For centuries live oral storytelling, blended with music and song, has carried Scotland’s voices from generation to generation – and round the world.

This year – its 21st – the Scottish International Storytelling Festival carries this ancient tradition into the future with the stories of Highland and Lowland Scotland, and of the Scots who travelled across the globe.

Journeying from the East come fabulous guest storytellers, gearing up as we speak, to share their stories, traditions and culture – their authentic voices – with visitors from Scotland and further afield.

Jeeva Raghunath and Geeta Ramanujam from India are joined by Malay/Singapura storyteller and puppeteer Kamini M. Ramachandran and Wajuppa Tossa from Thailand. Renowned Bengali scroll artist Gurupada Chitrakar brings his ancient form of storytelling to the Festival, and Mr Shiro Kayano and Mr Tomatsu Nabesawa come all the way from Hokkaido to cement the already strong links between the indigenous Ainu people of Japan and their Scottish friends.

At the Storytelling Centre the cream of live storytelling leads the way, complemented by talks and discussions, film screenings, training workshops, ‘Meet the Storyteller’ sessions, and a special Festival supper for storytellers and network members.

The Festival also works with the National Library of Scotland, Filmhouse, Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, Gladstone’s Land, the Scottish Seabird Centre and other local partners to offer a vibrant programme of adult and family events, all tapping into this year’s rich Eastern Routes theme.

Building on last year’s excellent ‘Festival on Tour’ programme, international guests travel to all corners of Scotland, sharing the Festival experience with local audiences, all supported by the national network of storytelling clubs and groups.

Full Festival programme available early September! Visit www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk for updates.

**CONNECTING VOICES**

**Story, Poetry and Song**

The Storytelling Centre and the Scottish Poetry Library have embarked on an exciting new journey to link up Scotland’s voices through arts of the spoken word.

Creative language along with rhythm and voice music are at the heart of poetry and live storytelling. In addition people are inspired – and sometimes comforted – by the spoken word.

Connecting Voices will involve storytellers and poets working together, but will also encourage talent in local communities through special events, training workshops and web resources.

The project, which is supported by the Creative Scotland Resilience Fund, will get fully into its stride in 2011 – watch this space!
Directory Welcome!

Anna Fancett  Aberdeen
Anna is from South East England. Now based in Aberdeen, she is studying for a PhD in literature, and working part-time in St Margaret’s School for Girls. She enjoys telling folktales, as well as stories about historical or mythological people and events. She works mostly with children and young adults but values the opportunity to work with older adults.

Sheila Kinninmonth  St Andrews, Fife
Sheila loves telling traditional tales from all over the world, especially Scottish folk, fairy and Traveller tales which celebrate ‘oor guid Scots tongue’. A qualified nursery nurse with a degree in early childhood studies, Sheila has 30 years’ experience working with pre-school and primary aged children, using storytelling both to entertain and to support learning.

Tim Porteus  Edinburgh
Tim loves sharing the wonderful world of folklore, mythology and legend, but has also developed an interest in collecting and telling modern urban tales, personal and family stories and reminiscences. He sometimes mixes his storytelling with music, murals, poetry and film making. Qualified in Community Education, Tim uses storytelling with vulnerable and marginalised groups to enhance self belief and confidence.

Tom Pow  Dumfries
Tom’s involvement with storytelling began at Glasgow University Dumfries, when he designed and taught the only university course in storytelling at a Scottish University. He has told stories to a wide variety of audiences from primary school children to older people and, as a creative writer, storytelling has become an integral part of Tom’s work.

Chrisella Ross  Isle of Lewis
Until recently Chrisella worked with the Gaelic Arts Agency as Sgeulachdan/Gaelic Storytelling Project Manager, promoting Gaelic community storytellers and raising the profile of Gaelic storytelling within communities and in schools at local, national and international levels. Now freelance, she has more time to focus on her own storytelling and uses Gaelic stories with children and adults of all ages.

