

Blethers

Issue 29 Autumn 2014

Historic Independence Referendum

As we go to press with the autumn issue of Blethers, Scotland has gone to the polls in an historic Independence Referendum. Scottish politics are never going to look the same, due to the energy and grassroots activism that has developed around the debate on what kind of society Scotland should become. Many pundits have spoken of the decline of politics and of democracy withering by neglect. The evidence of recent months defies these pessimists.



So what does that mean for culture? The unpredicted cultural surge is a clarion call for arts organisations to be more engaged at the local level, and for more people throughout Scotland to be actively involved in the shaping of our cultural life. The campaigning has had many creative aspects, not least those brought about

by the National Collective, but their effort will be wasted if we do not follow through in making the arts an inspirational presence through every strand of social and community life.

It is for that reason that the Scottish Storytelling Forum is now working so closely with the Traditional Music Forum and the Traditions of Dance Scotland Forum. Through TRACS, our unified umbrella, we aim to contribute to a vibrant, healthy society playing its full part locally, nationally and internationally by building on local ownership of culture.

In that endeavour we have a huge resource of song, music, dance and story which was nurtured by our foremothers and forefathers. That is not a static inheritance but something crying out to be carried into the future in new forms and patterns that feed into all the contemporary arts as well. It is a time of promise in a challenging world, and the arts of tradition in Scotland and worldwide bring wisdom, joy and hope for humanity.

This issue of Blethers reflects that growing collaboration between story, song, dance and music and we look forward to the creative years and decades ahead.

ONCE UPON A PLACE



Stories are the immaterial map that allows communities to navigate their surroundings and give meaning to the landscape. Old legends of place link people to their lands and give us

an insight into the events, hopes, fears and tragedies that shaped a community over the centuries.

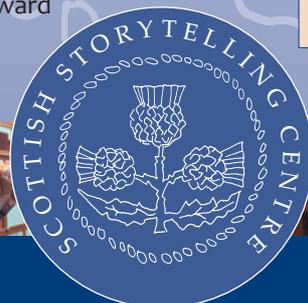
And of course one of the best ways to get to know a place is to learn its stories and myths. The Scottish International Storytelling Festival (24th Oct - 2nd Nov) provides a wonderful opportunity to see Edinburgh, Scotland and the world through the lens of the tales of this and many other lands.

Creative connections between live narrative and place in Scotland, Europe and the Pacific region will be celebrated, exploring the traditional and innovative ways in which people express their sense of identity by 'seeing stories' in their landscapes - rural and urban.

We are also delighted to be marking the 10th anniversary of Edinburgh's designation as the world's first UNESCO City of Literature with celebrations of Edinburgh storytellers - Sir Walter Scott in the 200th anniversary of his first novel, Waverley; Robert Louis Stevenson who links us with the Pacific; and raconteur extraordinaire of the Old Town, John Fee.

Warm nights of tales in good company await us in Edinburgh and in venues across Scotland, and together we will cross the threshold to a world where mountains are rocks tossed by giants and caves are passages to the Otherworld. It will be an incredible journey.

www.tracscotland.org/festivals



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www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk • www.tracscotland.org/tracs/storytelling

A Welcome to...

From this issue, Blethers will include contributions on traditional music, song, dance and across artforms from the Traditional Music Forum and Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland. Here is a brief introduction to the two organisations.

Traditional Music Forum (TMF)

Walk down Waverley Bridge or Sauchiehall Street any day of the week and you'll hear the sound of the pipes, Scotland's iconic, sonic badge of identity. There are other musical sounds though that are equally distinctive - Scots and Gaelic song, the fiddle, accordion and Clarsach, all with accents as redolent of their local origin as any speech. All of them can be classed under the broad and welcoming heading of Scotland's traditional music.

The Traditional Music Forum is the body which advocates the value of those sounds, those distinctive vibrations, to Scottish life and culture. It does so as the sum of its parts and as an emergent partner in the wider body known as TRACS.

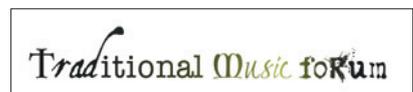
What are its parts? The Forum is a network of some eighty traditional music organisations from every part

of Scotland. One answer to the question 'what does the Forum do?' is contained in that membership. It collects and archives, it teaches, it develops skills, it promotes, it provides platforms for the performance of Scotland's traditional music - from the recording studio to the club to the concert stage - because that's what its members do.

What the Forum also does is represent that network at a national level, enable communication within, to and from it, offering the voice of Scotland's traditional music in fields such as education (formal and non-formal), cultural tourism, social enterprise and cultural policy. We catch up with each other at the annual Trad Talk conference in March and support each other in various ways throughout the year.

Traditional music has been one of Scotland's cultural success stories in recent times, exemplified recently by its high profile at the Commonwealth Games, and in events like Celtic Connections, Hebridean Celtic, and Piping Live. These great high points are platforms for work that has been going on at the grass roots for more than a generation. Taken together, the high profile events and the continuing activity on the ground make a strong, interlocking mesh which reinforces all of Scotland's culture. The Traditional Music Forum is a vital part of that.

For more info on the Traditional Music Form visit
www.traditionalmusicforum.org



Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland (TDFS)

Tap your toe to the sound of the pipes, fiddle or accordion and you're dancing to the rhythm of Scotland.

Scottish dance has flourished over the centuries alongside traditional music and storytelling, evolving and absorbing influences from new cultures to fuse into a fascinating history. One of the earliest structured uses of dance recorded was in the performance and telling of stories, as a means of committing knowledge to memory.

From castles to stately homes, from village halls to family kitchens, dance was of great significance to people and had an important social and community-defining function. In some contexts it was a test of strength, stamina and agility - Highland dance was once used to test men aspiring to join the Scottish regiments.

