It always feels good to take a moment to breathe deeply and reflect on where you are as a new year begins. At the Scottish Storytelling Centre we've done exactly that – and made some resolutions for 2011 that we intend to keep!

2010 was a hard year for many involved in the arts, as funding budgets continued to be cut and public, private and voluntary sectors all felt the pinch. Although according to some 2011 promises gradual recovery, storytellers and organisations promoting and supporting storytelling are well aware that there are still hard times to come.

At the Centre we’ve been reviewing our Network support and development activity, as our first resolution is to make some positive changes to the way that we’re able to provide professional support to storytellers and to promote and nurture storytelling in Scotland. To do this we’ll be working hard, alongside the Storytelling Forum, to strengthen our information sharing and communications across Scotland with the storytelling Directory in particular. We hope that there are exciting ideas and developments that storytellers will want to share through us, too.

We’re also excited about changes to the Centre’s storytelling training offering, which will include new events to support storytellers as professionals and for others to connect with storytelling in different ways.

The Connecting with Stories training programme will continue to follow a six-month season.

The collection of training events will be structured around eight strands: Beginners skills; Intermediate skills; Advanced skills; Storyteller CPD; Contexts; Themes; Storytelling in practice; Artforms and stories. This will make for clear paths through the programme for people who want to discover and develop their own storytelling skills, will widen the opportunities for deeply exploring story types, cultures and histories outside a skills setting, and will provide clearly targeted events for professionals and volunteers working in different contexts who want to bring elements of storytelling to their work. A new storyteller CPD strand aims to equip storytellers with the skills and knowledge needed to grow storytelling as a business in tough times.

The programme will offer more variety in event timings and formats, although it will still cover five key themes of Skills, Learning, Heritage and interpretation, Health and wellbeing, and Traditions, communities and cultures.

A Network day in June 2011, in a to-be-confirmed area of Scotland, will aim to bring together storytellers and storytelling champions for inspiration, fun, new ideas and ways of working, in a celebration of the richness of Scotland’s storytelling culture and a proactive way of planning for the future. Now that’s a 2011 to look forward to.

The May-October season of Connecting with Stories is published in April. Check www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk and join the mailing list.
A warm welcome to storytellers new to the Scottish Storytelling Centre Directory for 2011

**Daniel Allison** (East Lothian)
Daniel grew up in the seclusion of East Lothian’s Lammermuir hills, where the woods, hills and valleys kindled his love of stories. He began writing animal stories at a young age and after leaving school spent six months in East Africa, during which time he worked as a school teacher and on a chimpanzee habituation project in the forests of West Uganda. He studied English Literature and Creative Writing in Brighton and then spent a year in India and Nepal before settling to live, write and tell stories in East Lothian. Daniel draws on his travel and interest in other cultures in his storytelling, as well as his study of myth and literature. He has a special interest in Buddhist culture and teaches children about Buddhism using a blend of stories and meditation exercises.

**Diana Bertoldi** (Aberdeen)
Diana tells stories both in English and Italian. She is a wildlife storyteller and works on stories for healing with the DeBalieul method. Her repertoire ranges from the ancient traditional and wisdom tales to dark, haunted stories; from wildlife stories she creates for children, to cheerful jokes. A fine singer, she loves to accompany her storytelling with ballads and songs. Born and brought up in the Italian mountains, where she grew up with stories, Diana followed a calling to Scotland which she feels is her new home. Being a wildlife manager helped to develop her instinctive love for Nature, and then she combined her two passions: wildlife and storytelling. She works to share with children the wonders and treasures of our environment.

**Claire Druett** (Edinburgh)
Claire likes to tell traditional stories, myths and legends, stories based around nature and the environment as well as Celtic legends. She pens her own stories entwined with myths and legends and writes her own poetry which she uses as a contemporary introduction to more traditional stories. Claire was born in Wiltshire and as her first childhood memory is staring up at Stonehenge it is no surprise she grew up with an interest in Neolithic sites and the myths and legends of the British Isles. Her enthusiasm for ‘something other than television’ was greatly fuelled by her Welsh grandfather who would stand and tell her stories in the autumn whilst burning his garden leaves. Through telling to adults with varying behavioural problems and mental health issues she is a keen advocate of using storytelling as a therapeutic tool which can open up the imagination and place the listener in a more positive state of mind.

**Anne Pitcher** (Renfrewshire)
Celtic stories, especially Scottish folklore, fairytales and legends tug Anne’s heart strings in telling. Having worked in the pre-five sector for many years she also loves the traditional stories which every child knows, and imbues them with new life. As a committed Christian she aims to bring the Bible alive to any age group, in an interactive and engaging way. Anne enjoys recreating a sense of place and time with rich characters and interesting plots using a highly participative and multi-sensory approach via songs, rhymes, music, sound makers, puppets and interesting backdrops. Anne’s father was a Congregational minister and a great storyteller, and her childhood was spent in Ayr, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Cumbernauld – creating a rich mine of experiences to draw on in storytelling. Working with Hamish Henderson whilst doing her Honours degree in English was a beginning of a deep and abiding interest in Scotland’s rich heritage of stories.