Angie Townsend  East Lothian
Angie loves to tell stories to children, but is also at home storytelling to adults, especially in ceilidh-like settings and story walks. Her stories range from folktales, fairy tales, myths and legends to Scottish stories and battles. Angie is co-founder/writer for ‘Spooky n Kooky’– local history, tales and secrets, brought to life through storytelling.

Marjorie Leithead  Bridge of Weir, Renfrewshire
Marjorie was born and bred in Eyemouth on the East Coast. She has always told family and social history stories to start with, then later stories about Scotland’s people and places. As an English teacher, now retired, she has many years’ experience of working with secondary school pupils, but also enjoys telling to younger children and adults.

Sylvia Troon  Dundee
Sylvia was a freelance puppeteer for almost twenty years, but for the past five has decided to concentrate on storytelling. She likes to tell Scottish tales, and world tales, myths and legends, to all age groups from age three upwards in schools and the community. She also enjoys visiting the elderly, as well as children and adults with special needs.

Tell-a-Story Day 2010
What’s Your Story?
This year Tell-a-Story Day (TASD) falls on Friday 29th October and the Storytelling Centre outreach office are working hard with library and education staff in several local authorities to promote the day to children and families across Scotland.

In the spirit of TASD, why not gather some local friends and colleagues together and organise your own event? TASD is all about cost-free DIY storytelling – celebrating the magic of stories and finding the natural storyteller in all of us. It’s there, just waiting to be released! And we want to hear it! Send us your stories – written, filmed, recorded, painted – and we will post them on the Storytelling Centre’s website for all to see.

The Storytelling Centre provides support for all TASD-ers in the form of free online resources, high quality posters to promote your event, colourful TASD stickers for your budding tale tellers, and of course limitless help and advice.

Groups and individuals who return their TASD event feedback to us receive a special certificate of participation, AND go into a free prize draw to win a 2-hour visit from a local professional storyteller!

Some of you are already blazing the trail for TASD in your local area – please tell us what you have planned for this year and we can help you to promote it through the Centre’s website and TASD bulletins.

We’ll be taking TASD event submissions from mid-August, and posters and stickers will be available to help you promote your event free of charge from mid-September.

Happy planning!

For more information visit: www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk or contact Davide on 0131 652 3272 or davide@scottishstorytellingcentre.com for more information
Connecting with Stories
New training programme out now!

Continuing with the revised 6-monthly format, the Storytelling Centre’s new Connecting with Stories training and development programme is now available, covering October 2010 to April 2011.

Starting with Creative Approaches to Christmas Stories led by Donald Smith on 9th October, the programme offers practical tips and techniques, learning and inspiration for all, whether you’re a complete beginner, or an experienced teller.

Continuing the ‘Faiths and Cultures’ strand, Marie Louise Cochrane offers approaches to Easter stories on 26th February. In the meantime, beginners should sign up now to Starting with Stories on 22nd October or 22nd January – these are always popular!

As always our October CPD day is part of the Storytelling Festival, and this year taps into the wonder and riches of our Eastern Routes theme. Storyrich: Storytelling and Creative Teaching on 25th October explores imaginative use of storytelling in the classroom and across the school, bringing to life the Curriculum for Excellence.

The day is led by storyteller Ruth Kirkpatrick and storytelling teacher Fergus McNicol, who will work with participants to develop storytelling skills and explore approaches to cross curricular learning, drawing on Japanese story theatre (Kamishibai). Geeta Ramanujam, international guest and founder of the Kathalaya Trust in Bangalore, India and Scots storyteller, Stuart McHardy will also be sharing their skills and experiences during the day.

Post-Festival highlights include Storymaking in Health & Wellbeing Settings led by Ruth Kirkpatrick on 22nd November – an exploration of the power of metaphor, imagery and the ‘third person’ in health and healing.

This is closely followed by Reminiscence, Reading & Stories: Working with Older People on 4th December, the first of a series of ‘Connecting Voices’ training events, looking at a combination of storytelling skills, reminiscence and Scottish poetry resources for use with older people.