Today, Scottish traditional dance is most known for four distinct types: ceilidh dancing, step-dancing, Highland dancing and Scottish country dancing. Each has its own distinctive background but technique, movements, footwork and patterns are common to all. Alongside these, there is a wealth of dance traditions from all over the world that have now found a place within Scottish communities and contribute to the richness of the traditional dance landscape.

The Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland is inspired by these traditions and works with, and on behalf of, its membership to provide a platform for exchange and critical debate. The aim is to

facilitate the development of educational resources, facilitate training, and increase access to research and archive materials. In addition to membership services, TDFS aims, as part of the wider TRACS body, to support collaboration across traditional artforms and advocate traditional arts at a national level, securing a place for traditional dance in the fabric of Scottish life.

Membership of the Forum is open to all who support, engage with, or have an interest in traditional dance. To find out more about traditional dance or joining the Forum, visit
www.tracscotland.org/tracs/traditional-dance

Storytelling and the Arts of Change



Illustration: Henry Rivers

The renaissance of live storytelling is the subject of some landmark books this year. In **Storytelling in the Moment** filmmaker Michael Howes sets out to explore 'a contemporary verbal art in Britain and Ireland', and the result is a most practical survey of what is happening with storytelling now. The approach combines that of a documentary filmmaker surveying the field and that of an anthropologist commenting on it. This may not satisfy academic rigorists but it makes for an accessible and informative read.

Amongst the most valuable parts of *Storytelling in the Moment* are the interviews with audience members, identifying the appeal of storytelling as a live and participative human engagement. Howes is also critical at points of poor organisation or limited self-understanding of the contemporary artform, emphasising the need to be public-facing, responsive to social change and professionally organised.

Not everyone will agree with all of the opinions expressed and, as in much contemporary ethnology, the background and biases of the investigator are openly declared. But it is very refreshing to have an outsider's eye on where things are at, and Howes has been diligent and energetic in attending events, digging into source materials and, above all, speaking to those involved in all the different aspects of storytelling.

He is to be thanked for undertaking this task, and if the book provokes some arguments and debate then that is all to the good, as we reflect on the inspiration of traditions and the challenges of change.

Another sort of change is to the fore in **Storytelling for a Greener World**. Mike Howes would surely approve of the exemplary way in which this book taps traditional sources and then shows how they can creatively engage with the challenge of 'the now'. Subtitled *Environment, Community and Story-Based Learning*, the book really delivers on all three aspects by assembling a cornucopia of excellent contributors describing practical approaches, creative interpretations and insightful stories.

No-one who is involved in storytelling, environmental education or indeed any other kind of education, should be without this volume. You will keep dipping in and developing your own ideas and approaches as you go. Here is a critical area where tradition is a radical source for empowerment and change. What could be more vital than the very sources of life itself? *Storytelling for A Greener World* is inspiring and practical, and forms the centrepiece of this year's Storytelling Festival event at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh.

Stories of the Stranger: Encounters with Exiles and Outsiders presents itself at first as a very different kind of book.

It is essentially a group of stories collected from holy books, historical legends, folk tales and contemporary experiences by Martin Palmer and Katriana Hazell. Apart from useful introductions, the stories are left to speak eloquently for themselves.

But in fact this book is addressing another of our global frontline challenges: the displacement of people, the refugee experience, and the potential rise of xenophobic demonization of 'the other'. *Stories of the Stranger* speaks from a different place, one of welcome, recognition of what 'the other' brings to us and, above all, the deep instinct of the heart to embrace the stranger as a sister or brother. It is a wonderfully warm and slightly understated book with a big message.

Storytelling in the Moment: Exploring a Contemporary Verbal Art in Britain and Ireland

Michael Howes (Academia Press, 2014) ISBN 9789038221991

Storytelling for a Greener World: Environment, Community and Story-Based Learning (Edited) Alida Gersie, Anthony Nanson and Edward Schieffelin (Hawthorn Press, 2014)

ISBN 9781907359354

Stories of the Stranger: Encounters with Exiles and Outsiders (Collected)

Martin Palmer and Katriana Hazell (Bene Factum, 2014) ISBN 9781909657441

The ABCs of Storytelling: tips, techniques and reflections

D is for Delivery and Dialogue

Many come to me wanting to know how to deliver a story. They're hoping I can offer some sure-fire techniques to guarantee a first-rate delivery. While I can offer a variety of techniques, I cannot guarantee success. Delivering a story is much more than technique; among others it involves a deeper sense of timing, pacing, use of language and imagery, connection with the story and the audience.

There is no one way to deliver a story. Some storytellers are very animated and gregarious, while others are quiet and still. Some use humour, others pathos. Some use props, others none. There are as many ways to deliver a story as there are storytellers.

I would also argue that *deliver* is not the right word. *Delivering a story* suggests that a story is a package or commodity. My own view is that stories live and breathe around us and within us. They look for bodies and voices through which they can be told and heard. They are not objects to be delivered or thrown about. Stories are our connections to the past, to our humanity, to what we might become. We enable stories and stories enable us.

This philosophy is at the heart of my story-coaching. We prepare our bodies, our voices, our imaginations and our hearts as one might in a spiritual practice. I imagine myself as a sort of story-monk devoted to providing time and space in which you meet story. Storytelling requires commitment and faith. While I can offer techniques associated with the communication and performance arts - vocal techniques, body movement, gestures, rhetorical devices, acting skills and so on - I focus on



deepening the storyteller's connection with the story and their own *inner storyteller*. This takes place through critical reflection and dialogue. In a small coaching group, storytellers have the opportunity to watch and listen to one another, to learn from each other's experience, to explore their natural talents, to try on techniques and decide which feel natural and allow them to speak and act authentically.