**Amanda Edmiston** (Glasgow)
Mandy is drawn to stories which provide glimpses into our past, and the beliefs and shared wisdom of people from around the world. Originally from Aberdeen, she grew up moving house every few years, and continued this pattern in adulthood, the end result being a unique insight into the variety of lifestyles and traditions of modern Britain. It was having her daughter and realising how important sharing healing, herbal and life stories as well as comic and moral tales from around the world was, that led Mandy to see that all the pieces of her life made a beautiful backdrop for storytelling.

There are now over 125 storytellers working in different ways and in different settings all over Scotland.

Visit the Directory at www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk
Storytelling Festival to journey across seas to ancient times
Plans for 2011’s Festival revealed

“Moving, inspiring, enchanting. It stimulated my fantasy; it filled my heart with dreams, strength and the magic times of my childhood.”

2010 audience member

2010’s Scottish International Storytelling Festival, Eastern Routes, was a resounding success. With an artistically exciting programme, international guests from India, China, Japan, Thailand and Malaysia and some of Scotland’s finest wordsmiths – plus enthusiastic audiences – the 10 days were a fantastic celebration to mark the Festival’s 21st year.

The Festival reinforced and enhanced its role and status as a world leader and a Scottish flagship, with a total of nearly 18,000 adults and children taking part in public performances at the Scottish Storytelling Centre and partner venues, interactive workshops, a schools outreach programme of storyteller visits and a vibrant Tell A Story Day campaign.

Scotland’s storytelling community extended a warm welcome to the overseas guest artists through

‘Festival-on-Tour’ events in Glasgow, Dumfries and Galloway, Moray, Mull, Oban, the Highlands, Dundee and Aberdeen. The visitors particularly appreciated the chance to see Scotland and to engage with local storytellers and communities in the city of Edinburgh and beyond. The hospitality of Scottish storytellers and the sharing of skills, approaches and traditions are major features of the festival experience for artists and audiences, and an important element of the Festival’s role in artistic exchange and collaboration.

Plans for 2011 are now underway with a theme that embraces the history and culture of the Mediterranean and the magic of Scotland’s islands. An Island Odyssey: Scotland and Old Europe will run from the 22nd to the 30th October.

Celtic will meet Mediterranean as the myths of Greece and Rome and those of the north mix in a new Olympian contest. The contestants are the wandering bards, storytellers and minstrels who are reappearing across Europe in a renaissance of oral traditions – an epic celebration of histories, cultures, voices and tales.

The festival will offer unrivalled opportunities to enjoy the traditions of islands such as Bute, Malta, Sardinia, Crete, Arran, Skye, Lewis, the Orkneys, Mull, Corsica and the Ulster; to meet the storytellers; to participate in workshops and international networking; and experience the ancient magic of a tale told live.

Keep in touch with Festival developments by checking www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk

Look out for the Festival programme, published early September!

Gulliver’s Chums  Stories, songs and puppet fun for emotional wellbeing

Marie Louise Cochrane describes using storytelling for emotional literacy in Edinburgh nurseries.

In January 2010 Ailie Finlay and I received the Nancy and Hamish Turner bursary to support our work with younger children and parents and carers on emotional literacy.

Ailie and I began working together in 2009 to see if we could combine our mutual storytelling skills with Ailie’s puppetry and my song writing to work effectively in the area of emotional wellbeing with younger children and the adults who relate to them.

We had developed some material and taken part in a project at Stanwell nursery as part of the City of Edinburgh Council’s Growing Confidence project (www.growingconfidence.org). Stories and songs and puppet friends were created and were received well. After this initial project we went on to develop a stand-alone story, song and puppet session called ‘Gulliver’s Chums’. This covered topics such as naming, expressing and managing feelings.

We were keen to be able to offer similar sessions on this topic to children with additional support needs so we decided to use the bursary to explore how we might do this.

For my part I undertook some research which involved meeting with Clare Murray from Prospectbank School in Edinburgh. Clare is a specialist in using symbols to communicate with children with communication difficulties. I then spent two days shadowing a teacher at Oaklands School for children with additional needs in County Durham.

Ailie went to a conference in London run jointly by the Society for Storytelling and the British Association of Drama Therapists. This included an inspiring workshop by speech therapist and storyteller Nicola Grove on telling myths and legends to children who have severe and profound disabilities.

Ailie also met with staff at St Crispin’s Special School in Edinburgh and did some shadowing there in January and February. We are at the moment developing props that will make Gulliver’s Chums more multi-sensory and inclusive so we can use it at St Crispin’s and other special schools in 2011.

A special thanks to the Scottish Storytelling Forum and the Nancy and Hamish Turner bursary for supporting us to develop this work. The fruits of our endeavours are now available for schools, nurseries and other groups working with younger children and those who care for them.

info@flotsamandjetsampuppets.co.uk
Born 16th December 1930, died 9th January 2011 in Edinburgh aged 80.

The death of John Fee deprives Scotland of an important urban tradition bearer. Nurtured in Edinburgh’s old Town as part of its thriving Irish-Scottish community, Fee was a supreme entertainer immersed in the history of his community and locale.

