Descendant of illustrious ancestors such as the Edinburgh People’s Festival and the Edinburgh International Folk Festival, TradFest embraces all the folk arts, combining authentic sources with contemporary edge, passion and flair.

The festival also takes under its wing the former Ceilidh Culture promotion but marks a new phase of vigorous renewal of Scotland’s culture in its local, national and international relationships.

Edinburgh’s first TradFest will take place from 24th April to 6th May 2013. For over twelve days the city will be a hive of music, song, storytelling, dance, crafts, folk drama and environmental celebrations for Mayday/Beltane. Falling at the traditional start of summer, TradFest heralds a seasonal wave of festivals across Scotland reaching through to the autumn.

TradFest brings Scotland’s arts of tradition into the heart of the capital city, offering something for residents and visitors, old and young, artists and audiences, professionals and community activists - and all of them together. Many venues, organisations and individuals have been involved in curating events which take place in Teviot Row House, The Pleasance, Queens Hall, Scottish Storytelling Centre, Dance Base, Greyfriars Kirk, Arthur’s Seat, Calton Hill, Portobello Promenade and many other locations.

All the things you would expect from a folk festival are in TradFest, with a vibrant range of music and song. From bothy nichts traditions to the contemporary interpretations of Karine Polwart and Alasdair Roberts, from Nordic fiddlers to the Scots mastery of Alasdair Frazer, from the Lowland Pipes of Hamish Moore to the step dance rhythms of Fin Moore. What is less predictable is the cross-fertilisation of dance styles, the upsurge of folk drama, the wave of storytelling events, and the environmental happenings on Calton Hill, Arthur’s Seat and Portobello Promenade.

The festival heralds a new season for the folk arts, and the future of our past is addressed directly on the last day with the Festival Conference Open Fields: the Future for Trads. A full listing of events is available on www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk

‘The traditional arts in Scotland are all about building on the artistic inheritance of the past while looking imaginatively towards the future. That philosophy of innovation as well as emulation lies at the heart of TradFest Edinburgh; Dùn Èideann. We are delighted at the breadth and depth of the arts of tradition on offer, and I, for one, can’t wait to sample their delights. Bring it on!’

Gary West, Chair of TRACS.

TradFest is organised by the Scottish Storytelling Centre on behalf of TRACS (Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland, which brings together Scotland’s performance traditions under a new umbrella). TRACS is grateful for the strategic support of the City of Edinburgh Council and of Creative Scotland, and for the active participation of its three Forums - Traditional Music, Storytelling and Traditions of Dance. The Creative Scotland Traditional Arts Commissioning Fund has also supported the Source; Sruth programming strand. Finally, TradFest is delighted to contribute through its environmental events to the Year of Natural Scotland.
The Storytelling Apprenticeship

There’s a pillar in Roslin Chapel named Apprentice’s Pillar, there’s a TV programme by that name and now there are apprentice storytellers!

Developing the art and craft of the storyteller can take a lot of hard work and dedication. We call this period of development ‘the apprenticeship’. It is hoped that the following suggestions will be helpful for people going through this apprenticeship process.

A good starting point is to listen to other storytellers and experience the rich variety of styles. Maybe attend a storytelling festival. Then work on a short story and find a venue to tell it, such as the Guid Crack Club, Café Voices or a storytelling circle in your area where the audience will be sympathetic to people practicing their craft. Have a go; many storytellers start their career this way. Another excellent environment for the apprentice storyteller is to join, or start, a small peer to peer storytelling circle. This is generally a small group of storytellers who meet, tell stories and give each other supportive feedback.

Meanwhile work on your voice, movements, gestures, imagination. Read a wide range of stories and become acquainted with the structure of tales. Tell to children, be on the lookout for situations where you could offer a story.

Attend workshops. As well as the storytelling craft workshops on offer, look out for other related workshops that will hone your skills: singing, clowning, public speaking, mime, etc.