I would also say that my approach to story is dialogic; that is, that I encourage dialogue or conversations with stories. We talk to stories and listen to what they have to say. We get to know the characters within stories, not just the protagonist and antagonist but the marginal characters too. In fact, I like to have storytellers retell stories from different perspectives. Try *Little Red Riding Hood* from the Wolf's point of view, or Grandma's, or even from the point of view of the basket of goodies Little Red is carrying. Whose stories are not being told within a story? Explore those, listen and learn.

And finally, while we're on the topic of dialogue, may I offer one particular technique? It's the simple turning of the head from left to right to simulate a conversation between characters. Decide if one

character is taller or smaller than the other and indicate this with the angle of your head when speaking. Jack would look up when talking to the Giant and the Giant, of course, would look downward. It sounds obvious but many storytellers *tell* the dialogue rather than *show* it. Also, try eliminating the 'he said' and 'she said' indicators found in texts. Use your voice, head position, and relevant body gestures to indicate who is speaking. Such dialogue techniques will help you tell the story in a way common to oral rather than written storytelling and liberate you from the printed page. Your storytelling will come alive, I can guarantee that.

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Storytelling in the Corporate World

New buzzwords enter the business world all the time, and today the biggest corporate buzzword is *storytelling*. Corporates are obsessed with storytelling; conferences and workshops on the subject are told to full houses. I know because I deliver them.

But even I was amazed when SAMSUNG sent an entire film crew from South Korea to film me doing a storytelling workshop in Manchester. They had begun to realise that their competitors, particularly in the US and the UK, were selling their products more successfully through advertising using a back story. So they had decided to film storytelling live and wanted to do it at my workshop; I was thrilled to bits!

Storytelling has been in the corporate world of advertising for decades, but we just didn't notice that it was the story that was doing the selling. Storytelling is a timeless skill and story has been an essential vehicle for change throughout human history. Now more than ever, with the extensive choice of media available, businesses have the opportunity to stand out, spread the word and be more

successful through the use of back stories and the power of good storytelling.

So what is a back story? A back story is where you have an intriguing narrative and the advertised product is a catalyst for the story.

An example of this is the famous Nescafé adverts with the gorgeous couple living next door to

each other and the build-up of their romance through the constant offering of cups of Nescafé. We watched with bated breath to see how the story would unfold, and surely still remember the product it promoted.

This technique is widely used now. Think of your own favourite; mine at the moment is definitely the *Compare the Meerkat* saga, now with the addition of a cute baby meerkat.

Each of these stories aims to create an interest and to focus the attention in a way that dry data and blunt facts could never do. Any bit of information that we feel no connection to washes over us and is soon forgotten. Giving the same information as part of a story is much more effective, as the story focuses our attention and taps into our feelings and emotional attachment. This means that the message or other bit of corporate information is remembered along with the story, even long after it was first heard.

People are designed to engage with stories and will empathise with interesting characters, and storytelling can help the corporate world with that. In fact, the most successful companies are using this strategy to put themselves ahead of the game.

But storytelling in the corporate world is not just about ads and back stories, it can play an important role at organisational level too. A new idea, line of products or management setup will need 'buying in' from staff, sales personnel and shareholders, and this implies that they need to be receptive to the message that is being passed on.

Success happens when these people are able to understand exactly what the aim is, the reasons behind it and agree to go along with the ideas presented.



Corporate storytelling is about engaging an audience through simple narratives that will relate the story to prospective clients, employees and others in a way that inspires and motivates them to react favourably to whatever suggestions may be put forward.

This also enables companies to reinforce their brand identity and mark the difference (as a positive) between themselves and their competitors by offering a number of coherent concepts throughout every communication they produce and every PR action they take. Naturally in order for this to be successful, the 'story' has to be embedded in the branding and be instantly recognised.

Last but not least, it is also important to remember that corporate storytelling relies on facts, never fiction, and is grounded solely in meticulous research. It is not about telling a tall tale, it is about telling a good story well.

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CORPORATE COMMUNICATOR'S CHECKLIST

- Have a clear understanding of who you are targeting.
- Have a clear understanding of the values (and principles) of the proposal.
- Understand what is expected to be the achieved outcome.
- Be aware of any pitfalls and how they may be managed or avoided altogether.



Stories of Natural Scotland

In September last year I set off on a quest: to walk 220 miles coast to coast across Scotland on the Southern Upland Way.

The real challenge I had set myself, though, was to do the walk in the style of a wandering bard; what the Celts called a *seanacaidh* and the Norse called a *skald*. Every time I came to a town or village along the way, I would stop and tell stories; the *Stories of Natural Scotland*. Stories of seal-people and the fairy folk; of ghosts and goblins; of red squirrels and golden eagles.

The seed of the idea was a feeling I had that, in order to really get to know the stories, I had to know the land they came from. Stories and land are intimately related; they are part of each other.

Also, it was about authenticity. I didn't want to be a pale imitation of those skalds who traipsed into the village, all bearded and hoary and smelling of the forest; I wanted to have a go at being the real thing. Wouldn't my audiences get so much more from the session if they knew I had just come down off the hills to tell them a few stories and afterwards would be heading back into the wild weather? Wouldn't some of that wildness soak into me, into the stories and into them?

Hotels and B&Bs were out of the question. Fortunately I had a good stock of hi-tech lightweight backpacking gear (authenticity is relative, and I'm not that tough) which would be more than capable of meeting the demands of the journey. All I needed was time, money and willing audiences.

Being a self-employed storyteller, time wasn't to be a problem. Neither was money, since Creative Scotland was kind enough to fund the project. Finding audiences proved to be a little trickier. It's well known that people in our society tend to value things according to what they cost, so I found myself in the very bizarre situation of phoning round schools, offering to give away something which I make my living from, and being evaded, ignored or refused almost everywhere I turned.



But eventually my perseverance yielded some results with the schools along the route, so on September 5th I was in Portpatrick on the west coast, ready to begin the tour on a day of sparkling sunlight. I gave my performance at the primary school there, had some tasty fish and chips from the van at the harbour and started on the path.

