

# Blethers

Issue 24 Spring 2012

## EUROPE GOES GRIMM

### Don't Look Away!

No, it's not the latest credit agency rating. It's the 200th anniversary of the first edition of Grimm's Popular Tales.

The Brothers Grimm kick-started a wave of folk and fairy tale collecting across Europe. They also began a debate about the meaning of these remarkable stories that continues to this day. The popular tales they collected are scary, bizarre, realistic and magical all in one. But the key to them all is how the heroes and heroines survive and transform their lives.

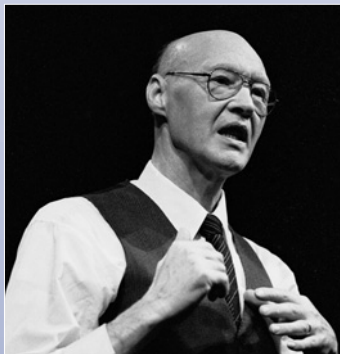
The Scottish International Storytelling Festival 2012 brings this major European anniversary home to Scotland by exploring the connections between Scotland's stories and those found in Germany, Poland, Russia, France, Norway,

Italy and the Netherlands. Song and dance traditions will also intertwine in an action-packed ten days.

Get those dates in your diary now – Friday 19th to Sunday 28th October. It might be Grimm, but it will surely be inspiring.

*The late Stanley Robertson, master of Scotland's Grimm tales, performs at the 2000 Festival. This stunning*

*portrait by Ian Mackenzie features in the 2012 Ian Mackenzie memorial calendar, along with eleven other brilliant images of tradition bearers.*



### Active Learning

How do the traditional arts of music, song, dance and story contribute to active learning in schools and colleges? We are planning a series of hands-on sessions to introduce vital sources, resources and approaches to creative learning inspired by Scotland's culture, so look out for our new training programme to be released in April.

## Trads Together

The Traditional Arts Networks are making excellent progress on working together for the future. The Storytelling and Traditional Music Forums are now being complemented by a new Trad Dance Forum.

Following the positive open meeting hosted by the Storytelling Centre at the turn of the year, ideas for shared events, workshops and courses are well advanced. Gica Loening has joined the Storytelling Centre team to help expand the existing education programme and outreach, with cross-artform content.

It is also hoped that the TRADS collaboration will enable stronger regional networks and hubs of activity across Scotland. Although these plans depend on winning the backing of Creative Scotland and other funders, the reaction to the Trad Arts working together has been excellent, and external organisations welcomed a stronger voice and presence for Scotland's cultures.

By sharing in the ceilidh spirit, today's artists are building on the foundations of tradition, while innovating in line with our radical roots. Watch this space, and check out [www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk](http://www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk) in the meantime for opportunities to get involved.

Traditional Arts organisations, who are not already contributing to the discussion but would like to be part of the TRADS umbrella, should contact [donald@scottishstorytellingcentre.com](mailto:donald@scottishstorytellingcentre.com) to express their interest and ideas.



Scottish Storytelling Centre, 43-45 High Street, Edinburgh EH1 1SR

T: 0131 556 9579 E: [reception@scottishstorytellingcentre.com](mailto:reception@scottishstorytellingcentre.com)

[www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk](http://www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk)

## Directory Welcome!

A warm welcome to storytellers new to the Scottish Storytelling Centre Directory



### Rona Barbour

Scottish and from a long line of storytellers, Rona was born in Glasgow to registered blind parents and as a result she quickly

learned the value and importance of communicating with others through story. Rona is a strong advocate for resurrecting storytelling within families and in schools. She writes several of her own works and also has a huge repertoire of stories including love stories, spine chilling ghost stories, traditional and fairy tales. Now back in Scotland, in the past 20 years she was based in England and has been Director of the Board of The Society for Storytelling for 6 years.



### Maria Cairnie

Maria tells stories from many different sources and in many different ways but her greatest passion is highly energetic, participatory

telling which usually involves live singing and original compositions. Maria has always had a deep love of American, Indian, Celtic and Scandinavian folklore but more recently has been invited to explore faith stories. Raised in the village of Neilston in East Renfrewshire, Maria continues to live and work from her home in Glasgow's Southside.



### Alex Patience

Alex was born and brought up in Fraserburgh – a Brocher and Doric speaker. She is from a fisher family and as a

bairn she went to the sea with her Dad and mended nets with her Mum. Alex has a great love of all things about the sea, about coastal and island communities and their lives, and tells stories of the second sight and selkies. Alex also loves to make connections between traditional stories and our contemporary lives.



### Mike Innes

Mike Innes, The Wandering Vagabond, has a wide variety of stories in his repertoire, not limiting

himself to any one genre or tradition. He has a strong knowledge of world myths and legends, with an emphasis on those cultures which have converged in Scotland: Celtic, Norse & Anglo-Saxon. Mike was born in a small town in the North-East of Scotland where he spent most of his childhood.

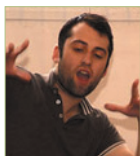


### Jackie Carothers

Jackie tells all kinds of stories from around the world, always making a point of bringing back new stories from wherever she goes. Her

stories include myths, traditional tales (especially those with glimpses of another world) and comic tales, stories about Edinburgh and Scottish characters and the retelling of real life experiences. She uses interactive stories and songs to entice audiences to join in. As a member of the Edinburgh-based Life Stories group for 6 years she has developed a particular expertise in storytelling with the over-50s.

### Barry Donaldson



Barry uses drama and music to tell classic and contemporary tales from Scotland and beyond. He approaches stories using the teacher-in-role method to engage and

empower audiences. Barry often uses stories as a tool to tackle prejudice and other social issues which influence contemporary Scotland. He also loves stories full of magic, mayhem and a bit of fairy dust!

Originally from the Orkney Islands, Barry was brought up in Aberdeen by a Scottish-Italian family.