Born in 1930 to parents Paddy and Catherine, John Fee was one of eight children. Neat made and a natural athlete, Fee followed in his father’s footsteps as a champion boxer, winning the Scottish Amateur Lightweight Crown in 1949. Fee also followed his father into the army doing National Service in Hong Kong with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, in which Paddy Fee had also served.

From the start however John Fee had creative leanings and a series of jobs in the fifties included scene painting for the Kings Theatre and singing in the Opera Chorus. While at the Kings, John produced a daily cartoon commenting on current goings on in the theatre, which proved more popular with some cast and crew than others.

In 1955 John married forming a lifelong partnership. Being a father stimulated a passion for education which was to characterise the rest of John Fee’s life. As his daughters recall “He taught us how to paint, draw, write, pray, think … and look – on long walks all over Edinburgh, Pentlands, Hermitage, Crarnond, Dean Village, and on hostelling holidays to the West Coast of Scotland”.

Education for Fee was not just book learning but exploration, observation and participation in all aspects of community life including its stories and songs. Nonetheless in 1967 John went to Edinburgh University as a full-time mature student, gaining an Honours Degree in History and going on to teach History and Modern Studies.

As a teacher, Fee was legendary – meticulous in preparation, dry of wit, demanding the best, yet above all compassionate and understanding, as if every youngster were part of his family network and destined to succeed.

Retiring eventually as Head of History and Modern Studies at Ainslie Park Secondary School, John Fee began a new creative career founded on his passion for Edinburgh’s social history. In a unique blend of teacher and entertainer, which few could have carried, John reached out to every kind of community group.

As the storytelling revival began at The Netherbow in Edinburgh’s High Street, John Fee quickly gained recognition as a master of the art, and as someone connected with an urban tradition of song, story and ceilidh which had been pushed into the shadows. He helped bring it back into the light.

Regaling packed audiences in The Waverley Bar’s Guid Crack Club, pacing the Netherbow stage, hat clamped firmly to his head, or leading gaggles of children and adults on storytelling tours, John was in his element.

Ever the master of dry understatement, while pointing up comic absurdity, Fee’s diminutive figure as he talked became commanding and his flow compulsive.

On one occasion he brought the house down with a long disquisition on the need for a new national anthem for Scotland, concluding with an impassioned appeal for ‘Stop Your Tickling, Jock’.

Yet behind the entertainer was a deeply serious student of humanity, a person full of sincere religion truly lived out, a wise and generous man, whose goodness seeped through every pore, attracting respect, love and admiration.

Weeks from his death after a long and hard fought battle against cancer, John was still working on one of his stories – the tale of Ned Holt, painter and performer in Edinburgh’s Old Town in the nineteenth century – an artist of the people whom John did not want forgotten. In the words of the folk song, John Fee was “a man you don’t meet every day” and he leaves a rich legacy of memories along with some fine publications.

John Fee is survived by his wife of fifty-five years, Mona and daughters Angela and Lorna.

This article was first published in The Scotsman, Wednesday 19th January 2011.

Storytelling Clubs at Church

Elsie Moir reports on two successful models of children’s storytelling and play groups at Granton Parish Church.

The Magic Carpet Club opened in April 2006 in the hall of Granton Parish Church. The aim was to provide a safe environment in which parents and their pre-school children could participate together in play and learning experiences. The club is staffed by six senior citizens who are members of the Church. The leader is a retired primary school teacher.

Our one-hour programme starts with a period of free play in a carefully planned and inviting play environment. During this time parents have coffee.

Adults and children then gather on the magic carpet for songs, finger rhymes, and conversation about topical themes such as seasons and festivals. This is followed by story time, when puppets
Art gallery storytelling and music tours

Marion Kenny explains how storytelling can help audiences find new ways of connecting with visual art

For the past three years I have had the pleasure and honour to work with Edinburgh Art Festival creating storytelling and music tours linking nearby galleries and responding to very contrasting exhibitions. Over a period of months I had the opportunity to work closely with curators and educational officers at selected galleries as well as Louise Donoghue at Edinburgh Art Festival.

The storytelling performances were accompanied by music, intended to weave intimate psychological dramas that get under the skin and delve into the minds of the audience, who then responded in a new way to the collections as they searched for the links with the story they had just heard.

Returning for a group discussion also allowed the receiver to bring his or her own experiences to understand, enrich or deepen the meaning of the visual art. My intention was to not merely connect a story with one work of art, but rather to find a tale that links an entire collection.

Having a period to research the art in planned exhibitions, as well as their artists, is a creative process I absolutely love.

Storytelling is a simple, powerful, effective, ancient art form that works exceptionally well in public spaces as it requires no stage, lighting, or technology and works in a small space with intimate audience, or in a larger theatrical space to a big crowd. Storytelling and art are of course intimately entwined; my hope is that as words turnle from my tongue, the listener can see the tale as a series of images, every audience member creating their own personal film.