I always find when I begin a walk that for the first hour or two there's an instinct continually telling me to stop. It's like my body can't understand why it's not sitting down. Then, after a couple of hours, I find my rhythm and when I want to sit down my body won't let me, and I have to argue with it that I need to take a break. In this fashion I made my way along the coastal path that leads north, then turned east and inland down quiet lanes in the gathering dusk, before making my camp on a bed of leaves in the woods outside Castle Kennedy.

At Castle Kennedy Primary School the pupils couldn't believe that I had slept in the woods. Their eyes went even wider when I told them of the giants that lived in those woods before a wee boy from Castle Kennedy got rid of them. Telling stories in this way was vital; I wanted to 're-enchant' the landscape, encouraging imaginations that had been fried by the X-Box to leap into life again at the thought of what might be out there in the forests and hills. They loved handling my camping gear and testing the weight of my dehydrated meals and tent.

It was midday on Friday when I left Castle Kennedy. I had the weekend to walk 50 or so miles across the Galloway Hills to St John's Town on Dalry, and I was looking forward to it. Then it started to rain. It was still raining when I put up my tent in a forestry plantation that night. It was still raining when I packed up my tent the next morning. It was still raining when, half an hour after setting off, I passed a bothy that I could have spent the night in but wasn't marked on my map. That was painful.

It rained all day and all the next night, and most of the following day. My gear was good, but not good enough; in particular my shoes. I had been walking ten miles a day in trail shoes in the weeks leading up to the walk, as well as running in them three times a week, and was happy that they would serve me well on the Southern Upland Way.

They didn't. By Saturday afternoon my thoroughly soaked feet began to blister. By Sunday morning the pain was awful. By Sunday afternoon... I don't really want to think about Sunday afternoon. One thing kept me going; the thought of arriving in Dalry before the pub stopped serving food that evening and drying my shoes in front of the fire while eating fish and chips.

I kept going, chanting a mantra through gritted teeth as I walked, until at last I came over the brow of a hill to see the village nestled by the river beneath me. Despite the pain, or maybe because of it, that was one of the most magical moments of the tour. I felt like I had a real sense of what it must have been like for a travelling seanacaidh to emerge out of the wild lands, cold and hungry, to see the village lamp-lights and know what they promised: a warm welcome, hot food, good company and somewhere dry to sleep.



The worst over, by the following morning I was in full swing. I carried on east to Sanquhar, and then the highest village on my journey and the highest village in Scotland: Wanlockhead.

I was looking forward to visiting Wanlockhead, not least because my partner would meet me there with

fresh supplies and encouragement, but also because I would be giving my first public performance of the tour in the inn. When I arrived at the inn there was already a good audience of local adults ready to hear some stories.

It was a new experience for most of them and also for me. I'm used to arriving at venues with a car full of didgeridoos, drums and exotic artefacts. Here it was just me, the audience and the story. The vibe was relaxed and unpretentious and I found my style adapting to fit the circumstances in a way that was surprising and pleasing. Chatting to the audience afterwards, I got great feedback and found that people loved hearing stories that populated places they knew with otherworldly characters but also related to their lives, the land and weather they knew.

After Wanlockhead I headed to Moffat, then into the Borders. By this point I had walked over a hundred miles and things were getting easier. The sunshine that had blessed Scotland all summer returned for spells. I was able to dry out my tent most days and get fish and chips in most villages, to make a change from my dehydrated meals. After that it wasn't so tough. The amount of miles I had to cover each day was less, and I had more time for breaks - previously there had been days of twelve hours walking with only a few five or ten-minute breaks. I nosed around the historic towns of Melrose and Lauder and stopped to read an article about my own tour in a newsagent's.

After leaving Lauder I was on the home stretch, over the Lammermuir hills to Cockburnspath and the end of the trail. 'Home stretch' is a fitting phrase as I grew up on the edge of the Lammermuirs; in a sense I had walked home. At last, after over thirty performances, two weeks walking and over two hundred miles covered, I saw the sea. I had made it. The pupils of Cockburnspath Primary School welcomed me in for a wonderful final school show, then in the evening I gave my second and final public performance at Cockburnspath Community Hall. It was much quieter than the Wanlockhead evening, with just eight audience members in attendance. We stacked all the empty chairs at the side of the room and brought our chairs into a circle, and I began to talk.

Again, something new happened. I didn't tell stories as I normally would. I told the story of the tour, of the joy of meeting so many enthusiastic children and sharing stories with them, and laughing at my struggles with torrential

A Natural Scotland?

The tour was called *Stories of Natural Scotland*. There have been plenty of stories but I have seen very little of what could truly be called 'Natural Scotland'.



In all the lands I had walked across, there was nowhere that was not divided by fence or wall. Every patch of grass was there for the grazing of sheep, and where there were sheep there was little else. Every forest was a plantation, as uniform and cheerless as a military parade. I spent just two nights in places that had the feeling of wild nature; a community-managed oak wood in Galloway and a cabbage-patch sized piece of woodland, too small for anyone to bother managing, by the side of a lane in the Lammermuirs.

I knew prior to starting the walk how precious little land is left to be as it will be in Scotland, I just didn't know it was this bad. There was nowhere worse, though, than the Lammermuirs. The high moor is 'managed' exclusively for grouse shooting and nothing that might harm the birds - other than those who pay handsomely to do so - is allowed to exist. I felt utterly dispirited as I crossed the wasteland of the moor, where I saw nothing that lived or moved save birds bred to die for sport.

That put me in a bit of a fix. Here I was, promoting the beauty and wonders of 'Natural Scotland' and encouraging children to get out on the hills, and yet the parts of Scotland that I had walked across didn't feel natural at all.

Was this just because I had been spoilt by my many trips to spectacular places abroad and in the highlands? I knew the highlands were no different, their soul-stirring sparseness the result of deforestation, overgrazing and the horror of the clearances - but due to the nature of the landscape they feel wilder.