### Fran Flett Hollinrake

Born in Scotland and brought up in England, Fran studied Scottish History at St Andrews and Edinburgh Universities and many of

her favourite tales are those based on historical events. She worked as a tour guide in the underground streets and vaults of Old Edinburgh, where she further developed a taste for the darker side of history, and loves telling tales of ghosts, spectres, witches and scary things. Fran moved to Orkney in 2004: in her work as a tour guide and custodian of historic monuments she has surrounded herself with legends, folktales and history, and loves sharing them with others. Fran organised the Orkney Storytelling Festival in 2010 and 2011.



### Tony Robertson

Tony Robertson grew up in a storytelling family. He is a son of the late great Scottish master storyteller

Stanley Robertson and learned from his father and other relatives many of the traditional tales of the travelling people. As well as telling

stories, Tony knows and sings many of the old ballads and is a keen amateur historian. Tony specialises in the telling of jack tales but also loves to tell supernatural and humorous tales.



### Alette Willis

Alette is drawn to tell stories about the natural world in which we dwell and our relationship with it. She loves creation stories about plants and

animals, and traditional tales about trees. While she draws mainly on folklore and myths, Alette has also developed original stories in collaboration with scientists. Alette is a member of the Talking Trees Storytellers at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, as well as an award-winning children's fiction author. Her first book, *How to Make a Golem (and Terrify People)*, which draws on Scottish and Yiddish folklore, won the 2011 Kelpies Prize.



### Susi Woodmas

Susi was born in Dumfries and grew up in a house where everyday news was like a story being told. She has been an active

storyteller for some years now and appears to her audiences as Susi Sweet Pea the Fairy. A lover of enchantment, her favourite tales usually incorporate the wee folk, dragons and giants. Susi's repertoire includes travellers' tales, Scots folk tales and tales that she has written for children in Scots. Susi likes to explore Scots poetry, songs and tales and uses these in her work where she can. Susi's working background is in the Care sector and she plays a variety of instruments such as the native fairy flute, acoustic guitar and bodhran drum.



### Daru McAleece

Daru's storytelling journey really began with listening to the stories that trees told him, and he is now a Druid Storyteller, performer

and visual artist whose storytelling is fuelled by a love of Celtic myths, science fiction and nature. The mythic 'earth-tales' he shares come from the Druid/Celtic traditions of Britain, Ireland and the Celtic lands and are influenced by our connection to Nature, often with a magical transformation at their heart. Daru grew up around Edinburgh in the shadow of Arthur's Seat and spent much time as a child in the Borders. His father was a Leith Docker and his earliest memories are of epic, sprawling and funny improvised stories his father told him.





## Whose Story is Leading in Regeneration?

As a storyteller I am convinced that a story-led approach to community engagement has a lot to offer. In top-down regeneration the complaint is that people don't feel that they have any input to what happens to the places where they live.

Their stories and stories of local context haven't been heard or written into proposals and neither have their 'imagined futures' – those dreams they might want to see realised. Local Authorities have struggled to engage with communities and many would admit failure. When we speak of a Local Authority, the very language speaks volumes about where the authority or power lies.

I believe, however, that it is possible to have a creative and fun approach in working within communities to develop ideas which are properly considered. If we want to turn things around and give local communities some authority in what might happen, then we need to make sure that they are the authors of the stories which are heard and these stories must be seen to be the drivers for change.

Much of community consultation has been tokenistic and unimaginative and has filled countless glossy official publications which lie largely untouched in piles in public buildings. Yet there are ways of working which people can really engage with and enjoy. Story-gathering is the first crucial step in the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach, where the stories are then used to 'fly kites' – ideas for future development. The whole community can then be involved in selecting ideas in a very open way – choosing which kites should remain up there in the sky – and further developing the stories of 'what might be'. Where people see their own stories headlining in development proposals, they really take ownership of the projects, and feel part of it. We have a lot to learn from this creative and



participative way of working and it goes without saying that there must be an investment of time, commitment and funding to make sure that any engagement is properly worked through.

Just as important as generating ideas and deciding on priorities is the ongoing dialogue at different stages of implementation of any proposals. We are getting better at using the softer indicators of development in evaluation and at monitoring where people's stories are recognised and valued. Although I am not totally convinced that the selection of the 'most' significant story of change is always the most important thing, as all the gathered and ordered material always contains a wealth of wisdom to be highlighted and shared, Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology is one way in which large groups of people can have ongoing involvement in any development process. Stories of change are very much about heart and mind and where these are gathered they can be used to draw out patterns, common themes and divergences.



**Elma Johnson** Members of the storytelling community will be saddened to hear of Elma Johnson's death. Elma was a well-known Shetland storyteller who had learned many of her stories directly from Tom Henderson, a writer, storyteller and first curator of the Shetland Museum. Elma had a real passion for Shetland, its culture, heritage and language and was well known for the storytelling, traditional music and dance session called *In Aboot Da Night* that she held in her house. Elma will be missed by the storytelling community in Shetland and further afield.

The Herald published an obituary by **Shona Main** which you can still read on their website.

## Blairgowrie's Own

As 2011 came to an end, Blairgowrie and Rattray named Sheila Stewart 'Citizen of the Year'. Sheila has received many well-earned honours, but it is especially important to be recognised by her own home town and celebrated for an outstanding contribution to the life of the community over many years.

An emotional Sheila said, 'This means more to me than receiving the MBE. My mother would be so proud because this is a recognition by Blairgowrie for the contribution my people have made to the town. I am accepting the award on behalf of my family and the Travelling community.' So, 'here's a health to the company' – Sheila Stewart is a woman you don't meet every day.

What I'm sure of is that when an imaginative approach is taken to show communities that their voice is being heard, then people will be more convinced about ideas of local empowerment, authority and authorship.



**Russell McLarty** is Co-ordinator of a Church of Scotland Priority Areas Project – *Chance to Thrive* – which looks to support eight local community partnership initiatives with volunteer mentoring support groups.

[rmclarty@cofscotland.org.uk](mailto:rmclarty@cofscotland.org.uk)



## The Joys of the Storytelling Teacher



Over the past twenty years or so, I've both taught and told stories... often simultaneously. Although schools have undergone many changes in that time, I've perhaps changed my teaching a little less than many teachers have. That's because I was lucky enough to be introduced to both storytelling and the use of storytelling in education in the early 90's in rural Minnesota.