Look for opportunities where you can shadow a storyteller and see how they interact with their audience. Find a mentor; some people offer this as a professional service, others may be happy to mentor you more informally. As you feel your confidence and skill grow, you can begin to seek out potential audiences. Very often doors open via people you know: perhaps a school teacher who would be happy for you to come in and tell a couple of stories to his or her class. Maybe you know someone who works in a care home? This is a setting where storytelling is very much appreciated. Or perhaps you know someone who owns a café and who would be open to you trying out an evening of storytelling. In those early stages there is generally not a lot of money to be earned, but much experience. If you are able to secure a regular storytelling situation, you will learn much about your ability to engage and enthuse from your audience’s responses. To promote these opportunities, it can be helpful to put together a simple leaflet that says a little about yourself and your storytelling.

If you would like to find out more about the apprenticeship, or have questions related to the Directory, please get in touch.

Janis Mackay

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The Scottish Storytelling Centre maintains a Directory of Professional Storytellers which now boasts 147 storytellers actively working in Scotland. The Directory is open to anyone, but attaining the level of professionalism needed to meet all the criteria may take years of development.

One of the criteria is that applicants should have had experience of telling stories regularly over a period of three years and be able to offer testimony to this from reputable judges, such as head teachers, critics in the media etc. It is also stipulated that someone learning the art and craft of the storyteller should engage with feedback from other storytellers. At the end of the process, the storyteller should have three positive recommending references from directory storytellers.

'It has been interesting to experience both sides of life at the Scottish Storytelling Centre. As a storyteller and writer I have recently enjoyed the opportunity of supporting people who wish to join the Directory of Professional Storytellers in Scotland.'
The Inside Story

Around the turn of the century I had a revelation. I had just come out of The Guid Crack Club and was full of the joys, having told a story there. People often say that there are no characters nowadays, and yet that packed upstairs bar was teeming with characters that night. I realised that if you keep on telling the stories that you love, your character has a hard job remaining hidden, that the sparkle will be in your eye for all to see.

What a triumph in an era where most have been disempowered by the dominance of passive entertainment in its many forms. Making your own entertainment is no longer required, and neither is your party piece - 'Shoosh, we're watching the telly'.

I never thought I'd achieve his timing or glorious pauses. However from early on to this very day, ten years after his death, when I'm telling a story of his I hear him telling the story in my head also. In this way, remarkably, I'm still learning from him. I have also learnt much in the same way from Stanley Robertson, David Campbell and Noel Cochrane, to name but a few. Inevitably some degree of affectionate impersonation crops up during my learning.

In the midst of each telling I feel the music of the story. Each has a rhythm of its own, although that rhythm changes with every new audience. Only when I meet the audience 'Eye to eye, mind to mind, heart to heart' will my intuition show me what rhythm is apt. Just as it will sometimes, during a performance, flash up a story I had no plans to tell. I have learnt to trust my intuition, in storytelling it has always proved right.

To express this music as best I can, my mind has to be fully on the path of the story. I have to be in the moment, like a sort of meditation. I feel I'm weaving a spell as I draw the audience into the story, and if an odd noise invades (a hoover or an ice cream van…) I include it in the story by using it as comic effect, so that the spell doesn't break. Similarly, I never look to the ceiling for the next part of the story, or the spell would break as the drama of my doubts flashes through for all to see, because the story is not about my process of telling.

John Fee was famous for his pauses. They were longer than Pinocchio's nose. They were daring, they were magical, they were thrilling - edge of the seat stuff.

Since the year 2000 I've told many stories, many times. Now I'd like to share something of the process that goes on within me as a storyteller. In doing so I hope to shed some light on why your character can't help surfacing.

In the beginning of my storytelling career I would tell my father's stories, about the characters of Jethart (Jedburgh) where I grew up.

What was going to happen next? It was only after his passing that Noel Cochrane told me the secret. John often forgot the story, but never once did his eyes reach for the heavens; instead he kept his eyes on his transfixed audience.

I've talked a lot about letting go the self in telling stories. Yet ironically it is when we relish the telling of our stories, when we lose ourselves in the tale so much that we are prepared to look our audience in the eye, sharing our passion in an open way, that our characters cannot help but shine out. This can be the case with anyone, even in the shyest of us, no matter whether the tale is true or the biggest lie you've ever heard. Such is the magic of storytelling.

