotland and Africa" has inspired Ewan McVicar to celebrate the birds born in Scotland who winter in Africa.

His imaginative Bird Exchange project has gathered dozens of bird stories for Scottish schools to use in StoryLab and has helped create unique links with Africa.

Schools in Scotland, Gambia, Uganda and Malawi will create hundreds of bird images for an exhibition at the Storytelling Court of the Centre in the Royal Mile in early November. It will then go to Kampala in late November during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting there.

The Scottish images will eventually be sent to African schools and the African ones to schools in Scotland.

See [www.storylab.co.uk](http://www.storylab.co.uk) for more information.

*This picture of a swift was sent to Ewan for his project by 14 year old Grace. She was rescued from the streets of Kampala and is now a pupil at Rookmaker School at Mukono, a school for ex-street children.*



*The children of Mengo Mutessa School in Jampala sent their drawing of this brilliantly coloured duck to Ewan for his project which links pupils in Africa and Scotland.*

## Glasgow's in the Lead to Let Storytelling Flourish

Rachel Smillie has been appointed Storytelling Development Officer for Glasgow. This is a part-time post and Rachel will continue in a fifty per cent job share as Director of the Village Storytelling Centre in Glasgow.



Glasgow is the first council in Scotland to create a storytelling development post, though Fife and Aberdeen have previously appointed storytellers in residence. The emphasis will be on supporting the emergent Glasgow Storytellers' Network while encouraging more effective applications and increasing storytelling across the city's communities.

The post, initially for one year, is supported by the Scottish Arts Council, Glasgow City Council Education Department and Glasgow Culture and Sport.

The Village Centre and the Scottish Storytelling Centre will provide practical support and other partners will be sought for specific projects.

First out of the starter's block is the Church of Scotland which is keen to see community storytelling flourish in areas of Glasgow which are under severe social pressure.

Donald Smith, who will chair a support group for the new post, thanked all those who have worked so hard in Glasgow in recent years to make this development possible.

"We look forward to a vibrant Glasgow Storytellers' Network, exploring and animating the diverse cultures and community spirit of Scotland's friendliest city" he says.

## Centre's New Focus is Health Promotion through the Arts

Space for Stories is a new Scottish Storytelling Centre project funded by the Artfull scheme, a Scottish Arts Council initiative aimed at developing and promoting the arts and the role they play in improving the mental health and well-being of people living in Scotland.

The project began in August and is working towards a showcase event in February 2008. Space for Stories is working in collaboration with Artlink Central and NHS Lothian to explore and celebrate narrative as a vehicle of personal and community development.

To support the project and pave the way for future development in this area, a Space for Stories working group was established earlier this year. It brings together several Storytelling Directory members with experience of working in a variety of mental health and well-being settings.

Using a variety of creative narrative-based approaches including storytelling, Life Story-ing and reminiscence, film, drama and creative writing, the group members work closely with Artlink and NHS staff to facilitate a series of workshops for people with mental health problems and learning difficulties who live in community-based hospital settings.

For more information on Space for Stories contact Caroline Budge on 0131 652 3272  
[caroline@scottishstorytellingcentre.com](mailto:caroline@scottishstorytellingcentre.com).



## School Goes Wild as Pupils Travel the World

Take one school with creative vision, three storytellers resident for a week and you have a Wild Words Storytelling Festival.

The Royal School of Dunkeld took Global Citizenship as the term's theme, shutting down the curriculum for a week in May.

Through stories they examined the concept "to live well in a place". Senga Munro took P1 and 2 down the Silk Road, Judy Paterson and P2-5 explored Dreamtime stories from Australia while P6 & 7 went to Africa with Amu Logotse.

Many sessions were held in the gardens and incorporated music, arts and crafts and the involvement of parents. The Week culminated with the children telling stories and the teachers explored the new Curriculum for Excellence.

Wild Words artwork has been on display this summer at the Birnam Institute.

## Festival Fare Goes Down a Treat

Congratulations are due to Aberdeen City Council for again organising a superb Storytelling and Theatre Festival. Local storytellers were to the fore as well as visitors, while the Festival realises its dream of involving every young learner in Aberdeen in a special event.