As a student naturalist at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Centre, I taught environmental education, much through the medium of storytelling. Taking groups out into the forests I told them stories of the animals, trees and birds that fill that magnificent place, followed by stories round the campfire under the stars.

Later on, in classrooms in inner city Glasgow, I started to gain an insight and appreciation of the amazing transformations that occur when young people are given the chance to tell their own stories. So through my work as a teacher I also became a storyteller. Now I wear both caps through the week, though often it feels like I just wear the one big hat, that of the teaching storyteller, or perhaps the storytelling teacher.

Now interesting times for both education and storytelling are here. You can't fail to have heard of Curriculum for Excellence with four Capacities (that enable young people to be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors), Learning Outcomes galore and

cross-curricular approaches to teaching. There is a big new educational playing field in Scotland, and the great news is that storytelling fits perfectly into this new model of learning, active learning being a large focus.

Storytelling and active learning? Oh yes! Tell a story to a class and you'll see their eyes light up, hear the cogs and wheels of little minds whirr... add in a couple of rhymes, a refrain, a little action to join in with – and bingo! CfE delivered! Wonderful for both educators and learners, as we teach and learn while having the great experience of story sharing. But what really strikes me is that storytelling delivered every bit of the previous 5 to 14 Guidelines as well. And I would bet that storytelling will still be delivering whatever replaces Curriculum for Excellence as the 'new' way of teaching in years to come. Storytelling has been humankind's foremost form of communicating ideas throughout history after all.

We know that storytelling works so well in education as it is stimulating, dynamic, inspiring and a platform to learning in many (if not potentially all) areas of the curriculum. But crucially, I think we must be careful not to see it as just a handy way to deliver CfE. As soon as we pin specific learning outcomes on a story we begin to limit the potential of the story in terms of the ideas, thoughts and inspirations that the story holds.

A story told, by its nature, has a 'High Ceiling, Low Threshold'.

This is the educational term for activities that allow all learners in a class or group to maximise their learning from the one activity: the threshold to access the learning is low enough so that even the most challenged learners can participate, but the activity has a high ceiling of potential learning that will stretch even the most able in the group. Even though it's where I started in education, I've yet to come across something more effective than storytelling that does this.

For example, take a story such as 'The Three Little Pigs'. As the storyteller you have complete control over the content (vocabulary, phrasing and expression in the telling). That allows you to sit with a group of children with a wide spectrum of ability yet engage all.

While some listeners will be beginning to build simple blocks of vocabulary through listening to the story, others will be enriched by the adjectives, adverbs and figures of speech that you as the teller include. I've enjoyed experiencing this process with classes where we have worked on retellings of stories in both oral and written form.

I've seen learners who at long last were able to write a meaningful sentence, ones who suddenly began to write with a bit of flare ('Curses! Snarled the wolf) and those who took the story and transformed it into something unique and out of the ordinary, all from the same telling.

And I've not even started on what they did when it came to telling the story to others... those who at last found their voice, the natural comedians who had a platform for their performance, those who managed to work with someone else effectively, those who found pride in being a part of their school; successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors!

Oh, and by the way, we all had fun too!

**Fergus McNicol**  
[fergus\\_mcnicol@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:fergus_mcnicol@yahoo.co.uk)





## Blethers from Burns



Scotland's best and boldest storyteller, Robert Burns, is being given a new lease of life at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum (RBBM) in Alloway. Famous for his tall tales of witches, ghaists and houlets, Burns celebrated his 253rd birthday on 25th January.

As he can't be here in person, we have to celebrate for him – so come and join us in the year ahead!

6,000 school children visit the museum and cottage site every year to be inspired by the places that encouraged Burns to write. One new workshop being offered for the first time in 2012 is *Time for Rhyme* – a poetry session where pupils get to write poetry inside the birthplace cottage. Armed with clipboards and pencils, they look closely at the objects and places that were familiar to Burns, learning a series of writing techniques as they progress through the rooms of the cottage.

A unique and interactive element to the sessions are the 'graffiti' they get to make and take away with them. The cottage is decorated inside with the names and stories of visitors from the last 130 years; the pupils can see how people left their mark on the Burns story, they

can learn about Burns' own epigrams, and then write their own to take away with them. Using adhesive acetate sheets, the pupils can also stick their own words on the drawers, walls, and windows of their classrooms – in a non-permanent way, of course!

Objects often hold the key to a story: RBBM looks after more than 5,000 of them. But only a fraction of these can be on display at any one time, so the museum has started offering talks and tours by its knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff and volunteers to tell the story of those hidden away in the stores. Held every Wednesday at 3pm these talks allow the stories to come to light, increase access to the collections and make a visit to RBBM even more special.

Digitisation Project Officer Karen Cornfield and Curator Amy Miller are working hard to digitise the collection, so that even people who cannot visit the museum in person can examine the treasures kept there. The project will be launched later this year – so keep your eyes on the website [www.burnsmuseum.org.uk](http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk) for news and info. Some lovely things have recently come to light, thanks to the work of Karen and Amy, among them a piece of paper decorated with birds – possibly doodled by the Bard suffering from momentary writers' block?

Another wonderful strand to the Burns story is the connection between Burns and India. The poetry of Burns is known to many Indians and India's national poet (and author of the national anthem), Rabindranath Tagore, was also inspired by Scotland's most famous son, translating *Auld Lang Syne* and *Ye Banks and Braes* for a Bengali audience. The museum celebrates this connection with its new exhibition *Singing a Nation into Being*, which opens on Sunday 29th January and runs until 4th March.

And if you like your poems and stories with a more contemporary feel, come down to RBBM at 7pm on 13th March for a night with Jamaican poet Kwame Dawes, an event organised in partnership with StAnza, Scotland's International Poetry Festival. As Burns very nearly moved to Jamaica prior to the publication of the Kilmarnock Edition, this brings the Burns story round full circle.