Artists since the beginning of time have drawn inspiration from myths and legends and personal tales. Rudimentary drawings scratched onto the walls of caves are known to have been forms of early storytelling for many ancient cultures. Complex forms of tattooing such as the Maori mocha represent stories with information about genealogy, affiliation and social status. The Australian aboriginal people painted symbols from stories on cave walls as means of helping the storyteller remember the story; the story was then told using a combination of oral narrative, music, rock art and dance.

During many of the Art Festival tours audiences were able to view artists at work. Tours moving between the Talbot Rice Gallery and the Dovecot Gallery ended with people being able to see weavers and tapestry specialists creating art, and walking tours from Dogger Fisher Gallery to the Printmakers Studio finished with the audience moving into the studio to see the process of printing and creating a work connected to the stories heard. At Edinburgh College of Art the tours concluded with audiences watching international stone sculptors at work on the pieces used as inspiration for the stories.

Scotland is blessed with a wealth of inspiring art galleries and with every work of art and its artist having a story to tell, there is a powerful role for storytellers to play.

See Marion’s Festival story tours here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BN4XXo18Wo
Scotland’s a Blether!

Here’s a snapshot of some of the storytelling groups and clubs across the country, and their plans for 2011. 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 - Claik and Clype Storytelling Circle
   Greg Dawson Allen plans to revive this Inverness group for 2011. Contact Greg on 01463 233729 or greg@telliesperie.co.uk

2. Tayside and North Fife - Blether Tay-Gither
   Our storytelling group continues to meet on the last Tuesday of the month, 7-9.30pm, throughout the year, as well as organising some special family events and workshops. As we are still seeking a suitable regular home, keep checking our website for venue details. Contact Sheila Kinninmonth www.blethertaygither.org.uk

3. Borders - Borders Bards and Music, Verse and Stories
   Down here in the Borders, we have two sessions going from strength to strength. The first is ‘Borders Bards’, a monthly storytelling session hosted by the ‘Borders Guid Crack Club’, creating a friendly and informal setting encouraging the Bard within us all! In 2011 we are running extra sessions themed around animals of the Celtic year. Last December we successfully ran ‘The Bear of Winter’ and in February ‘The Wolves of Spring’ arrived. We meet the second Tuesday, monthly, 7.30pm at the County Inn, Peebles – donation £3/2. All are welcome, new or experienced!
   ‘Music, Verse and Stories’ is compèred monthly by local poet Howard Purdie, with a magic formula of traditional arts combined with a comfortable, welcoming venue. All are welcome to come and do a spot and we have a monthly Guest Performer, usually a band, well-known singer, visiting poet or storyteller. Following last year’s exciting acts, including Maasai Warriors, we started 2011 with an alternative Burn’s evening and a surprise storyteller for March. We run the first Sunday monthly at 8pm, at the Traquair Arms Hotel, Innerleithen. Suggested donation £3, includes a free light supper and a raffle. For more info on either event, contact Daru McAleece david@mcaleece.com

4. Perthshire - Silver Branch
   The Silver Branch Storytelling Group meets once a month in Highland Perthshire and is a place where people interested in the oral tradition/folktales/life stories can come to listen, share and have a blether. We are a small, intimate group and welcome a few more to sit round the fire and continue this wonderful tradition. We are a semi-nomadic group at the moment, and being small can rove from one fireside to another! Contact Claire Hewitt www.clairehewitt.co.uk or 01887 820339 or 07765 166034

5. Fife - Kingdom Krack
   Our numbers have reached eleven to date with two members also co-members of Blether Tay-Gither. Our aim as a group has been to support individuals on their own journeys into the world of storytelling. We meet on the first Monday of the month, in winter at The Inn on the Park in Dunfermline and our summer venue is the Earthship and Yurt at Craigencalt Ecology Centre Kinghorn.
   There are only two Directory members in Kingdom Krack and amazingly the rest of the group all use storytelling actively in their work. The majority are teachers but others use storytelling in heritage and ecology based situations. Most members also have young families but in spite of the inevitable commitments we try to get to as many storytelling events as possible, the Guid Crack Club, Cafe Voices and of course various events at the Storytelling Centre. Such events give us the chance to be inspired, to learn and share and to also tell.
   At meetings we focus on stories for specific occasions, helping members with projects. On one occasion we spent the time working up suitable endings for stories. It’s relaxed, fun and all about story. Contact Andrew Elstonapelston@btinternet.com

6. Glasgow - Better Crack Club
   The club meets at Tchai Ovna Tea House, 42 Otago Lane, 7.30pm on the third Friday of the month. Anyone is welcome to come along for stories, music, song and much more and each month features a guest storyteller. Contact Frances Logan on 0141 574 4136
Some joined-up story-sharing from four regional storytelling groups

Our storytelling New Year began on Saturday January the 8th in spite of the snow – another successful collaboration between four regional branches, Blether Tay-Gither, Bagatelle, Silver Branch and the hosts this time, Fife’s Kingdom Krack.