As Spring beckons, so too does the natural world. On 12th March visiting guests Peter Chand and Shonaleigh Cumbers lead a practical workshop looking at story collecting in the community. Landscape and Identity in Storytelling explores how to collect, care for and tell stories from your own and other cultures.

Running with the ‘Heritage & Interpretation’ theme, Naturally Inspired: Eco Stories on 19th March celebrates the natural world as our greatest resource for learning and healthy living, and explores the role of stories in helping us to engage all age groups with the wonders of nature.

Learn, Share, Enjoy!

For the full programme visit: www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk or call 0131 556 9579 to request a copy

Here to Stay
People Power the Key

Blethers readers may have seen some alarming headlines over recent months about the Scottish Storytelling Centre’s flagship building in Edinburgh’s Royal Mile. Fear not.

The Centre is owned by the Church of Scotland and run in partnership with the Scottish Storytelling Forum. The Church has been a generous supporter but is under great financial pressure.

Inevitably in these situations, all sorts of options are considered, including drastic ones. Unfortunately press coverage seizes on options as if they were decisions, hence some alarmist coverage about closure or sale.

The Church’s review of the Storytelling Centre is in fact producing some positive results. Yes, the Church will not be able to grant-aid the Centre in the same way as before, but the Church is also providing skilled support to increase our earned income, increasing its huge support in kind, and encouraging many more local organisations and faith communities to use our services.

The Church is committed to finding a viable way forward for the Centre and its work, honouring the partnership with the Forum and external funders.

These are tough times for everyone, so adapting and changing is essential. The key to the future is increasing live storytelling across Scotland. People power and participation form the vital support base for this unique national treasure.

Donald Smith
**Forteviot Storytelling Group**

From November 2009 until April this year I ran twelve storytelling sessions at Forteviot – a day unit for children and young people in Edinburgh – with a group of older children (10-14 yrs) and two staff members.

The young people had a variety of needs. Initially, I used a story each week as a focus and we then had an art activity, usually related to an archetypal image which I had selected from the story. For example, I told the story of ‘Ashputtle’ whose mother's spirit seems to be expressed in a tree. We then presented the children with a large painting of a tree and invited them to create a place to live in the tree, and to make it.

Staff Nurse, Alison said, "The experience of being involved in this collaboration with Ruth, our storyteller, has been extremely valuable. Forteviot staff involved in this project have observed the absorption shown by young people. Staff have also had the opportunity to observe young people's responses to often potent underlying themes raised in the story – such as sense of attachment, belonging, being claimed, justice and resolution in the face of unfair treatment, emotional hurt and the changing sense of self and relationships in the transition from child to young adult."

A staff training day introduced the skills and explored potential benefits of storytelling as an intervention. We saw its potential as a way of working therapeutically with children experiencing life challenges, and acknowledged it as a meaningful and emotionally nourishing experience for children attending both the younger and older programmes."

In later sessions we created stories. In the stories which the children made it was often easy to see the connection to the issues in their own lives.

Some examples of the comments from the young people about the sessions were – "relaxing; liked listening; the stories are encouraging because they have happy endings; helped my concentration; helped my confidence to talk; stopped me worrying so much; fun".

The project has been very worthwhile for all involved. In the future the unit might consider having a residency for a storyteller, which would help to build on this small start, so that staff could develop their confidence and repertoire and storytelling could become part of their regular practice. All the staff seemed to really understand the potential for this way of working and I think would enthusiastically support this.

Ruth Kirkpatrick
www.storiesallways.com

**The Borders Bards**

Down here in the lovely Tweed Valley, in the last year there has been great storytelling activity: new sessions, some resurrected and others reaching anniversaries.

The Borders Guid Crack Club, established June 2000, has an annual summer storytelling and music weekend. Wooplaw Story Gathering is at Wooplaw Community Woodlands in the hills above Galashiels. This has always been the centrepiece of our programme and includes nature oriented activities. This is a venue where tellers of all ages (and levels) can share their skills and friendship around the campfire. We have a log cabin, camping space and gorgeous woodland in which we also run nature-based creative and Bardic workshops for both adults and children.