## Come and Experiment in Our Centre of Discovery

The Scottish Storytelling Centre is launching an exciting initiative aimed at children and young people, concluding with National Tell A Story Day on Friday 26th October.

StoryLab invites young people, and adults working with them, to create their own storytelling events, try out their skills and explore high tech and low tech stories through a variety of traditional and contemporary media including dance, puppet-making, music, song and film-making.

The three-week programme of fun, participative and inspiring events at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh's Royal Mile, aims to provide opportunities for the young to discover the magic of stories, will encourage them to develop their existing skills and interests and to explore new ways of creating and telling their own tales.

An interactive StoryLab website will provide free advice, resources and support materials to all those taking part and carry information on events at the Centre and further afield. The site will also feature an online "showcase" of the thrilling and innovative storytelling and storymaking projects taking place across the country.

For more information on how you can get involved in StoryLab, which began on Saturday October 6th, visit [www.storylab.co.uk](http://www.storylab.co.uk) or contact the Scottish Storytelling Centre on 0131 556 9579.

## Short on Storytellers - But Much to Explore in Slovakia

### Patsy Dyer on a fascinating journey

Since moving to Argyll in 2006 I have been involved with a fascinating museum. Auchindrain is a historic "farming village" close to Inverary, which has cottages, longhouses, barns and byres - as well as the atmosphere of an intriguing past.

In the spring I was delighted to be invited to visit Slovakia with Joanna Howdle, the museum's Curator. This was an "Innovations in Cultural Heritage Interpretation" funded by the European Union's Leonardo da Vinci programme.

I was told that there would be the chance to meet storytellers in some of the regions we were to visit. These included places like an open air museum, Bardejov medieval town and museum of Icons. Levoka (classed as the richest medieval town in Slovakia) and several fairy-tale like wooden churches. I also met Saint Urban - a carving - in the Tokay wine region! A wealth of fascinating material.

However although many important people were asked about storytelling no-one showed the least interest or had any information to pass on about storytellers or even published material. I felt very down-hearted.

I believe this reflects a feeling that storytelling is considered a sign of poverty, "a thing of the past". The only positive response came after I told a series of Greek myths to my colleagues and guide, Miro, one evening. His response was to tell, very kindly, an old folk story of the origin of Slovakia a night or so later. It was also difficult to meet the Roma or traveller folk. On one occasion they arrived and I am afraid it was obvious they were not welcome. This is an area I feel needs to be followed up and I am in the process of trying to make contact with the Slovakian Consul (no joy at the time of writing though). I went to all the bookshops I could and found no Slovakian folk tales. I was surprised about this as I have Polish, Hungarian, Slovenian - and a friend has sent me Ukrainian tales. What is it? As a writer and a storyteller I can say the country is dripping with stories. (At the time of writing this I have found American published tales available over the Internet.) In the meantime I continue to search for contacts and will bring what information I have about customs to Auchindrain and local schools. I feel there is a lot to learn from Slovakia and I am delighted I had the opportunity to visit. Apart from the lack of information on storytelling, it is a beautiful country with many delights to discover.





## A Summer Story of Travelling Folk

You have heard of sentimental journeys - but you could never imagine one like Essie Stewart's.

Her "Summer in the Straths" tour in the far north of Scotland revived the routes the travellers covered in the Highlands fifty years ago and reunited her with old friends who were happy to recall the visits of her parents and other travelling folk.

"It had been talked about for a long time", says Essie "and two years ago I was with friends, Dr Issy MacPhail from Stoer and Meg Telfer from Skerray and I told them I would like to do a circuit - one more with a horse and cart and bough tent around the old roads of Sutherland. From then the whole plan evolved and it was decided to do it in the 2007 Year of Highland Culture."