We aimed to allow participants to hear and retell less familiar Scottish stories at a bare bones level within a time constraint. People were able to work with each leader with opportunities to mingle and hear new stories from other participants. Lunch was a feast brought by us all and afterwards we had a song from Aileen Carr, played some Scottish circle games and explored adapting Scottish stories for the young with an opportunity to retell and share them. The day ended with two lovely stories from Linda Bandelier who had kindly been an understudy should one of the workshop leaders be unable to attend. Andrew Elston was MC and timekeeper; leaders were Senga Munro and Sheila Kinninmonth who both had stories in Scots, and Claire Hewitt and Judy Paterson. Each leader had prepared five stories so in all 22 stories were told, shared and retold!

Some comments:

“I particularly enjoyed the chance to tell a story several times … The most fascinating part of the event for me had to do with the astounding variation in the manner of telling a story between one person and another.”

“…quite a challenge to tell essence of a story and do it with integrity AND keep the integrity of the story intact – honour the tale in few words... great though and VERY good practice... thanks Judy!”

“It was great and I learned a lot. The day was well structured and I liked the mix of activities with the games and songs…”

“The experience of having to tell stories on the spot, no time to worry about which word to choose was great. This allowed the story to come through and almost tell itself, at the same time I felt I owned it and I felt more confident about telling stories!”

My thanks to all participants, to Andrew and especially to Senga, Claire and Sheila who donated time and talents.

Judy Paterson
judy4stories@yahoo.co.uk

Look out for details of a storytelling Network inspiration day in June 2011, somewhere in Scotland!

www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk

7. Grampian - Friday Fling
On the second Friday of the month the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire storytellers meet together for an evening of stories and fun. We try to ensure that any storyteller who would like to tell a tale gets a chance, but that those who want to just listen aren’t forced to speak! We sometimes have special guest tellers, but otherwise there’s a theme to help the group think of something to share. Neither the theme, nor being a storyteller, is compulsory, and we love having non-storytellers as our guests and members. Older children (over 12) are also welcome. We meet at Queen’s Cross Church in Aberdeen, with some Friday Flings in different venues, so it’s always worthwhile checking our website. Contact Anna Fancett
www.grampianstorytellers.org.uk

8. Edinburgh - Edinburgh’s Guid Crack club
The club meets on the last Friday of each month, 7.30 pm upstairs at the Waverley bar in St Mary’s St. There are some seasonal variations, so do check with the Storytelling Centre. We generally have a guest teller, who may be local or from afar, and may be well established or may be new to the Storytellers Directory.

Our guest will start and finish the evening, leaving time for contributions of stories, songs, poems and music from the floor – which leads to a great variety of moods and styles in the course of the evening. Our host will invite you to put your name in the book if you would like to contribute. We are always eager to hear from visitors and those new to storytelling. Contact Andy Hunter andy@storybikes.co.uk

9. Lothian - BagaTelle
The group is based in Midlothian and welcomes storytellers/developing storytellers and those with a healthy curiosity about storytelling. Bring along a story, poem or song or simply bring yourself – you won’t be disappointed. We have guest speakers, visit other groups, run workshops and mutually support each other in the context of storytelling. We currently meet at the Laird and Dog pub, Lasswade on the first Monday of the month at 8pm. Contact Lea Taylor on 07744 624065
A Diamond Jubilee  The School of Scottish Studies Archives

Dr Margaret Mackay, Honorary Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, describes the birth of a rich storytelling resource.

2011 sees the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the School of Scottish Studies in 1951, and six decades of stewarding archives of Scotland’s oral traditions for all with an interest in her people past and present and their history, languages and cultures.

The catalyst for the creation of a centre whose focus would be the collecting, archiving, researching, teaching and publishing of this material was Angus McIntosh, who was appointed to the University of Edinburgh as Forbes Professor of English Language and General Linguistics in 1948. He was a scholar of medieval dialects whose war-time experience in code-breaking at Bletchley Park had shown him what collaborative research teams using the most up-to-date technology, such as magnetic tape and the portable tape-recorder, could achieve. Folklore and folk life study could go hand-in-hand with comprehensive surveys of Gaelic and Scots dialects.

This project can be said to have had friendship and international co-operation at its core, for McIntosh gained inspiration from his close friends the folklore collectors John Lorne Campbell of Canna and his wife Margaret Fay Shaw, pioneers in the recording by machine and camera of the wealth of Scotland’s Gaelic heritage both at home and in Nova Scotia. Through them he met Professor James Hamilton Delargy, founder of the Irish Folklore Commission, who had himself long dreamed of Scotland having a similar institution. He in turn introduced McIntosh to the work of Swedish scholars whose methods of classifying and analysing oral materials were a model for the work of the School.

Solid scholarship, a commitment to the highest technical standards, and engagement through fieldwork with communities throughout Scotland were hallmarks of the School from the start. And storytelling was a central focus from the time its first full-time collector, Calum Maclean, began work in 1951. He had been trained in the 1940s by Delargy and others in Dublin, and was encouraged to collect in Scotland as well as Ireland. The subsequent appointments of Hamish Henderson, and of tale specialists Donald Archie MacDonald, Alan Bruford, John Shaw and most recently Will Lamb, along with the work and encouragement of all the School staff, have ensured that the riches of Scotland’s oral narrative traditions, from Shetland to the Borders and from the Western Isles to Buchan, have been recorded and filmed, studied and published.