This year is the event’s 10-year anniversary and should be wonderful!

We have also begun a new story circle: Borders Bards, the second Sunday monthly at the County Inn, Peebles at 7.30pm. This is a fun and supportive group designed to help people to develop at all levels in the craft of storytelling. Whatever your experience, you can come along and have the opportunity to share stories in any form, be they spoken, sung or in prose. Don’t worry, you don’t have to ‘perform’, we have a lovely private room all to ourselves.

The session has been going very well, with much cheer so far, as there is plenty of room for sharing, feedback, socialising and inspiration!

A second group, Music, Verse and Stories, re-started in May after a break of about two years. Three months ago about ten people involved at the start, way back in the 1980’s, met to organise the comeback.

The result was an opening night with about fifty audience members – many of whom were performers! The beauty of this session is that it has been actively encouraging the development of each of the three areas locally.

For more information find Music, Verse & Stories and Borders Guid Crack Club on Facebook or email me on: david@mcaleece.com

Daru McAleece

**Note:** See Ted McKie’s article on page 6 for more on Music, Verse and Stories.
Taffy Thomas: Story Gardener

Taffy Thomas likes to say that stories have legs and travel with you. Ever since becoming the nation’s first Laureate for Storytelling, Taffy has been taking stories all over Britain – a long line of stories that stretches back and forth across the border between Scotland and England and many other borders as well.

Storytelling Laureate is a two-year honorary position. Honorary, according to Taffy, means that all you get is a two kilogram bag of beans and you go looking for someone named Jack.

The novelty of the position though is also one of its greatest strengths: the brief is still there to be invented. “I want to raise the profile of oral storytelling, leaving behind stories and storytellers wherever I go. And where possible I collect stories,” says Taffy. Already this year he has filmed two storytellers in England who would never call themselves storytellers, because one of the most important jobs of the Laureate is to remind people of things they already know.

Sometimes people know there is a story about one place or another, but don’t remember it, or they think they don’t, until someone comes and asks them to tell that story.

Taffy’s style is to collect and tell stories where people are, be it in a street or in a pub, and not necessarily where people have to go, such as theatres or storytelling clubs. And this is hardly surprising in a storyteller with a street theatre past. “I was in Dublin one day, and I met a poet in a street. The poet had a big poster with about a hundred poems on it, and if you paid a pound or two he gave you a cane and you could point to a poem and he would tell that poem for you from the top of his head. So I thought ‘that’s great, he doesn’t know what his performance is going to be until it’s requested. I want to do the same with storytelling!’”

The idea for a Tale Coat was born. The Tale Coat is a long coat with lots of different pictures embroidered on it that Taffy sometimes wears in his performances. Each picture corresponds to a story that people can request. Like its printed counterpart Taffy’s Coat Tales, the coat is a device for passing control to the audience. Taffy’s Coat Tales was published recently as part of the Laureate remit and contains some of Taffy’s tales, illustrated with pictures of embroidered scenes from the Tale Coat. The aim is to make these stories available, in the hope that they will be told and passed on.

"There is also an important literacy development aspect with storytelling, because you can’t write a story unless you can tell a story, and you can’t tell a story unless you have heard one."

And so Taffy goes with his two kilogram bag of beans on his shoulder, planting stories wherever he travels, making sure everyone he meets has heard at least one.

Davide Panzeri

The Stories on the Bus

As all my friends know, I spent my early years on a bus. It was an idyllic life on the single decker, travelling the countryside with my parents and seven sisters. I used those wonderful memories to fill the pages of five books which has set me on another joyous journey. So when Stagecoach boss Brian Soutar sent his Director of Communications to visit with a proposal – would I like to tell stories on an old vintage Leyland Tiger bus at the concert hall in Perth as part of Perth 800 celebrations – I had no hesitation and jumped at the chance.

In the early days Brian’s mother Catherine had hired the bus to take berry pickers from across the area and transport them to and from the berry fields. Many years later he discovered it in a dilapidated state.