### Esther Rutter

Robert Burns Birthplace Museum  
01292 430315

[erutter@nts.org.uk](mailto:erutter@nts.org.uk)

[www.burnsmuseum.org.uk](http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk)





## Scotland's a Blether!

Here's a snapshot of some of the storytelling groups and clubs across the country. Make sure you're on the Centre's mailing list to get monthly updates on storytelling clubs and groups in your area.

### 1. Highlands and Islands – Inverness Bothy

Song and Storytelling Club is starting up in Inverness, hosted by Brian O'hEadhra and George Livingstone. The club will meet the first Thursday of each month at 8.00, upstairs at La Tortilla Asesina, Castle Street, Inverness. Can you tell a story, sing a traditional song, or enjoy a good ol' cèilidh? Come along and join in the craic. Bidh mòran fàilte ort. Goan yersel! Guest performer and local artists will be performing every month, entry by donation. [Contact Brian O'hEadhra b.ohedhra@gmail.com](mailto:Contact Brian O'hEadhra b.ohedhra@gmail.com), 07717 224360 [www.inbhirnis.com/bothan.html](http://www.inbhirnis.com/bothan.html)

### 2. Tayside and North Fife – Blether Tay-gither

Blether Tay-gither meets every month on the last Tuesday to share stories and songs on a variety of themes. We also aim to take storytelling out into the community by organising family events, forging links with other community groups and taking part in local festivals and events throughout Dundee, Tayside, Angus and North Fife.

Our tellers come from a wide range of backgrounds, from professional storytellers to those who just want to listen for now, from students to OAPs. Our meetings are informal and at the moment take place in The Burgh Coffee House, Castle Street, Dundee. [Contact Sheila Kinninmonth sheila@blethertaygither.org.uk](mailto:Contact Sheila Kinninmonth sheila@blethertaygither.org.uk) or see [www.blethertaygither.org.uk](http://www.blethertaygither.org.uk)

### 3. Borders – Borders Bards

Over the Christmas break some members met, sharing a small Winter Solstice celebration with seasonal readings, poetry and a small Druid ceremony.

Our session started again properly in January, with Mary Kenny offering beautiful tales and songs of the Faerie folk. We were joined by new members from nearby Walkerburn and from Musselburgh and shared tales of creativity and hope, and dreams to inspire us for the year ahead.

Each month we aim to loosely work with the themes of the Celtic/Druid festivals, or the seasons. New members are always welcome at our cosy gatherings at the County Inn in Peebles. Meet us monthly on the 2nd Tuesday in the main bar at 7.30pm; £3 donation.

Our next session is on Valentine's Day, where we will be taking the theme of the Celtic/Druidic festival of Imbolc, sharing tales on tenderness and the heart, Brigid, snowdrops and the coming of Spring.

### Music, Verse and Stories

The session has been running well with

its regular mix of guest performers, local artists and the poet Howard Purdie warmly hosting proceedings. In early December we were host to the brilliant storyteller and puppeteer Poppy Brown.

We celebrated Robert Burns by Candlelight on 5th February, and from March onwards we have a host of talented artists lined up, including Innerleithen band Spoonthrift and the Borders musician Kenny Speirs. Local poets, storytellers and performers also provide the core Bardic talent each month.

So do come and join us the first Sunday of each month 8pm-11pm and you will also get a free light supper, along with a warm Borders welcome! (£3 donation) [Contact Daru McAleece david@mcalleece.com](mailto:Contact Daru McAleece david@mcalleece.com) 0785 384 5019.

### 4. Perthshire – Silver Branch

The winter season has been spent honing Hodja stories, Jack tales and feasting together. One of our members was called upon to don her Elf outfit and walk with the reindeer, tell stories and help Santa at Pitlochry and Dunkeld Christmas fairs, and another told tales in a cosy Yurt. This year we hope to take out tales here and there in Perthshire. We are organising a series of seasonal Handmade Tales with bushcraft expert Willow Lohr and Storyteller Claire Hewitt on 3th-4th March in Highland Perthshire. We meet on the 2nd Wednesday of every month and being a small group we can gather informally round people's kitchens. [Contact Claire Hewitt www.clairehewitt.co.uk](mailto:Contact Claire Hewitt www.clairehewitt.co.uk) or 01887 820339 or 07765 166034.

### 5. Fife – Kingdom Tales

Autumn gave us all a chance to look at ways of becoming more established as a storytelling group. The first move was to change the name from Kingdom Krack to Kingdom Tales as we felt the new name gave us a clearer identity. Along with a new name came the opportunity to look at our plans for the future.

As we grow as individual storytellers and as a group, it is important to become more involved in local events. In line with this I was invited to a meeting of Fife's Creative Learning Network which provides a networking opportunity for those involved in the creative sector. My aim was to look for opportunities to use storytelling in a wide range of environments and although this is a developing process, it looks like there is potential.

As a group, we would like to offer our warmest congratulations to Beverley Bryant, a long standing member, who has recently been accepted onto the Scottish Storytelling Centre's directory of storytellers - well done Beverley! [Contact Andrew Elston apelston@btinternet.com](mailto:Contact Andrew Elston apelston@btinternet.com)

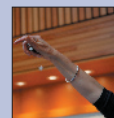
### 6. Glasgow – Better Crack Club and Even Better Crack Club

The Better Crack Club for adults meets on the third Friday of the month at Tchai Ovna Tea House, 4 Otago Lane, Glasgow, starting at 7.30pm; the next two meetings are 17th Feb and 16th Mar. Join us for a relaxed, friendly evening of stories, poems, songs and music; everyone is welcome!

The Even Better Crack Club – storytelling for ALL the family meets in the Fairfield Room, The Mitchell Library, Granville Street, Charing Cross, Glasgow. Meetings are from 10.30am to 12.00pm and the next two dates are 18th Feb and 24th Mar.