Looking back, it is clear to me that despite and because of the abuses done to our land, we must encourage our children and young people to get out there, to make up their own minds and to begin dreaming Natural Scotland's future.

Myself, I have found huge inspiration in George Monbiot's book *Feral*, where he makes a case for 'rewilding' the landscape, allowing forests to grow again on the high lands and reintroducing native wildlife such as bison, lynx, wolves and bears. I believe that for the kingdoms our minds to be healthy, the borders of our imaginations must be wild, shadowy places; forests and dark mountains where witches brew potions and wolves hunt by the moonlight; places where we roam in our dreams and fantasies.

rain and blisters. I usually find it hard to talk about my own life and my own personal stories, but here it wasn't so difficult. The audience told their own stories, and though I still told the tales I had promised, the evening had a unique feeling; not a performance, not a ceilidh, but something in-between, a time and place where something very special was shared. I learnt a lesson about not holding back from an audience, not hiding in the safety of my menagerie of stories. Allowing myself to be vulnerable rewarded me with my favourite night of the tour. And not just because I didn't have to walk any further!

I loved meeting the pupils at each school and sharing the journey of each story with them. No matter how many times I give a performance or tell a particular story, it never gets boring. Once you've begun telling, the energy of the story, the audience and the place all intertwine to make something that has never happened before and will never happen again. It's a bit like dancing - no matter how many times you dance to a favourite piece of music, you'll never dance the same dance twice. I'm back to using my car now, but I'm still on that journey and won't be stopping anytime soon.

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Folk who gave me Folklore

During my childhood in the decade following the end of World War II I heard many tales and legends from family and neighbours, especially from my great aunt Kate MacDonald (1879-1968) who was retired from having been the only teacher in a tiny rural school.

She had never married, so she treated me as if I were her own child: she watched over my education, taught me subjects beyond the school curriculum and passed onto me all that she could remember of the lore she had heard in her own childhood.

When she died she left me her personal belongings, including a bundle of letters from the 1840s which were the correspondence of her grandmother, Sarah MacCallum (born 1824 in Barramolloch, Argyll) from whom she had learned much of her lore.

From the age of nine I was given weekly private instruction in piping. Already aware of the prevalence of folktales in Highland culture, I pestered my piping teachers for stories and legends. My first teacher, Jimmie MacNeil, would become annoyed that I wanted to learn tales and songs as much as piping technique or tunes, but he would usually comply. Later teachers were more readily forthcoming and often appreciated the extent of my interests. Alec Macrae, who was a car mechanic at Calvine in Highland Perthshire, was particularly keen to tell me stories and teach me songs, many of which were the sources of pipe tunes. He even took me to visit the places where tales had taken place and introduced me to game-keepers who had a wealth of local lore, especially Bob Bissett in Lubriach, upper Glen Lyon. Bob was the custodian of the Cailleach stone at the top of the glen, a steep hike up from his house. In later years, after I had settled in Edinburgh, I regularly went to visit Alan Macintosh Bain, who had been brought up in the Lochalsh district, and he would tell me tales while teaching me pipe tunes, so that the two became quite intertwined with one another. He also had a fine memory for dances and dance steps which had not passed into the repertoire of the Highland Dancing or Ceilidh Dancing societies. He drilled me in these until I got the movements just as he remembered seeing them.



Being something of a vagabond myself, I often visited travellers including the splendid Willie Macphee and Duncan Williamson, many years before the Scottish Storytelling Centre was founded. Willie taught me some pipe tunes as well as telling me many tales. He had a knack of sliding into a tale during a conversation, so that it was difficult to tell where exactly the story began, and he was often several minutes into it before I would realise he was actually telling me an ancient fable and not simply recounting an incident from his own past.

From my late teens, I spent much of my life in Europe. My home for a while was in Macedonia and later in Neresnica, a Vlach village in eastern Serbia. From those bases I travelled through Bulgaria, Slovakia and the Czech lands. In later years, after I had returned to Scotland, I continued to visit those countries and also wandered around Italy, France and Croatia. I generally travelled by hitch-hiking and survived by busking in cities and towns or by manual jobs in rural areas. All along I learned different 'folk' bagpipes and picked up tales, songs, dances and traditional customs with a great appetite. I had to learn the languages as I went along and, to this day, I tend to speak them with the accent and idiom of a country bumpkin, much to the surprise and amusement of tourists and diplomats I meet.

In observing and participating in such a variety of different European folk cultures, I was struck by the parallels and similarities, especially in folktales. Not only did specific motifs in the Slavic tales strike me as similar to those of the Gaelic tales of my childhood, but the manner in which they were told was virtually identical in all cases. The person telling a story in a home setting always sat and recited the sequence of events in a matter-of-fact way; never dramatising it or acting out the characters. I cannot recall any of them ever attempting to mimic the actual voice of a character in a tale, except in some instances where that character was an animal or a bird. They did not tell you, nor pretended to know, the thoughts, feelings or motives of a character; the storytellers simply reported what was said and done. They would sometimes respond to their own storytelling as if they were actually listening to it themselves for the first time; showing surprise at a sudden twist in a tale. People listening to these tales, usually family members and neighbours, more often than not had their hands busy with knitting, stitching, polishing, repairing; the standard evening chores of a rural household. So they could not focus on watching the person telling the story, who was quite often also occupied with a simple task.



Nowadays, when storytelling has been revived largely in venues with a seated audience and a stage, necessity perhaps demands a more dramatic delivery; but I have made the conscious decision to deliver tales as close as I can to the manner in which I first heard them. In doing so I can relive those vivid experiences from my youth and perhaps pass that experience on to others.