On the 2nd & 3rd July I stepped aboard my expertly restored old lady with plush seats and just the right height of head rest, to meet lots of happy little faces who sat listening intently while I told them tales of a greedy crow, naughty wee lassie and the northern lights, and a fairy with toothache. The children also had tales to tell. One shared a riddle.

Others came on to tell stories; those berry pickers from when the bus was in her prime – some in their twilight years eager to reminisce.

Two sprightly old gents remembered when a Traveller family with horse and cart stumbled over the Meikleour bridge into the river Tay and, with excellent clarity, demonstrated how they took part in the rescue with a happy ending.

Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex, officiating at the Armed Forces Parade, popped on board and was happy to take a book, and Celebrity chef Gino DiAmpio also visited my bus for a photo shoot.

All in all my two days of nostalgia was a wonderful story and shall live on like most good tales for a long time to come.

Jess Smith
www.jesssmith.co.uk
Music, Verse and Stories

Since its inception in the 1980s the monthly gathering for Music, Verse and Stories has proved a popular and enduring alternative to a Sunday evening slumped in front of the telly. After a gap of a couple of years the event was back with a bang on 2nd May.

The venue has never changed. Around sixty folk and three dogs crammed into the Pirn Lounge, the dining room of the Traquair Arms Hotel in Innerleithen, and the excitement was palpable. The instigator, organiser, producer and compere hadn’t changed either – poet Howard Purdie, still as large as life and at the top of his game. Howard was obviously pleased that his emails and publicity had resulted in a good attendance to the relaunch of Music, Verse and Stories. He thanked everybody for coming and remarked that one of his posters may have caused some confusion. Pinned to a cluttered notice board the ‘v’ from verse and the ‘s’ from stories had become obscured and Howard feared it might have given the event political overtones!

Last Sunday’s entertainment featured really varied examples of music and verse and stories. Howard himself led off with poems, as ever perceptive and humorous, about his beloved greyhound Kitty and his new best friend, Horace the Heron.

Other poetical contributions came from Isobel Cowe who read a light-hearted yet moving poem, ‘The Million Dollar Mum’, which at the end she revealed had been written by her daughter and she was, in fact, the subject of the verse. Stuart Akers travelled down from Peebles to make masterly renditions in braid Scots of witty and ironic poems by Hugh MacDiarmid and Edwin Morgan.

Songs came from Andrea Brown from Roslin and Innerleithen’s Kenneth McQueenie, both with their trusty guitars. Alec Meigle from Peebles sang superbly unaccompanied while fellow Peeblean Ron Murray, a stalwart from the early days of Music, Verse and Stories, hitched up his guitar for lively performances of the traditional ‘Jesse James’ and ‘Kelvingrove’. Mike Lamont reprised Howard’s poem ‘The Bairns That Saved the Heron’, sung to a Welsh folk tune and accompanying himself on guitar. Two all female groups, The Fisher Lasses and The Beggar Girls, added their dulcet tones to the proceedings.

On top of the hugely enjoyable verse and music was added a fine mix of drama and hilarity from the storytellers. Andrea Brown again featured with a local traditional tale of the ‘Battle of Roslin’, skilfully heightening the impact of the action with flourishes on a small harp. Daru McAleece, holding to a Beltane theme and interacting uncannily with a canine onlooker, treated his audience to an eerie tale of the supernatural, wolves and self-fulfilment. From Peebles’ own Ian McFadyen came an amusing account of a folk-tale, believed to have originated in Africa but set in the Western Isles, in which a magician was tasked to stop a giant on the rampage.

To all this Australian Alasdair Taylor added a brilliant tale in each half. The Isle of Barra in medieval times was the setting for the hilarious ‘Talking Skull’ while the scene for Alasdair’s second contribution shifted south to the slightly larger island of Ireland. Whatever you do over there, don’t accept a lift in a Merc with a neurotic driver! All these tall tales of an evening doesn’t half let you understand why children love bedtime stories, though.