Fifty people were involved in the planning of the 23 day journey which began in Altnaharra and ended in Achiltibuie. En route there were seven ceilidhs which filled a marquee to overflowing, open house events at the camp site, celebrations at schools - and plenty of opportunities for storytelling. One feis



attracted seventy school children at Stoer and in Strathnaver, the oldest resident, at 94, was happy to recall stories of Essie's family. "It was a wonderful thing to do" says Essie, grand-daughter of one of the greatest Gaelic storytellers- Allidh Dall Stewart. "More than anything, I wanted to let the younger people see a way of life that is long gone and skills that are no longer used. I hadn't been on the road for fifty years but when you are brought up with that kind of life, from six weeks old, it stays with you and the yen is always there to do it again. I wanted to take the exact route we took every Spring and I wanted everything to be as traditional as I could make it. I even acquired the services of Arthur Dutch, a tinsmith from Clashmore, Dornoch and we had farrier, Keith Hedley of Invershin to do horse-showing demos for the children. At the ceilidhs there were the most wonderful musicians". The Straths journey far exceeded Essie's expectations and people turned out in droves.

At campsite, huge amounts of home-baking and jam awaiting the travellers who included Meg Telfer as artist in residence. Her photographs will tour schools later this year when she recounts the event. "It was such an emotional journey, for me" says Essie. "Everywhere we went, every step of the road, everyone I met of the older generation brought back memories. At the end of it all, I was an emotional wreck, but it was well worth it."

Essie tells stories in Gaelic and English - a principle she followed in July in another summer project to Crask Inn to commemorate the Sutherland drovers. Local school children walked with sheep on the drover route before being served traditional fare of bannocks and porridge with music and plenty of stories at an evening ceilidh. There is to be a permanent record of Essie's summer in the Straths. Filmed as a Gaelic documentary it will be shown on BBC 2 this autumn.



Would she try it again? "Of course. It is even being talked about on a smaller scale for next year."

*Photographs courtesy of the Mackay Country Archive Summer in the Strath team.*

## Telling Their Life Stories

### Where Memories Mean So Much More

This year saw the Life Stories Group extend its storytelling and reminiscence work with older people and their carers to West Edinburgh.

Building on past projects in the Central, North and Leith and East areas of the city, the Group carried out a programme of group and one-to-one sessions at residential homes, older people's projects, lunch clubs, church groups and in-patient units in Muirhouse, Drylaw, Corstorphine, Craighleith and East Craigs.

Skill development workshops for those working with older people were held at the Scottish Storytelling Centre and Drylaw Parish Church.

As well as providing an opportunity for staff and carers to develop their own storytelling skills, the sessions gave people in different community and care contexts a chance to share their experiences of, and approaches to, working with older people. Some fruitful partnerships were formed.

To round off the project, community celebration events were also held at the Storytelling Centre and Drylaw Church. The event in Drylaw was a particularly success, providing the opportunity for local success, providing the opportunity for local older people and their carers to experience storytelling in an informal community setting - while enjoying a cup of tea and a biscuit.

## Sheila For Hall of Fame



Hands up for Trad, in association with BBC Scotland Interactive, will be hosting the fifth 'Scots Trad Music Awards' on Saturday 1st December at 7 pm in the Nevis Centre, Fort William.

The aim of these Awards is to highlight Scotland's wonderful traditional music in all its forms and to create a high profile opportunity to bring the music and music industry into the spotlight of media and public attention.

This year Sheila Stewart will be in the group of outstanding tradition bearers to be inducted to the Music Hall of Fame. This is the third year of the Hall and each musician has been inducted for their remarkable contribution to traditional culture.

Hands up for Trad has commissioned portraits of each artist from photographer Luis de Caro. Music writer Rob Adams will be compiling a short history of each inductee. The Hall of fame will be exhibited in the Nevis centre during the Scots Trad Music Awards and places are sought to house the exhibition the rest of the year round. There is also a dedicated website: [www.tradmusicall.com](http://www.tradmusicall.com).

## A Collector's 'Eleven'

The book, *"Tales on the Tongue"* a collection of 46 stories from 36 Scottish storytellers proved very popular and its successor on CD is also being snapped up.

Because a story told is different from a story on the page, Ewan McVicar recorded and edited eleven stories so that they can be compared with the book version, from the same tellers. Senga Munro, Judy Paterson, Claire McNicol, Bea Ferguson, Audrey Parks, Donald Smith, Colin Mackay and Ewan are the contributors to "Storytelling Voices in Scotland".