Glasgow Storytellers met at 'The Gathering' on 4th February to explore the way forward for storytelling in Glasgow and the West of Scotland. They are also looking forward to an event in St. Mungo's Museum on Wednesday 29th February where Polish storyteller Michał Malinowski, will be performing with Scottish tellers. [Contact Frances Logan loganfrances@gmail.com](mailto:Contact Frances Logan loganfrances@gmail.com)

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Storytelling across Scotland







## 7. Grampian – Grampian Association of Storytellers

GAS meets for our Friday Fling every second Friday of the month, usually at Queen's Cross Church, Aberdeen, for telling and listening to stories at 7.15 for 7.30pm start. We have a great line up of guest storytellers this half year and some very funny and intriguing themes for our DIY sessions. All (over 12 years old) are welcome. **Contact Sean Gordon**  
[www.grampianstorytellers.org.uk](http://www.grampianstorytellers.org.uk)

## 8. Edinburgh – Edinburgh's Guid Crack club

Edinburgh's Guid Crack club has had a busy few months. In October we had an extra long session to cater both for

the regulars and those coming over from the Ithacan evening as part of the Storytelling Festival. The plan was that each teller's story would follow on from the previous one, which worked after a fashion! We've enjoyed some wonderful evenings in the company of guests Claire Druett (Sep) and Senga Munro (Nov). Donald Smith hosted our open December session and in January we had Kati Waitzman who has been Inspired by Burns since her arrival in Scotland. As Spring approaches we will be welcoming Peter Snow and Daniel Allison as well as having our customary Ceilidh Culture meeting on March 30th.

**Contact Andy Hunter**  
[andy@storybikes.co.uk](mailto:andy@storybikes.co.uk)

## Bothan

Bothan, Edinburgh's Gaelic night club meets at the Canons' Gait pub downstairs, 232 Canongate. Evenings are 8.30pm-1am and the cost is £5/£3 on the door. Next dates are Friday 2nd March with newly formed band Cruinn ([www.cruinn.net](http://www.cruinn.net)) and Friday 23rd March with the fantastic duo Sileas.

**Contact**  
[bothanduneideann@googlemail.com](mailto:bothanduneideann@googlemail.com)

## 9. Lothian – BagaTelle

Well, blow me down with a feather. Last time I wrote about BagaTelle I waxed lyrical about no longer being nomadic and the joys of having a stable place. Well, get your address books out and pencils to the ready, we are moving again. Unfortunately our time with the Museum has had to come to an end due to staffing problems, but no sooner was the news out that Midlothian Libraries came to our rescue. Dalkeith Library here we come!

The good news at the start of the year is that our membership has increased and there is much afoot to keep us occupied and stimulated. Links have been made with Black Diamond Radio Station (through Jim Aird's *Sunday Best* and Moira Clayton's *Women on the Loose* programmes); Tyne and Esk Writers Group are open to sharing the platform with storytellers at their next event; Vogrie Park Rangers are keen to work with us and have scheduled storytelling into their summer programme of events. This will include storytelling sessions, storywalks around the park and the development of environmental storytelling boxes. Join us if you dare! **Contact Lea Taylor**  
[lea-andy@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:lea-andy@tiscali.co.uk)

## The future of the training programme

### Connecting with Culture



For 2012 Scotland's storytellers, songmakers, musicians and dancers have come together to offer a feast of participative culture for all those who are involved in the arts, education and community making across Scotland.

The aims of the new training programme, which will receive cross-artform input from Gica Loening, will be:

- To enhance our capacity for life by assisting people to understand, interpret and influence the world around them
- To enrich our experience by bringing colour, passion and intensity to our emotions, thoughts and imaginations
- To provide a supportive environment in which people can build their skills, confidence and self-esteem
- To enable all those who live and visit here to share in Scotland's culture, celebrating diversity and hosting an international web of folk connections.

The courses and workshop programme is developed along five strands. Skills (beginner-1, intermediate-2, advanced-3) will focus on individual development; Learning for Life is for all those engaged in formal or informal education; Themes and Traditions introduces cultural resources and themes for interpretation (aimed both at groups and individuals); Skills in Context explores the relationship between creative practice and particular areas of social engagement or concern. Professional Development is open to all but focuses on professional support for artists or those using artistic skills within their professions. In practice this also overlaps with the other stands.

*"Whenever I feel like I'm bogging down, creatively speaking, I sign up for a workshop at the Scottish Storytelling Centre and I always come away inspired"*

Alette Willis, 2012 workshop participant  
[www.alettejwillis.com](http://www.alettejwillis.com)

## Regional Training Opportunities

Some of the training events set out in 'Connecting with Culture' will also be available in the autumn of 2012 in a range of locations in Scotland. You can book or commission a workshop for your own location and organisation through the Trad Arts Hub at the Scottish Storytelling Centre by contacting [gica@scottishstorytellingcentre.com](mailto:gica@scottishstorytellingcentre.com) or [davide@scottishstorytellingcentre.com](mailto:davide@scottishstorytellingcentre.com) or 0131 652 3272.

## Walking the Stories

**Essie Stewart and Alec Williamson** are widely respected members of the Highland Traveller community.



Each year, well into adulthood, both of them went on the road from early spring through to autumn, hawking, pearl fishing, and doing seasonal work. Both are heirs to the great Gaelic storytelling tradition. Working with Alec and Essie, over the past fifteen years and more, made me increasingly aware of the way they see the world, where the landscape and the places within it teem with stories – personal, familial, tribal and traditional.

I began to try and weave this sense of intimate interconnection between tale and location into my own storytelling work, particularly when I was leading storywalks. At the same time I noticed that on the walks, during the gaps between my stories – the walking bits themselves – members of the group would chat enthusiastically, getting to know each other, telling their own personal stories or stories about the places we were passing through. Why shouldn't these tales become an acknowledged part of the walk experience?

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In 2010 I was awarded a Creative Scotland Storytelling bursary for a project called *Walking the Stories*, which drew directly on my experiences working with Alec and Essie.

Five storywalks were planned in different parts of the Highlands, each organised in partnership with a group which had a particular focus of interest, and members of the general public would also be very welcome to take part. I would tell legends and traditional tales of the places we were walking through and, as we went along, members of the group would be encouraged to contribute specialist knowledge, as well as general observations. At the end of the walk, wherever possible, we would gather for further chat over light refreshments.