At the end of a varied and excellent night’s entertainment Howard said it was “not a bad start” and reminded folk that Music, Verse and Stories happens at 8pm on the first Sunday of each month in the Traquair Arms, Innerleithen.

Ted McKie

Loving and Leaving

Caroline Budge, our National Storytelling Co-ordinator, is leaving after five fantastic years at the Storytelling Centre.

During that time she has fostered the growth of the storytelling network with never-failing calm, efficiency and kindness. In particular Caroline has pioneered support for work with older people and storytelling for health and well being.

In that spirit Caroline is beginning postgrad training as an Occupational Therapist at Queen Margaret University. All her colleagues will need therapy when she leaves this month, but we are proud of all she has achieved and wish her well in her new career – and as a lifelong friend to storytelling!

Bon voyage to Caroline, and au revoir.
A Winter’s Tale: Healing Words in Prince Edward Island

In February I left the chilly climes of Scotland for the icy and snowy realm of Prince Edward Island (PEI) off Canada’s Atlantic coast, where I’d been invited to offer a series of my ‘Healing Words’ workshops on therapeutic storytelling.

PEI is Canada’s smallest province, with a population of nearly 140,000, but what it lacks in size it more than makes up for in warm hospitality and generosity of spirit, especially welcome in winter’s sub-zero temperatures. Its population is a diverse mix of people: Aboriginal (Micmac), Acadian, French, English, Irish and Scots as well as an array of newly arriving immigrants from the four corners of the globe. Such diversity has produced a rich heritage of storytellers. In fact, two of PEI’s celebrated ‘storytellers’ are Lucy Maude Montgomery (of Anne of Green Gables fame) and country singing star Stompin’ Tom Connors.

My visit to PEI was hosted by the Lovely Witches Club (LWC), a social network and resource hub supporting those wanting to explore and cultivate their creativity through story. The workshops were organised, advertised and virtually sold out by the time I arrived. And thanks to an interview on CBC Radio (Canada’s equivalent of the BBC), the last few places on the workshops were quickly filled by people eager to find out more.

The participants included storytellers, writers, teachers, therapists and care workers, artists, parents and students. I was honoured by their openness and willingness to explore and share their stories with one another. Their stories touched on a range of experiences – some painful, others joyful. Some revealed the deep connections with ancestors, with the land and with the sea that surrounds them. Others told more contemporary tales of life in the modern world. We laughed and shared tears. All were agreed that our sharing and listening together through story had brought us a measure of healing and greater appreciation of one another.

Thanks to the generosity of the Scottish Arts Council, I returned to Canada this summer to facilitate another series of ‘Healing Words’ workshops and coaching sessions in Ontario as well as PEI, where I took part in a local storytelling festival. I was also involved in the annual conference of Canadian Storytellers in St. John’s Newfoundland, speaking on storytelling and peace alongside storyteller Liz Weir from Northern Ireland and Canadian storyteller Karen Gummo.

Having worked in Scotland as a professional storyteller for nearly ten years I am ever more grateful to the Scottish Arts Council and the Scottish Storytelling Centre for their generous support and making it possible for me to return to my native land to meet other storytellers and to share my passion for the ‘healing word’ through the art of storytelling.

Michael Williams
www.rjmwilliams.co.uk

Rosy Glow or False Dawn

No, not two new applicants for the Storytelling Directory, but the title given to a Scottish-Irish symposium held at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in March. Fifteen years ago a storytelling summit was held at the Verbal Arts Centre in Derry, so St. Patrick’s Day 2010 seemed like a good time to reconvene.

Funded by the Scottish Arts Council and Cultúr Éireann, with support for delegates from the Arts Councils of Ireland and Northern Ireland, twenty four storytellers and representatives from funding authorities met together to discuss areas of mutual concern.

Donald Smith led the opening session where it was agreed that storytelling opportunities were developing in a variety of contexts, including education, community development, cultural diversity, heritage and tourism, environmental interpretation, festivals, arts venues, health and wellbeing, and, as ever, entertainment.