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Storytelling and a Sense of Place

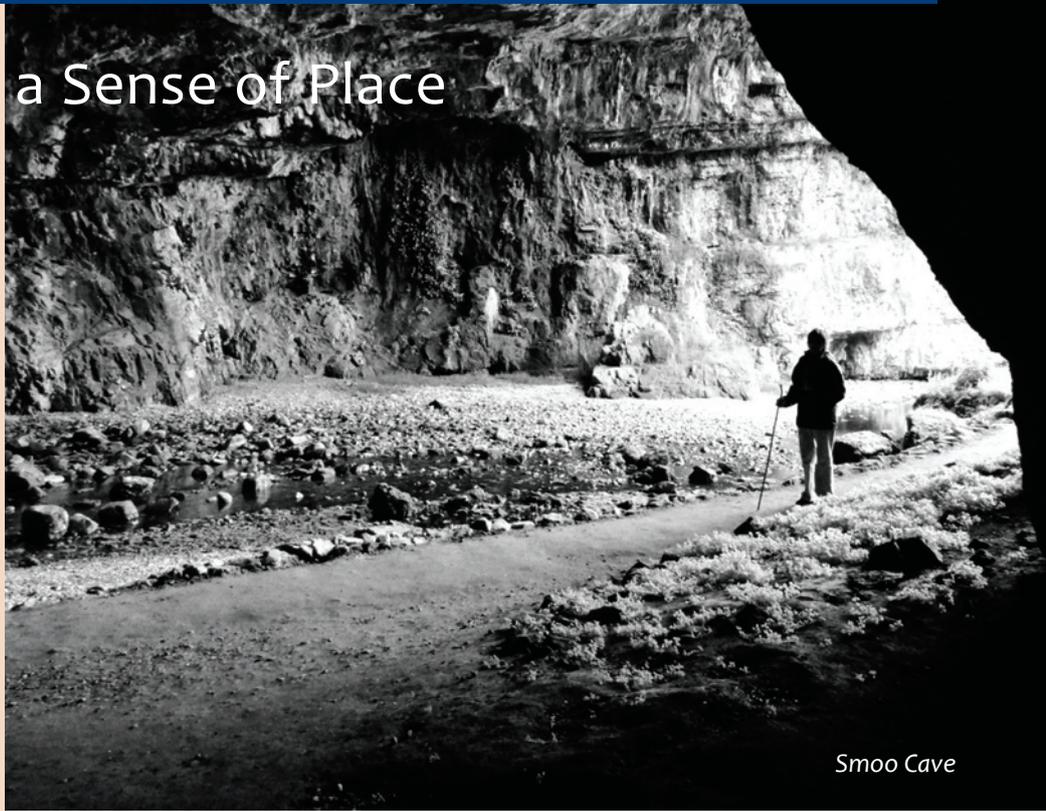
All stories happen somewhere, but in some instances, where a particular story has become attached to a particular location, there is a much more physical relationship between story and place.

This kind of story fascinates because it promotes an understanding which doesn't necessarily have something to do with historical fact, but nevertheless creates a psychic topography which can be lived in just as vividly as the physical landscape. Stories of place can have major social functions: they can unite communities or set them against one another; they can be the focus of religious devotion or the fomenters of wars. More recently and mundanely they have been used for walks, school projects, to promote tourist activity and so on.



This autumn we want to encourage everyone to go and research the tales and the legends of their local community and then share them with friends, family and with anyone else who might be interested. Let's bring life back into the landscape!

Have a look at our *Once Upon A Place* campaign on www.tracscotland.org/legend-hunting, part of the Scottish International Storytelling Festival, and you'll find free resources as well as tips and advice on how to become a Legend Hunter!



Smoo Cave

Local legends are always sited in specific locations and include quite particular details which help to anchor them there. Beyond pure entertainment, they may have a function such as 'explaining' how a particular feature of the landscape earned its name, or came to be (a giant dropped a hodful of rocks and created a mountain); strengthening and confirming the identity of a community (bold folk descended from a legendary hunter); fleshing out an event or life round the bare bones of historical detail (the Wolf of Badenoch plays chess with the Devil).

Stories of place can fall into two main categories: legends and stories with some historical basis, but the boundaries between the two are not always well defined. For example, take the story of the piper who enters a particular cave in search of treasure, never to be seen again (though his dog emerges, several weeks later and from an entirely different cave, with no hair, and hardly any skin left on its body). Versions of this tale are so widespread that not only a search for a 'true' version would be pointless, but we find examples of this tale mixing with historical fact.

The first Lord of Reay, in Northern Sutherland, is a real enough character - born Donald Mackay in 1590, supporter of the Protestant cause after the Reformation. But there is a tale about how he narrowly avoided a show-down with the Lord of Darkness in Smoo Cave by sending his dog into the cave first - of course it emerged hairless and virtually skinless.

This shows that however much of the legend is rooted in events which can be shown to have taken place, it will contain elements that can't be verified historically and which, when looked at more closely, can often be found in other stories linked to other places as well.

Broadly, a local legend may not be as entirely local as first appears. The whole story, or parts of it, may also be found in essence in other places and other times. This doesn't mean that local legends have less value for this but rather that one of their outstanding qualities is an ability to adapt, like an organism, to a particular location, and to create within that location's community a feeling of connection to landscape and a sense of shared history.

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LIVING VOICES

Stories, poetry and song in care homes across Scotland

Living Voices is a project in partnership with The Scottish Poetry Library that started in February 2013 with a simple premise: words have great power and they can benefit older people living in care. An 18-month pilot saw a team of storytellers, poets and musicians visit care homes and sheltered housing units in Perth and Kinross, South Ayrshire and Aberdeen.

During their monthly visits, the artists work with small groups and are supported by care staff or volunteers. Stories and songs are the starting point for conversations ranging from responses to the pieces shared to reminiscence, and aiming to encourage the groups' creativity to flow.