In the end, there were seven walks. On the best attended, which was organised in collaboration with the Highland archaeology group ARCH, fifty hardy folk tramped to the Black Rock Gorge in Evanton. The gorge is a narrow vertiginous cleft buried in woodland, and at its very bottom was the Lady of Balconie, a prisoner of the Prince of Darkness. The lady was chained to a rusty chair, and guarded by two giant hounds.

Her story was told alongside contributions concerning the geology, the local and natural history of the place, and of course its archaeology. There were two walks on Iona, shared with my partner Dr E Mairi MacArthur, who is an authority on the crofting traditions of the island. A mix of residents and visitors to the Iona Community gave thoughtful, sometimes passionate commentaries on the insular legends, informed both by local knowledge and Christian commitment.

On a chilly beach in Golspie, a group of young people from the youth club were joined at dusk by other local folk, ranging from pre-schoolers to over 70s to hear tales

of the sea, and later to have their own stories recorded and to take part in animation sessions.

Folklore and archaeology met, and stared lovingly into each other's eyes, on a second walk with members of ARCH. This time we were on Knock Farril Hill above Strathpeffer, where, local legend says, an Iron Age fort whose stones really are fused together by fire was destroyed in a vengeful act of arson by a disgruntled Fingalian warrior.

And, on Easter Saturday 2011, the final walk took a group of forty people and a dog through the cobbled streets of the port of Cromarty, whose stories were chronicled by the 19th century geologist, journalist and folklorist Hugh Miller. Along with Alec Williamson and Essie Stewart, Miller was one of the chief inspirers of *Walking the Stories*, so this last walk was a grand way to round off the project. In the tea and biscuits session afterwards, many spooky stories of the town were exchanged.

Throughout the project, I much valued and enjoyed the contributions made to the walks by others – both experts and lay people – and felt that the richness of context they provided encouraged the traditional stories to flourish, and generally expanded the scope of the storywalk. I hope that at least some of the folk who came on the walks, who might never have heard a contemporary storyteller before, thought that this was an experience worth repeating. And the experience of planning and walking the stories of the north of Scotland was absolutely invaluable when I was writing my collection *Highland Folk Tales*, which will be published by The History Press in April, and will include stories from Hugh Miller, Essie Stewart, and Alec Williamson, the heroes of *Walking the Stories*.

**Bob Pegg**  
catsback@gmail.com





## Support in Mind

### Storytelling and craft offer respite to carers of people suffering mental health problems

One in four adults in Scotland will at some point in their life experience a diagnosable mental health problem. Fortunately, the vast majority of people do not have to be admitted to psychiatric wards and can be supported and treated within their community.



It is estimated that 35% of those recovering from mental illness have the support of carers, who may or may not be family members. Unfortunately, supporting someone with a mental illness can have a negative impact on a carer's mental and physical wellbeing, leading to feelings of isolation, loss and bewilderment.

Support in Mind Scotland works to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of people affected by mental illness, including family members, partners, carers and supporters. It can be difficult to reach families affected by mental illness, in part because of the stigma attached to mental illness and also because those caring for/supporting someone with a mental illness often do not recognise themselves as carers. Furthermore, quite often carers are just too mentally exhausted themselves to access any form of support.

In July 2010, the Scottish Government announced funding of £5 million over five years to be channeled through the voluntary

sector to help support and sustain carers, including young carers, through enabling better access to short breaks or respite care.

Support in Mind Scotland's Edinburgh Carers Support Project, in collaboration with the Scottish Storytelling Centre, aims to offer carers of those experiencing mental health problems the opportunity to get some 'time out' in the form of storytelling sessions.

It is hoped that by attending these *Handmade Tales* sessions, facilitated by storyteller Claire Hewitt, the carers will have the opportunity to socialise with like-minded people, have some 'me' time, learn new or forgotten skills, reflect and think about the future and more than anything else find a voice to tell their own stories. This in turn will help them to reconnect and rebuild strong relationships with family and friends – especially with the person that they are carer of.

Ultimately, the sessions will give the carers the opportunity just to have a break away from their caring role, and act as a reminder that they too are important and they need to look after themselves.

If you would like to find out more about the sessions, please get in touch.

#### Lorraine Keith

Edinburgh Carers Officer  
0131 662 2280

[lkeith@supportinmindscotland.org.uk](mailto:lkeith@supportinmindscotland.org.uk)  
[www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk](http://www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk)

**Handmade Tales** is a place to relax, gather round the table, and have fun discovering – or rediscovering your creative side! In the supportive and friendly space of the Storytelling Centre I will lead you through an eight-week programme of Storytelling and hand crafts/art activities linked to the season of Spring. And whilst the hands are busy felting, stitching, thumping clay or making bread, stories can be shared and tales told. These sessions are designed especially for people who support and care for a member of their family who has mental health problems. You will have space to breathe, time to gather your resources and give yourself a break. Storytelling and handwork will give you the skills to express who you are, connect with forgotten dreams and celebrate life and the growth of something new. These sessions are also about developing new friendships and having time to reconnect with family and old friends. You don't have to be a performer or artist, just come with a willingness to have some fun, laugh, relax and learn something completely new! The sessions will be running in Edinburgh at the Scottish Storytelling Centre every Tuesday between 1pm-4pm from 10th April to 29th May.

#### Claire Hewitt

Storyteller and handmaker

## Learning the Telling Trade

Whether you are exploring your own potential as a storyteller, looking for innovative CPD opportunities or are just after a stimulating, fun and memorable participative experience, we are sure our programme has something for you. Here is a sample of what we offer:

**Telling Scottish Folktale** (Intermediate skills | Traditions, communities & cultures) Sat 31 Mar | 10am-1pm | £30/£26 Network Members

Get back to the roots of Scotland's oral storytelling heritage with a day that explores folktales and their contexts, and offers some pointers on telling the tales today.

**Traveller Traditions** (Themes | Traditions, communities & cultures) Sat 31 Mar | 2-5pm | £30/£26 Network Members

Discover the story tradition of Scotland's Travelling people, and pick up some tales and tips for re-telling.