Enquiries about the CD to the Scottish Storytelling Centre, tel: + 44 (0)131 556 9579.



## Hugh Miller Inspires Project

Hugh Miller's classic 1835 collection of Highland folk tales and lore, provided the inspiration for a project on Ross-shire's Black Isle.

Throughout the summer term of 2007, children from each of the schools in the Black Isle cluster worked with artist Jane Bregazzi and storyteller Bob Pegg to produce eight substantial, sail-shaped hangings, destined for display in the library at Fortrose. Miller's imagination was drawn to the dark, Gothic stories he heard when he was a lad and today's children were equally enthused by tales of wind witches, malevolent fairies, and spectral hounds. The images, which use a combination of water and plastic-based paint, crayon and pen, on calico, will be unveiled to the public this autumn.

The work was a collaboration between the Highland Council's Merry Dancers Storytelling Project in Ross-shire and the Highland Year of Culture.

## Castle weaves its spell as Village welcomes Scotland's Story Folk

The Village Storytelling Centre in Glasgow played host for the first National Development Day in the Scottish Storytelling Centre's 2007/8 training and development programme and the event was voted a great success by facilitators and participants.

The theme was 'Storytelling in the built and natural heritage' and was facilitated by members of the Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen Networks. The event involved participants from conservation, education and heritage backgrounds discussing and exchanging a broad range of approaches to storytelling, reminiscence and story gathering.

Kicked off by an inspirational keynote speech from John Hamilton, the morning's programme featured a presentation from Rachel Smillie, Director of the Village, on the Centre's projects involving local community groups. This was followed by a talk from the Talking Trees storytellers on their voluntary work with children and families at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh.



At Crookston Castle nearby, those taking part were treated to a tour of the site by storytellers in residence, Alan Steele and Gerry Durkin - a wonderful chance to see the Castle and to "meet" the characters who lived and worked there, brought to life.

Back at the Village, John Hamilton and Grace Banks led small-group workshops on creative approaches for children and local heritage and story gathering and the day was rounded off with a feedback session. Thanks to Rachel Smillie and her team at the Village for their warm welcome and hospitality.

The next development day, "The Power of Objects: Storytelling in Museums" takes place on Saturday November 10th, 2007 at the Scottish Storytelling Centre.

## Heather and Her Harp Hit the Right Notes in Poland

**Some people say that telling tall tales can get you into a heap of trouble, but for Heather Yule it led to adventure.**

Gosia Litwinowicz, the Polish storyteller, who visited the Storytelling Centre last April heard me in action at the Tall Tales Oscar night. She called later to suggest we chat about storytelling but circumstances meant a meeting was impossible.

Imagine my surprise and delight when I received an email from Gosia inviting me and my harp to Poznan. Gosia is part of a group of storytellers, based in Warsaw, called "Grupa Studnia O" who are working to re-establish traditional storytelling in Poland. They had been invited to be part of the 16th Biennale Sztuki Dla Dziecka - a Child Art Conference.

In June I flew to Poland with my harp and was whisked into the picturesque centre of Poznan to meet Grupa Studnia O. I am not sure how many storytellers comprise the group but five of them came: Jarek Kaczmarek, Agnieszka Aysen Kaim, Beata Frankowska, Dorota Maciejuk and Pawel Gorski.

It soon became apparent why Gosia had thought I would fit in well with Polish storytellers. They use a lot of instrumental music and song interwoven with their stories. Three musicians came with them from Warsaw. The instruments the lads played included the lute, hurdy-gurdy, various drums, African instruments like the kora, the traditional Iranian Tar (a stringed instrument that can play quarter tones) and the Ney (an Iranian wooden flute).

We had a ceilidh that night and it was fun to share stories and improvise on the Scottish harp with these wonderful multi-cultural musicians.

Before leaving Scotland I had emailed the tales I was planning to use to Agnieszka because she was to be my translator. It is a strange experience telling stories with a translator. How do you break up the story - into longish sections, or very short bits? It was a challenge. I was fortunate to be working with a fellow storyteller who understands traditional storytelling.