Sessions have a common structure and the same themed resources, but flexibility is at the core: artists



work to create something unique, suited to each group's interests, needs, histories and abilities, and this is hugely beneficial. Sessions are run in a subtle and person-centred way, with no pressure on anyone. The aim is not to try to entertain, but really to listen and give participants a sense of a safe space in which they can share anything that the songs, poems and stories trigger.

One very important factor of Living Voices is that we have been able to evaluate the impact of the project over time through independent external assessment.

The final evaluation was recently launched at a community celebration in Aberfeldy. The document suggests that Living Voices improves wellbeing and strengthens social connections between residents, and is highly valued by them: *'I find this of terrific value.... It's very good, stimulating to be learning new things when you get to this age!'*

Key findings also include demonstrable benefits for care

staff, who report that Living Voices helps them to engage with residents in new ways, learn about them and build relationships. Many have been inspired to try working with poetry and story outside the Living Voices sessions, and we have trialled training to support this.

We hope to build on this success in the future. Scotland's health and care systems are going through a period of great change, with a greater focus on individuals, their histories, interests and personal preferences.

In this context, there is great potential for programmes like Living Voices to bring quality engagement with the arts into care settings.

Emma Faragher
Living Voices Project Manager

Living Voices is funded by The Paul Hamlyn Foundation, The Baring Foundation, Creative Scotland and The Gannochy Trust. You can download the final evaluation document at www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/learn/carers

AMANDA EDMISTON

As I arrived at the care home for my first session, I was met with apprehension by one of the carers who was unclear about my role. And when I explained to a resident that I was a storyteller, she asked if there was to be a show could she leave? I joked that I hoped not, as I might go with her if there was! Soon I proved my point. The session developed like a loosely structured conversation, I was not a performer but more like a new visiting friend - one with a selection of interesting anecdotes and unusual topics. After the first session I found a rhythm. I presented the month's theme through poetry and tunes which branched off from a story, or sometimes through a family anecdote or a news update from my previous month's work. Stories became more accessible, not

'something for children' when presented this way.

The core group of six was often joined by relatives, and four of the carers became regular faces. Poetic license was generously applied, we did not need the tales we shared to be 100% accurate, and did not feel hurt when details were forgotten. This was important, in order to make sure the residents didn't feel anxious about getting things wrong. Tales became romantic glimpses through clouds, or raconteurs' banter tailored for comic effect. Over time the group helped me review and tweak stories for other projects, shared their own family legends and gave me valuable insights into life. My last session saw a lady hug me and say she would miss me, as I was 'something different!' amandaedmiston@btinternet.com

ROSIE MAPPLEBECK

Living Voices has taught me never to expect anything - dementia can develop very quickly, so our group members could feel like different people each time we met. Underneath the confusion, frustration and anger that can accompany the progression of dementia though, there are fine people who have lived lives rich in story, who enjoy meeting up and sharing those stories.

We had snapshots of memories, sailed on seas of fabric while singing songs of home. We tasted our stories - I always have associated pictures, smells and tastes to back up any image made in words. Poetry and music have been powerful ingredients in the sessions, with people sharing

Scots Patron of Reading

I met Mackenzie Crook at the Edinburgh Book Festival. You know, he was the one who played Ragetti in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, but he also wrote and illustrated two beautiful books, *The Windvale Sprites* and *The Lost Journals of Benjamin Tooth*, which he signed for me to give to the children of Eyemouth Primary School. We had one of those rambling blethers and I said 'You would make a great Patron of Reading. Would you like to do that?' and he said, and I still can't believe it, 'I would'. If he really does it, he will be in great company because I am a Patron of Reading too, albeit a very recent one.



songs in answer to the ones we brought and sometimes responding to a poem with startling images and memories.

We became friends and facilitated laughter and tears. One abiding memory is of a lady with only monosyllables left, who cradled a doll I had brought to represent the infant Robert Burns for a story. As she held it, she disappeared into her own story, and we could only watch her emotion-filled face and wonder.

The Living Voices project has been practice-changing for me. Now I see story and inspiration in every item, and I seek to touch the essence within us with humility and an open mind. It also made a huge impact on social practice at the care home I visited, as individuals' needs were revealed and responded to in sessions, and the value of word and story to bring people together was recognised.

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The Patron of Reading scheme is quite new, having started in Wales two years ago. Tim Redgrave, a headmaster from St. Asaph's in Denbighshire, wanted to get away from the idea of forever testing kids and wanted something to encourage reading for fun and enjoyment. He invited author Helen Pielichaty to be the very first Patron of Reading ever and she has been working with the school ever since. Helen was the first, I am number 91 in the UK, number 19 in Scotland and, most importantly, the first in the Borders. Eyemouth Primary School picked me, which is a real honour and a surprise, as I thought they would be fed up with me being in and out of the school all the time.

Patrons of Reading are attached to a school for a period of three years. They can visit, set up reading groups, read to the kids, hold quizzes and competitions, involve classes or the whole school in events, introduce new authors, suggest books - in fact, the list of possibilities is endless. One of the joys is that it is teacher-led so, although I can suggest things, it will be the teachers who will call the shots and there is a greater chance of them getting what they want. My contact is P.T. Amy Perryman and the aim is to dovetail being both a storyteller and a Patron of Reading and fit it all in with the school's new reading/creative writing scheme, starting this term, and the Eyemouth Primary School Storytelling Festival on 24th October.

And of course let's not forget the Scots language. I speak Hiemooth, a very localised form of Scots. It is also used to some extent both sides of the Border as there are Hiemooth words spoken in Northumbria (the language of Northumbria) and vice versa, and they tend to be very old words. Imagine saying to children, 'My two Scots words of the day are *haspan* and *moonbroch*. Off you go and find out what they mean!' Then the next day there are another two Scots words, e.g. *sklent* and *whigmaleerie*.



And all the time I'm looking for local words which are centuries old and using them in storytelling and reading, just scattering a few lovely sounding words here and there. It might just bring parents on board, particularly the ones who still see Scots as slang. A lot of Scots words are connected to place so there will be words used specifically in the fishing or farming or boat building.