**Stories Count** (Storytelling in practice | Learning) Sat 28 Apr | 10am-4pm | £48/£44 Network Members

A practical workshop for teachers and classroom assistants who want to find fun new ways into maths.

We are also always keen to discuss tailor-made training, CPD or interactive workshops for your group, school or organisation. Please call 0131 652 3272 or email [gica@scottishstorytellingcentre.com](mailto:gica@scottishstorytellingcentre.com) or [davide@scottishstorytellingcentre.com](mailto:davide@scottishstorytellingcentre.com) for more information.



## 2011 Just Another Year

Once New Year was over, I was going to settle back and enjoy a quiet year. Did someone mention schemes of mice and men?

**First** came a little gentle storytelling to elderly and disabled people at the Resource Centre where I was scolded by a 93 years young gentleman for telling the story as he had been told it when he was six years old, but not having the right name for the hero. This led to an argument between him and a lady of 99 years as to what the right name was. It was finally decided either name could be used and peace was restored.

Next came my wife Morag's new car being rammed in the car park at Fort William by a large 4x4 and all the resulting upheaval. Just to keep me young and active.

**February** crept up quietly with estate management meetings and I decided I needed a tractor to carry out work on the croft and of course that developed into a story I may tell some day. The highlight of February though was a trip to the Japanese Consulate in Edinburgh to do some storytelling and to try a new Japanese whiskey – a hard job but somebody's got to do it.

**March** brought the first groups to Fasach for storytelling in the Bothan on the croft. Then a visit from storyteller Kati Waitzmann for a tale or two.

**April** started with a request from an American family for some genealogy, a story or two of their ancestors. A trip to Inverness to audition for a film part, one or two small story gigs, then a family birthday party.

**May** brought visitors from Switzerland looking for stories of sea monsters and wishing to visit places where some of my stories happened. It was a real pleasure to oblige. Mid month was taken up with groups from America and Australia for storytelling in the Bothan and on the hill.



The last weekend brought the Skye Storytelling Festival and also brought the worst weather in May for many years – gales, pouring rain and cold. At the same time the volcanic eruption cancelled and delayed flights but fortunately our storytellers all got here eventually, with one lady showing enough commitment to make the trip by bus, ferry, train and hired car.

Unfortunately many of those coming to the festival cancelled either for travel reasons or weather and we ended up with a very small but appreciative audience.

**June** started wet but was brightened up by a visit from Sheila Wee and Phillip Julie from Singapore whom I took to the story places in Skye. At the end of the month I received the rather unusual request to give a story at a funeral.

In **July** I welcomed a small group from Ireland and another one seeking information on local genealogy as their great grand father had come from Glendale.

In **August** I had been invited again to Belladrum Festival, which has featured storytelling since its 2nd year. I have attended the six previous editions but unfortunately I was unable to attend this one. I suppose you are bound to miss out sometimes. Towards the end of the month a visit from an Italian lady for stories and druidical tales.

In **September** Morag, Grace (our great granddaughter), and I went to a caravan site for a holiday break. It was very nice but I ended up telling stories to some caravaners. Later on in the month I did some work for a Book Bus project, then I was off to Orkney for a few days to do some storytelling.

In **October** I was off to Germany for the Aachen Festival, as magical as ever, and then a trip to Holland where I met school children full of questions, a real highlight. The month ended back in Edinburgh and Skye for the Scottish International Storytelling Festival. Exciting times!

In **November** I was back home to Auld Claes and we had a leak in the upstairs bathroom and needed a new ceiling in the kitchen. We also needed new insulation and new floor tiles in both. The rich tapestry of life?

**December** was quiet apart from three genealogy inquiries. And so rolled in another year, out with the old, in with the new. Already the bookings have started.

**George Macpherson**  
[georgefasach@hotmail.com](mailto:georgefasach@hotmail.com)





## A Journey to Tigh nam Bodach

### House of the Old Man in Glenlyon – For the Less Hardy Pilgrim

Inspired by the tale of the pilgrimage of Donald Smith and Andy Hunter, who in May 2011 walked part of Adomnan's route through the Highlands from Glen Orchy to Glenlyon – see *To Be A Pilgrim* Blethers 23, page 11 – I decided to go and see the mysterious Bodach Stones for myself. Having read much about these enigmatic and ancient stones situated in Glen Caillieach, my reward for completing the Scottish Folklore course with a Masters dissertation on Scottish nature and weather stories was a weekend holiday to visit the site.

Milton Eonan Cottage B&B in Glenlyon proved to be the best place to base our expedition, as proprietor Melanie O'Flynn is a most generous and well-informed host. Melanie has been one of six volunteers who spent a weekend at the end of summer 2011 rebuilding and restoring Tigh nam Bodach, the House of the Old Man. Under the supervision of Norman Haddow, a dry-stane dyker from Glenlyon, the volunteers completely renovated the stone family's winter house. Over many years of wind, rain, and sheep sheltering, the tiny bothy was in a sad and neglected state of disrepair, as you can see quite clearly from Donald and Andy's photos. But by the time of my visit in September, the work of Norman's team was standing proud, with the family of sacred water-stones grouped in front of their house facing down Glen Caillieach, in keeping with the tradition. The scene was ancient and timeless.

Melanie helped me and my partner to plan an easy route to the stones: we drove up Glenlyon to Pubil, and parked below the hydro-dam at Loch Lyon, then taking the well-maintained track on the north side of the loch, it took us just 2 hours and twenty minutes to reach the Bodach stones in Glen Caillieach, and that was including a couple of short, juice breaks.



Unlike Donald and Andy's route, we only had one very shallow ford to cross, and our feet were still dry by the time we reached the stones. What a treat when we reached them! The little bothy is a work of art, as you can see from the pictures. We sheltered by the river, ate our packed lunches – doesn't food taste wonderful, out in the fresh air, after a good walk?! – then we admired the old man, old woman, and children. I placed a couple of presents on top of the bothy, a shell and sea-smoothed, beach glass from Troon; there were plenty of other offerings on the turf roof already: an amethyst, quartz stones and a clay pot. When we felt suitably rested, turned around and headed back the way we had come.