The Scottish Tale Archive, meticulously built up over many years by Mary MacDonald and Cathie Scott, is a unique resource. Since 1957 Scottish Studies has published studies of tales and tellers, while transcriptions of oral recordings have regularly appeared in Toccher since its creation in 1971. The CD of Scottish Traditional Tales in the Greentrax Scottish Tradition Series from the Archives makes a splendid accompaniment to the anthology of the same name edited by Bruford and MacDonald. The recent publication of the Perthshire collections of Lady Evelyn Stewart Murray has been another important milestone for all with interests in narrative.

Students in the School’s undergraduate degree programmes in Scottish Ethnology have long had the pleasure of memorable visits to or by storytellers. Their projects and honours dissertations and, importantly, the research and theses of many postgraduate students and scholars have furthered our understanding of Scottish tales and tale-telling here and elsewhere in areas such as Appalachia and Nova Scotia/Cape Breton.

The School of Scottish Studies and the Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies have valued their strong links with the Scottish Storytelling Centre since its inception and look to developing these further in the years to come.

The Allan Bruford Memorial Lecture is an annual feature of the Scottish International Storytelling Festival and both bodies share valued connections with the storytellers and storytelling community of Scotland. The recent launch of the online resource Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches makes a wealth of storytelling from the School, the BBC and the National Trust for Scotland’s Campbell of Canna collections accessible to all, along with songs, instrumental music, customs, beliefs, place-names and much more.

Enquiries about undergraduate and postgraduate studies are welcome, and personal visits to the School’s sound and photographic archives and research library.

Please contact Dr Cathlin Macaulay cathlin.macaulay@ed.ac.uk to arrange these and for further information about the events taking place throughout 2011 to mark the first 60 years of this dynamic institution.

www.tobarandualchais.co.uk
www.kistoriches.co.uk

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Electric Tales  Storytellers take The Stand

Storyteller James Spence reviews Electric Tales at The Stand, Edinburgh on Tuesday 21 September 2010; part of an ongoing collaboration between the Scottish Storytelling Centre and The Stand comedy club exploring the relationship between live storytelling and stand up.

From a storyteller’s point of view Electric Tales is a wonderful opportunity to develop storymaking skills, and to present material in a different way to an audience with different expectations. For a storyteller to have an exclusively adult audience is refreshing; there is a freedom of subject matter and in how you may choose to express your material.

Let me tell you how it is for a budding comedian. If you want to give it a bash on stage at the Stand, you apply and go on a six-month waiting list to do five minutes at the weekly Red Raw night. Having done that you will have to go through the same process again in the hope that you get noticed and get invited to do 10 minutes the next time. There are a thousand people currently going through this process.

But storytellers fortunate enough to have been involved with Electric Tales are invited to do 15 minutes of comedy storytelling at a premier comedy venue (in my case it was the Arches Theatre at last year’s Glasgow Comedy Festival) alongside some of Scotland’s best comedians. September’s line-up certainly did include some of the country’s finest, including the legendary and surreal Bruce Morton. I used to watch him on TV in the 1980’s. Bruce was joined by Sian Bevan and Vladimir McTavish (Paul Snedden) and the storytellers taking part were Fiona Herbert, Alasdair Taylor and Donald Nelson. The night was compèred by comedian Susan Morrison.

The thing that’s different in a comedy venue is that the audience are expecting to laugh.

Many of us storytellers panic at that sort of expectation, but I now recognise the advantages. You’re half way there as soon as you’ve stepped onto the stage. You can say something dead-pan and people will automatically laugh because of the contrast to what they were expecting. Any decent storyteller will tell differently to different audiences, adapting to audience reactions, altering timing and tone, so it is a great thrill to have this eagerly responsive audience.

The storymaking is also a thrill. To take funny incidents from your life, to weave them with funnier bits you thought of afterwards, to weave truth and lies, to lead your audience down the garden path, to mess with people’s expectations is great fun, just a huge game you get to play with your audience all in the name of comedy. To write something you are sure will work, then to present it before a live audience a couple of days later is a huge buzz.

Comedy and storytelling are such close bed-fellows. Storytellers honing their skills over the years are not so far away from comedians practicing their art, which is why the storytellers who are comfortable projecting to larger audiences can make that leap so successfully.

At this event people said that they didn’t know who were the comedians and who were the storytellers. We’ve heard this comment throughout the life of Electric Tales.

I found the storytellers remarkably composed and at ease on stage, and all must be congratulated for their poise in grasping this new nettle. I’m sure they all had their nerves, but it didn’t show.

Fiona even managed to alter the mike in a composed manner (mikes are a complete mystery to storytellers and most want nothing to do with them, they’re not to be trusted!). All of the storytellers got laughs, were engaging, entertaining and very assured.

The comedians seem to be getting a lot out of it also. I’m sure that they find freedom in storytelling without the pressure to constantly make funnies.

I hope all storytellers involved in the Electric Tales events were delighted and inspired by their experience as I was. I have continued with comedy and am aware that my comedy has brought greater vibrancy to my storytelling. I sincerely hope that Electric Tales continues, grows and thrives. The challenge now for the storytellers involved is creating regular opportunities to present their stand up storytelling.