Jon Biddle is the National Organiser and Katrina Lucas is the Scottish Organiser with an interest in Scots language; they are spreading the news to all schools and their help has been invaluable. The most important piece of advice they have given me is to have a blog (me, a blog?) so that the kids and parents can write about their reading. Now I have a mobile phone, a laptop, a Kindle Fire and an Ipad, so I am all set. Nick of Eyemouth Library is in, I am reading like mad and trying to put together a collection of books, as Jon Biddle wants this for the website, and I am tweeting. Excitement or what?

Marjorie Leithead
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HASPAN - half-grown, a youth.

MOONBROCH - halo round the moon.

SKLENT - go to the side.

WHIGMALEERIE - decoration/daftness.



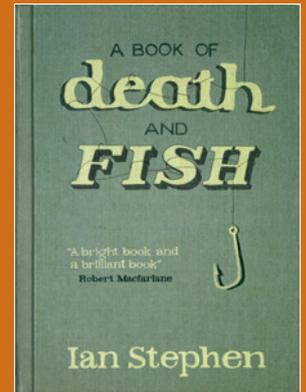
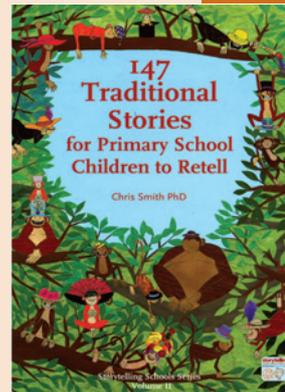
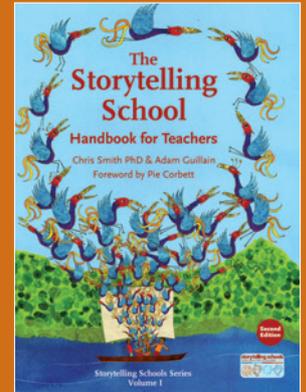
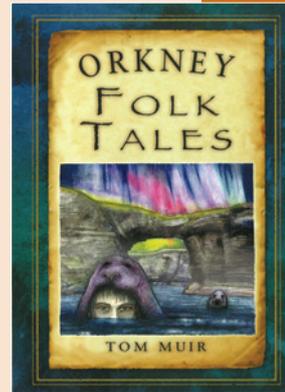
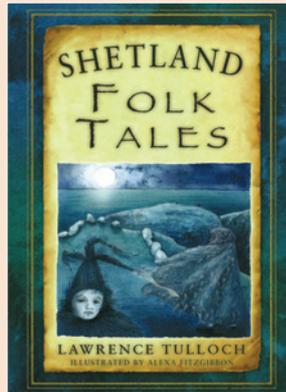
Book Blethers

There are two new volumes in the History Press 'county' folk tales series, and both of them are stoaters. Lawrence Tulloch's *Shetland Folk Tales* and Tom Muir's *Orkney Folk Tales* bring lifetimes of island experience together with the art of the living storyteller. Both books are also beautifully illustrated by Alexa Fitzgibbon and Sheila Faichney respectively.

All in all it's a wonderful two-hander from the Northern Isles. Next up in this series is the Western Isles by Ian Stephen, and the full islanders' hat-trick is celebrated at the Storytelling Festival.

On the education front, an important PhD thesis by Fiona McGarry has just been completed and lodged at Dundee University Library. *Story Teaches You Things* is a detailed exploration of how storytelling is being used as a resource for teaching and learning in primary school classrooms in Scotland. It is full of useful insights, and paints a picture of vigorous activity, led not by any central institutions or organisations, but by teachers, pupils and parents connecting with each other. There are lots of positives here based on Curriculum for Excellence, and lots of possibilities for future development. Everyone concerned with Scottish storytelling will want to thank and congratulate Fiona McGarry, who teaches in Dundee, on her fine achievement.

Following on from that study, two practical resource books from Hawthorn Press could help us all on our way. *The Storytelling School* is the second edition of an excellent handbook for teachers, full of practical learning activities arising from storytelling. The objective and philosophy is 'every child is a storyteller'. Accompanying this is another volume, *147 Traditional Stories for Primary Children to Retell*. These are simple, economical and well-crafted versions for oral tellings, as it says on the tin.



They are drawn from a wide variety of traditional and literary sources and will provide material for many different curriculum areas. On the whole, however, teachers and storytellers should use such a collection alongside more locally sourced materials, as a storytelling school draws creatively on its own environment and local identities.

The final book to note is, if the author will forgive a pun, a different kettle of fish. Ian Stephen's *A Book of Death and Fish* is the fruit of a lifelong meditation and reflection on memory, storytelling and the sea. The book is presented as a novel, but also included is a lot of detail on cooking-fish, engines, and even European history and politics, touching on religion, drugs and alcohol along the way.

You cannot help identifying the central narrator Peter McAulay with the author, but fiction and factuality merge throughout. The book is a long read and I dipped in savouring it in stages, till I was steadily drawn into the emotional life of Peter, and began to read in longer chunks to the end. *A Book of Death and Fish* is a testimony to the emotional power of story, both when told, and when blocked or restrained. It is a moving, very personal book that defies conventional genre boundaries to sense the flow of life, like the tides of the sea.

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SHETLAND FOLK TALES

Lawrence Tulloch
The History Press, 2014
ISBN 9780752497693

ORKNEY FOLK TALES

Tom Muir
The History Press 2014
ISBN 9780752499055

THE STORYTELLING SCHOOL: HANDBOOK FOR TEACHERS

Chris Smith PhD
and Adam Guillain
Hawthorn Press, 2014
ISBN 9781907359385

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Chris Smith PhD
Hawthorn Press, 2014
ISBN 9781907359392

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Ian Stephen
Saraband 2014
ISBN 9781908643667