

Blog 1: A Kist Full of Gems

As part of Scotland's Year of Stories, Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches ([link to www.tobarandualchais.co.uk](http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk)) is organising two events which will take place at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh at the beginning of May.

Jess Smith is one of three gifted storytellers taking part in 'Stories from the Kist', a special evening of storytelling in Scots and Doric relating to nature and place.

Jess has spent many hours on the website in preparation for the event, listening to stories told by people whom she remembers sitting around the campfire with as a child.

In her first blog, Jess reflects on the significance which recording equipment has had on the preservation of memories and folklore, and the access to them which has been made available through the Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches website.

"Simply ask yourself a question of the old and ancient ways and sure as sunshine, you'll find all the answers you seek within the fantastic Kist o Riches."

Memories nurture our souls. We close our eyes and relax, and remember the passing moments of our lives. The elders who left us so much to ponder- wise words, sad and happy songs, ancient ballads, poetry, and granny's parting words of wisdom. They tell of wonders such as mermaids, selkies, fairies, kelpies, wizards, and wraiths. Memories provide a wealth of tales, superstitions, and healings.

Yet our memories only last as long as we do and those times fade, disappear, lost to the world. When people talk of olden days, it's very much a personal sharing- we can only contribute so much.

Some people recognised that the ways of the past would indeed be dead and buried apart from in books, and that the natural rhythm of the voice would be silenced. Imagine the thoughts of those concerned with this loss when science stepped forward with a machine that could listen and gather those voices- the recorder was born!

What an amazing tool. Out into the open spaces, into the world, went the thirsty gatherers to catch the voices from the wind and secure them forever more onto recording machines; big wheels of ribbons, where the old crofter at the kitchen table relaxed amid their home surroundings and shared to the 'big box' as many tales and memories as they liked.

Traveller folks inside their tents of hazel, switch and twine cramped around the 'big box' and sang into the early hours. They spilt out around blazing campfires and swelt

up their peeps to share for the very first time reels and tunes from their ancient bagpipes.

Lassies sang songs where there were no music notes to write down- the 'box' swallowed everything.

On and on the sturdy collectors ventured, further into the Highlands and Islands, gathering more and more. Tapes filled up, were marked, and stored.

What was becoming clear was that many of the recordings were of the Gaelic. To have Gaelic speakers recorded was crucially important at a time when English was fast overtaking the old tongue in schools and across the country. These voices and dialects were stored on reels and Gaelic students could learn from these recordings, and still do. Doric of the northeast and Scots from Perthshire can be heard too.

Science has since minimised those giant bulky reels. Now it is all digital. At the touch of a button the mystical, magical recordings heard in their natural form are contained and free to all! The Kist o Riches is available to everyone.

Dip a toe inside and allow the nostalgic waves to flow around you. An invitation awaits –take and surround yourself with this sea of recordings.

Traveller tales and balladeers can be found together, along with wise words from the village church minister, memories from the crofts, stories told at a mother's knee or at the old spinning wheel, musings from the ploughman and the shepherd, as they hold down onto a fence post in a howling gale, swearing blind it was an auld cailleach that soured the cow's milk and stole the first lambs.

Where else in the world can you find a gathering of gems more precious than diamonds?

Simply ask yourself a question of the old and ancient ways and sure as sunshine, you'll find all the answers you seek within the fantastic Kist o Riches.

Songs and stories for all, and wisdom for the seekers.

Jess Smith is happy telling any kind of story but her true gift lies in the rich kist of Traveller tales she has gathered since childhood. From a Scottish Traveller family, Jess was privileged to sit round campfires and be enthralled with stories of ancient kings, dragons, and all manner of heroes. She hopes that her storytelling brings people closer to understanding the Traveller community.

More information about the Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches storytelling events is available at https://scottishstorytellingcentre.online.red61.co.uk/events?s=&to=&from=&from_sec=&to_sec=&start_date=07%2F05%2F2022