Contact James on wizzardpoet@googlemail.com or 0131 661 0726

Electric Tales continues in 2011, with regular meet-ups, training events and performances.

www.electrictales.co.uk electrictales@me.com

Did you know the Scottish Storytelling Centre is on facebook and Twitter (@scotstorycentre)?
Come and find us!

www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk
An International Storytelling Festival in Rome: a cultural miracle!

Festival founder Paola Balbi tells the story

In a posh sushi restaurant in the heart of Rome, all dressed up and surrounded by storytellers and journalists, we answered questions for the country’s most important newspapers and broadcasters. Every now and then we – young tellers of Raccontamiunastoria – glanced at each other. Without words our eyes were all asking the same question: did we really make it?

Here we are, at the opening evening of the second International Storytelling Festival. Raccontamiunastoria in Rome. Despite the absolute lack of funding (I mean it!), and even if our group is the only in Italy entirely dedicated to storytelling and we are all young artists under 35...we’ve made it!

For the second year we managed to organise a Storytelling Festival with more than twenty artists from all over the world, and a thousand visitors.

Raccontamiunastoria storytelling company was born in 2005, when back from England and a fantastic storytelling experience with Credo Storytelling Trust run by Shan Stephens, I – at the time a young actress from Italy’s most established Drama School – decided that I had a new dream: to bring storytelling back to Italian adult audiences. My enthusiasm affected colleagues Giulia Troiano and Angela Sajeva and we embarked on this new adventure: to create a storytelling group in Rome, in a place where nobody remembered the real meaning of the word ‘cantastorie’, storyteller...

We started our first storytelling open floor – now called ‘Salotto Raccontamiunastoria’ and an acclaimed monthly event – in a sitting room with 15 friends. The seed has grown, people have come and gone and now I’m running Raccontamiunastoria together with colleague Davide Bardi, who is also my ‘artistic partner’ (as we love to tell in tandem!).

Raccontamiunastoria is now a group of passionate young professionals who decided to devote their skills and passion to storytelling. Most of all we are a group of people who learnt how to make things happen, against all odds.

With money raised through our annual activities for every storytelling job we do, a percentage of the fee or income from tickets goes toward Raccontamiunastoria’s common fund to sponsor future activities. We hired a good press agent, who was one of the keys to the success of our Festival. She managed to raise the attention of the media and the national TV.

We hosted the storytellers in our own houses and found sponsors for catering, printing flyers, hosting a press conference and dinner. The Appian Park, thanks to its enlightened Director Alma Rossi, hosted the whole event and sponsored technical needs: lighting and sound system, electricity bill, security service... The park is a beautiful setting; one of the world’s most important archaeological sites, a place full of Italian history and ancient stories and a very significant spot to welcome storytellers from all over the world.

In a few months we managed to realise what the journalists called a “cultural miracle”. It happened like in the old Gospel story...we multiplied, not bread and fish, but our resources. The news that there was now an International Storytelling Festival in Rome spread and second generation or immigrant Italian tellers from all over the world contacted us. Many of them such as Mariella Bertelli and Charlie Chiarelli (Canada), Giovanna Cavasola (Mexico), Antonietta Pizzorno and Frida Morrone (France), and Diana Bertoldi (Scotland), took part in the Festival. After this great interest we decided to create FIST (Federation for Italian Storytelling), in order to have a network of Italian storytellers across the world.

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Our vision is to promote the work of not one single teller, but of a whole group of highly motivated, passionate and skilled performers, the majority of whom are young – another reason we have attracted the attention of the media, and hopefully sponsors.

The fact that all of us have previous drama training is quite important. Even though some tellers might think this is not a bonus, we believe it is. We stick with the pure oral tradition (there are no written words in our performances, nothing learnt by heart, but very good voice and body language skills). We are in love with the tradition, but add a glamorous image.

Many of us speak at least two languages very well, and this helps to bring our repertoire to wider attention. We use two ‘official’ languages during the Festival – Italian and English, with an Italian teller working in tandem with each of the foreign tellers.

Many great artists from all over the world have volunteered to take part in our Festival and have enthusiastically supported the birth of our project. David Ambrose, Michael Harvey and Martin Manasse (UK), Heidi Dahlsween and Matts Rehman (Norway), and Pam Faro (US) just to mention a few. To them goes all of our thanks and gratitude – and more than this the thanks and gratitude of the Italian audience. A special thanks goes to FEST (Federation for European Storytelling), as it was at the first meeting that I realised Italy was the only country without a Festival.

It’s a long story to tell in a few lines...but this is only the start. After the enormous effort we’ve undertaken we really hope to “live happily ever after” and to spread storytelling in Italy and Italian stories abroad “for ever and ever!”

The third International Storytelling Festival takes place in Rome on 30th September and 1st and 2nd October 2011. raccontamiunastoria@yahoo.it

Blethers
The soul is healed by being with children (Fyodor Dostoevsky)

Frances Logan reports back on her trip to Perm, Russia in 2010

It was the first story of the day and I was rather concerned. Would it work in another culture? Would it work using a translator? Would it work? In the end, there was no need to worry. The response from the children was overwhelming and as they laughed, jumped out their seats to get my attention and giggled with delight, it was easy to see that – yes! – it had worked.