At the first session I was on my own but later we came together for a performance and listened to all the storytellers. Obviously I couldn't understand Polish but I enjoyed watching and listening. It was a great demonstration of the importance of body language. They were all excellent so I gleaned a great deal from their gestures and facial expressions. The stories "looked" amazing!

It is an honour to have the opportunity to work with storytellers and musicians from other countries and cultures and I hope there will be further interaction between the storytellers of Scotland and Poland.

## Viking Invasion Continues as 'Sagalands' Project Conquers Frontiers

Delegates from across the European 'Northern Periphery' were at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in May to discuss the success of their 'Destination Viking' project and to ask: "What next?"

Over the last three years, countries and regions stretching from Newfoundland to Sweden have shared in highlighting their Norse voyager inheritance and the renaissance of storytelling traditions.

At the forefront of this have been Tom Muir from Orkney with Lawrence Tulloch and Davy Cooper from Shetland.

The strength of Scotland's continuing traditions has encouraged others to reclaim their storytelling heritage for the benefit of visitors and local people.

Now EU funding is to be sought for a second three-year project entitled "Sagalands". This will broaden the concept to include Celtic, Inuit and Sami traditions alongside Norse sagas, so linking Sagalands across the northern rim of Europe and the Atlantic.

It was agreed that an international 'Sagalands' gathering will be held in Edinburgh in 2008 as part of the Scottish International Storytelling Festival.

## Kelone To Receive First Nancy and Hamish Award

Many people, particularly Guid Crack veterans, will remember Nancy Turner and her husband Hamish who were founding members and also regulars of early Storytelling Festivals.

Nancy was particularly interested in the Traveller storytellers and in Gaelic storytelling. She championed recognition of Willie McPhee as a fine storyteller, often travelled to George MacPherson's Skye Festivals and could be fairly be described as a Stanley Robertson "groupie". At every point, though, her enthusiasm was well informed and perceptive. She was unafraid to give you a frank and telling opinion.

It is with great pleasure, therefore, that the Scottish Storytelling Forum office bearers have received a generous donation from their daughter Elspeth Turner, with her husband Stewart Asquith, to found the Nancy and Hamish Turner Bursary Award which will recognise and encourage those storytellers developing their work with children.

The first Award has been made to Kelone Khudu-Petersen from Botswana who is currently working in Scotland. The Award recognises Kelone's pioneering work amongst children from cultural minorities (including the Bushmen) in the Eastern Kalahari region and to encourage storytelling links between Scotland and Botswana.

Kelone will be taking part in this year's Scottish International Storytelling Festival before returning to Botswana to train primary school teachers.

Donald Smith, who knew Nancy Turner well, expressed his delight at the Award and its reflection of core storytelling values. "It shows how it is creative, passionate, opinionated people who make storytelling happen here and across the world. We are profoundly grateful to the Turners and I hope others might consider making a difference in this way," he said.

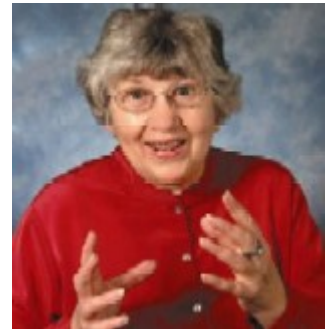
## Dundee Steers in the Right Direction

Dundee now has its own storytelling group, bringing together those in and around Dundee who would like to see local storytelling flourish.

Things got underway at a special meeting hosted by Dundee University and facilitated by Russell McLarty, chairman of the Storytelling Forum.

A steering group has been formed with plans for regular gatherings, workshops and cooperation with schools and community groups in Dundee.

Senga Munro, who has championed the cause of storytelling in Dundee's schools, has been appointed the group's official "Granny", so keeping up the city's notable traditions of matriarchy.



If you are interested in the Dundee group and want more information, email Debbie Maxwell on [d.maxwell@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:d.maxwell@dundee.ac.uk).

## Medical Opinion Says Staff Are A Real Tonic

The atmosphere of the Storytelling Centre turned out to be just the right prescription for Dr Elena Mannique when she looked in while on holiday in Edinburgh. She felt so welcomed that she has been in touch from her home in Mexico to thank all the Centre staff. She is now a regular reader of the website and intends to visit again next year.

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