Liz Weir from County Antrim led the session on ‘Growing Storytellers’. The differing needs for training of professional storytellers, storytellers in professions, community storytellers and young storytellers was discussed with emphasis on acquiring skills, repertoire and knowledge of sources. The importance of knowledge of business management and child protection was also raised. The differing routes of shadowing, mentoring, small group work, workshops and longer courses were explored with the definite conclusion that all storytellers should be supportive, respectful and generous.

Although there has been an enormous growth in storytelling, all participants had the same desire to further spread the message of what storytelling is about and to increase audience numbers. Adrian Johnson, former Literature Officer with the Arts Council in England led a wide-ranging discussion on possible methods to achieve this.

The discussion on the importance of storytelling in education was led by Clare Murphy from Ireland, and in community by John Hamilton who has a foot on both sides of the water.

The final session was on ‘Structure and Recognition’ of storytelling. Led by Nuala Hayes, we discussed how, while allowing each country to have its own patterns and development, we could build networks to further increase understanding and support.

The symposium ended with a brilliant public performance by the Women of Ireland – Nuala Hayes, Clare Murphy and Liz Weir. St. Patrick would have been proud.

Bea Ferguson
If you are interested in the links between folk tradition and history then A New History of the Picts by Stuart McHardy is for you. This is a major rewrite of the Picts, replacing the myth of a lost, mysterious race with our own ancestors – the indigenous people of Scotland.

On a more irreverent note, Lang Legged Beasties is Ewan McVicar’s latest contribution to children’s lore. It’s a handy collection of stories and rhymes guaranteed to entertain – and keep Scots bubbling and chortling as a living tongue.

A B C ma grannie found a flea, She salted it and peppered it and had it for her tea.

Secret Songs of Silence is an even more deeply irreverent offering. Collected originally by Peter Buchan from Peterhead in the nineteenth century, the Secret Songs are published here for the first time with extensive notes and commentary by Editor, Ian Spring. Buchan’s original endeavour is a strange mixture of well known folk chestnuts and some very distinctive material from direct sources. However Spring is unfailingly informative and interesting on all aspects of these bawdy songs, and their publication is a historic milestone in folk studies.

Land of the Seal People is an expanded collection of Duncan Williamson’s renowned Selkie tales. Lovingly edited by Linda Williamson, the book evokes the spirit of the great master himself and his closeness to nature.

Also dipping deep into the well of tradition is Peter Snow in The Shifty Lad and the Tales He Told. This draws on Scottish, Irish and Manx stories, with a dash of roguery and cunning worthy of the lad himself.

Finally, those who attended the conferences on Arthurian lore in Scotland, with its Christian and mythological connections, will be interested in a new series of booklets by Hugh McArthur, the Seannachie of Clan Arthur. These are listed on the right. McArthur tenaciously re-roots Arthur in the landscape, place names and history of early medieval Scotland, and throws light on all these topics in the process. While not everyone will agree with some of the history, the Quest for Arthur makes for great storytelling.

Donald Smith

No area of Scotland is richer in local tradition than Ayrshire. Yet at the moment there is no local storytelling network.

This is all set to change on Saturday 11th September, with a storytelling taster and development day at the Robert Burns Birthplace in Alloway. The day includes talks, workshops and story tours, and offers anyone interested in getting involved as a storyteller or listener, an open door to the wonderful world of storytelling. Nat Edwards, Director of the RB Birthplace Museum, kicks off the day in the Education Pavilion at Burns Cottage, and contributions will follow from Bea Ferguson and Donald Smith from SSC, as well as an overview of storytelling opportunities in community life today from Caroline Budge. Local storytellers Val Parsley and Rosie Mapplebeck also contribute.

Links with poetry, song and literature, education, faith communities and the environment are all on the agenda and contribute to a full and fascinating experience for all. For more information, please contact Donald Smith via Jenny Gilchrist on jenny@scottishstorytellingcentre.com or 0131 556 9579.