We were in School 139, a school for blind and partially sighted children in the centre of Perm, a bustling city on the edge of Siberia, Russia. I never imagined that I would ever visit Russia, let alone be surrounded by the laughter and excitement of a hall full of Russian primary school children and be caught up in their enthusiasm as they listened to my tale.

Thanks to a grant from Creative Scotland I was there as a member of a small delegation representing SLATE (Scottish Language Action Towards Education) Charity. We were there participating in the International Festival of Motherhood, (iFOM) organised by Glasgow’s Better Crack Clubs, Michael Kerins and me. iFOM celebrates Motherhood in all forms and coincides with the 100th anniversary of the birth of Michael’s mother. Some of these forms are obvious, like the natural state of being a mother, others are more abstract such as mother-nature, mother of invention, mothers in storytelling and more abstractly men as mothers, giving birth to art – music – story. As well as taking part in the festival, we were also continuing the good works of the SLATE Charity and introducing audiences to the joys of storytelling.

We had several days working in the University where we spent time collaborating with students and staff, all of whom were keen to practice their English and learn more about Scottish culture and traditions. Of course, plenty of time was given to storytelling and the students showed great enthusiasm for what we had to share. We also managed to visit Perm State Technical University where we spent the morning with a wonderful storytelling concert.

Our journeys saw us attend two local schools in Perm and the Teacher Training College in Kungur. Some time was dedicated to the practice of English and questions from the teachers, assisting them in their knowledge and understanding of the English language and Scottish culture. We were delighted to be entertained by some of the pupils in School 77 who regaled us with songs from the works of Rabbie Burns and some fine Scottish Dancing.

One of the most unexpected joys of the whole tour was the storytelling performance in the Pietrovski Bookshop in Lunacharskogo, in the middle of Perm.

Frances Logan

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www.slatecharity.com
Donald Smith's pick of story-related publications for early 2011

There is a singing theme to the books this time. Ewan McVicar’s *The Eskimo Republic: Scots Political Song in Action 1951-1999* packs in a lifetime of knowledge and insight. It also comes with a CD so you can hear as well as read – and sing along!

Meantime in Ireland the wonderful Len Graham has produced an outstanding study of one great tradition bearer – *Joe Holmes: Here I Am Amongst You*. It is a labour of love, beautifully produced, and puts Joe’s Ulster songs and music within the context of long Irish and Scottish traditions. Len’s notes are a storytelling session in print!

On briefer notice Ewan McVicar (does he ever sleep?) has transposed Arabian Nights to Ross-shire in *One Black Isle Night*. Everyone will get a good story to tell from this one.

Jerker Fahlström’s new CD *Asgaard* re-tells the great Norse myths in Swedish and English. Mighty tellings, and available from the SSC shop. And Charles Coventry has kindly gifted his *Tale of Divarof the Absent-Minded* to the SSC Library. This booklet has some very interesting essays about gay experience within traditional culture.

Borne on the Carrying Stream: *The Legacy of Hamish Henderson* is a bezer of a book edited by Eberhard (Paddy) Bort. It covers every aspect of the Hamish Henderson-inspired renaissance of traditional arts, and a lot else besides. Lots of the contributors are well known on the storytelling scene and it’s a must read.

During his months of illness John Fee penned a collection of his inimitable local history stories which his family have produced in a limited edition. Demand outruns supply at present but we hope this may become available in a wider edition. The stories are fabulous and some of John’s own illustrations are included.

Last but not least Alastair McIver has produced a contemporary storytelling novel *Glasgow Fairytale* which has been entertaining SSC staff – so here is an insider view from Jo Richards at SSC reception:

“What would happen if Jack’s magic beans were thrown into the River Clyde by the Squinty Bridge?

What if one of the three little pigs had built his house on an Easterhouse estate?

Could Rapunzel have been an asylum seeker incarcerated in Dungavel detention centre?

Alastair McIver provides the answers as he takes you on a whirlwind adventure through the streets of Glasgow, casting a fresh eye on some familiar fairytale characters. Little Red Riding Hood will never look quite the same again”.

ASGAARD
Jerker Fahlstrom
(Distribution: Jerker Fahlstrom)
+46 (0)70 607 47 39
Available from Scottish Storytelling Centre shop
£10.00

BORNE ON THE CARRYING STREAM
The Legacy of Hamish Henderson
Ed. Eberhard Bort
(Grace Note Publications)

A GLASGOW FAIRYTALE
Alastair D McIver
(Black and White Publishing)

JOE HOLMES
Here I Am Amongst You
Len Graham
(Four Courts Press)
ISBN 978-1-84682-251-3 hbk £ ??
ISBN 978-1-84682-252-0 pbk £22.50

ONE BLACK ISLE NIGHT
Stories from 1001 Arabian Nights Retold as Stories of Ross-shire
Ewan McVicar
(Gallus Publishing)