All in all this was a fabulous day out, and the stones just stunning, sitting humbly in front of their now splendid, winter house. Melanie told us that the stone family and their house form a Celtic shrine. It's recognised to be the oldest, uninterrupted pagan ritual in Britain, some say in all of Europe. The stones are safely returned to the house at Halloween, to spend the winter inside, and brought back out at Beltane (1st May).

I couldn't recommend this mini pagan pilgrimage enough, and if you fancy a friendly and cosy B&B, rich in history and folklore, then Milton Eonan Cottage is the right place for you.

[www.miltoneonan.com](http://www.miltoneonan.com)  
01887 866337

**Allison Galbraith**  
[al.story@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:al.story@hotmail.co.uk)

## Allison's Tale

As a storyteller, I was of course fascinated by the story behind this strange and unique ritual, and I found this tale in Anne Ross's book, *Folklore of the Scottish Highlands* (2000, Tempus Publishing). Here is a brief summary:

Many years ago, during a winter snowstorm, a giant and his wife came down the mountainside and asked the inhabitants of the glen if they would shelter them from the elements. The people who lived in the glen were happy to look after the supernatural couple. After all, the giantess was pregnant. A thatched house was built, and the pair lived there for the rest of the winter.

During her stay in the glen, the woman gave birth to a baby girl. While the couple stayed to look after their daughter (*Nighean*), the weather was always pleasant and the crops and animals thrived.



When the family decided it was time to leave, they promised the locals that as long as they kept the giant's house in good order, then the glen would always be blessed with warm summers and mild winters, and that peace and prosperity would remain with the folk who had shown them such generosity.

It is believed that the House of the Old Man has been maintained from an unknown date, and the group of river stones which represent the family has been placed inside for the winter and brought out for the summer ever since this supernatural event.



## Highland Folktales

The illustrations below are the work of artist and illustrator John Hodgkinson. They are an outstanding example of how storytellers – in this case Bob Pegg – and artists can inspire each other, and delve into the meanings, passions and pictures of a tale.



## BOOK BLETHERS

**Donald's** round-up of exciting storytelling titles out now

The 2011 Kelpie Prize was won by another storytelling artist, Alette Willis, with *How To make a Golem (and Terrify People)*. It's a great story for younger listeners/readers with just the right mix of scariness and reassurance. But it is much more than that. At its heart it is a moral tale about growing up, gaining confidence and taking responsibility for one's actions.

*Tis Sixty Years Since*, edited by Ebberhard Bort, came out just in time for the Carrying Stream Festival, organised in November by Edinburgh University Folk Club in honour of Hamish Henderson. The book contains an unrivalled sheaf of frontline accounts, and some retrospective reflections, on the Scottish Folk Revival in which Hamish Henderson had such a pivotal role. As the Traditional Arts move into the cultural mainstream in Scotland, this is an invaluable account of recent decades and a platform for discussion and debate – for decades to come.

*My Storytime Bible* by Renita Boyle, illustrated by Melanie Florian, is rooted in the virtues of live storytelling. Clear, compact and lively narratives animate every page. The inspiration of timeless faith stories combines with imagination and superb pictures.

# COMING SOON!

Buy your tickets for events at the Scottish Storytelling Centre online

@[www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk](http://www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk)

HOW TO MAKE A GOLEM (AND TERRIFY PEOPLE)

Alette Willis  
(Florin Books)

ISBN 9780 8631 5840 £5.99

TIS SIXTY YEARS SINCE

Ebberhard Bort  
(Grace Notes Publications)

ISBN 9781 9076 76109 £9.95

MY STORYTIME BIBLE

Renita Boyle  
(Barnabas for Children)

ISBN 9780 8574 60257 £14.50

## Storytelling Diary

by Wendy de Russett  
[tasc.derussett@btinternet.com](mailto:tasc.derussett@btinternet.com)

*The Princess Stone* is a lovely local legend about Malvina, the beautiful daughter of King Fergus. Much troubled by Viking incursions, Fergus gathered a force large enough to fend off the next attack, and took hostage young Harold, the son of King Sven of Denmark. This handsome prince caught the eye of Malvina, who bribed servants to let her visit him, maybe carrying a meal or two. Despite no common language they pledged 'love, not war' and decided to elope, Harold promising Malvina she would become Queen of Denmark. Unawares, their fathers had forged a peace treaty through ambassadors, which included a marriage between their heirs.

When Fergus discovered the disappearance of the pair, he and his men, desperate to break the good news, chased them to the ford at Dulsie on the River Findhorn which, tragically, was in spate. Fearing revenge, the lovers plunged into the raging waters and were drowned. The legend tells us that their bodies were found days later on the far river bank, entwined in each other's arms.

Today, in the sloping woodland nearby, you can find an ancient stone with Pictish carvings that was erected in memory of Malvina and Harold and is called 'The Cairn of the Lovers'.

Originally published in *Knock News*, December 2011.



*The Gillie Dubh*



*The Bredach Stobhach*

These pictures though are just an appetiser for a long term project of Bob Pegg's which is about to emerge in its final form. *Highland Folktales* explores the legacy of Highland mainland storytelling in many of its aspects. The book guides you round the Highlands by story, relating people with place and tale. It is a really rich exploration and tribute to Highland traditions, and to individual storytellers ranging from the great Alex Williamson to Hugh Miller through to Bob's one time neighbour Dolly, who casually told him a great yarn about a 'merrymaid' on the beach beside their homes.

But *Highland Folktales* is also about the art of storytelling now. It is about how one storyteller has garnered a repertoire and developed it in response to people and place. The stories themselves are excellent but the unobtrusive commentary on the background and contexts, along with Bob Pegg's explanation of how he developed and uses the material, are invaluable.

We look forward to the publication of *Highland Folktales* by The History Press (ISBN 9780 7524 60901). This is another classic addition to the living library of story that Scotland's storytellers have produced in recent years.