James Spence
wizzardpoet@googlemail.com

James will lead the tall-tales workshop It happened to me and it was this big on 1st of June at the Scottish Storytelling Centre.

www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk
The role of the audience is primary to the storytelling performance. Without someone to listen where would the storyteller be? A story needs sharing with another pair of ears, a willing heart and mind. Treat your audience with respect and they will reciprocate, ensuring an enjoyable storytelling performance for everyone.

Many storytellers speak to audience members before beginning their story as a way of connecting. Introduce yourself—don’t assume everyone will know or remember your name. Children love being asked their name. A riddle, call-and-response, wee song are excellent ways of establishing a connection. Have a repertoire of engaging ‘firestarters’ to warm up the audience.

Take the story to the people, move toward them. Try not to have tables, lecterns, or other furniture between you and your audience. Make eye contact with individuals at key points in the story. If telling to children, keep your story simple and not too long. Exercise their attention span but don’t wear them out. If you forget something, don’t be afraid to ask the audience what they think comes next. Don’t look down, this cuts off your eye contact. Instead, look slightly upwards to the realm of inspiration. The audience will still feel your connections and the ‘story angels’ or ‘ancestors’ will likely help you out.

Show, don’t tell. This old adage reminds us that stories work best if we remember to show our audience what our story characters are thinking, feeling and doing. If a character is angry, try to show it rather than simply telling so. Take the time to do the actions, to let the emotions shine through and give the audience material to use their imaginations on, in order to recreate the story in their minds. Of course, there will be times when telling the audience what happens next is the quickest way to get from one place to another in the narrative. Nevertheless, stimulate your audience’s imagination with vivid pictures, sounds, smells, tastes and feelings. Varying vocal tones, body movements, gestures and facial expressions are your tools of the trade and create dynamic tales guaranteed to engage and entertain your audience.

Storytelling is about relationships. When finished, thank your audience for their attention and participation. If possible, be available to them after your performance to answer questions and allow them to get to know you better. Having business cards ready is a convenient way for potential clients to take away your contact details.

Finally, remember that you are an ambassador for storytelling.

The ABCs of Storytelling: tips, techniques and reflections
By respecting your audience, knowing their needs, attending to their comfort and delivering a first-class performance, you will honour the tradition of storytelling and go a long way in promoting it and keeping it alive. Also, you’ll watch your audiences grow and become more nurturing as time goes on. This is not to say that you won’t encounter the occasional problem - a heckler, a disruptive child, a drunken adult or other unexpected interruption - but with forethought and an engaging rapport, you will find your connection with audiences all the more rewarding and mutually satisfying.

**Michael Williams,**
iamthestoryteller@gmail.com

**NEXT TIME**
B is for Blogging
your story

Michael Williams is a professional storyteller, story coach and narrative consultant. Michael is co-founder and facilitator of the ‘Narrative Approach to Transformational Leadership’ programme for the Aberdeen Leadership Forum and co-editor of ‘Therapeutic Storytelling’, part of the All Things Healing online community.

For more information, go to www.rjmwilliams.co.uk

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Scotland’s a Blether!

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

1. Tayside and North Fife – Blether Tay-gither
Blether Tay-gither continues to thrive and to make links with the wider community in Tayside, Perthshire, Angus and North Fife. We had a very successful event as part of the Scottish International Storytelling Festival with two Polish storytellers and were involved in a literacy project in Dundee last December. In the coming months we will be involved in Dundee’s Women’s Festival, in a project on serendipity with Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre and some of our storytellers will be filming telling the winning stories of a writing competition for Angus Tartan Day. Our most exciting project was unveiled on 29th January at our monthly meeting: regular attendees were asked to contribute an original story or a re-telling of a traditional story for a collection called A Book of Blethers, which we hope to launch later this year to celebrate the coming of the New Year to celebrate the coming of the New Year. We continue to meet in the Burgh Coffee House in Dundee on the last Tuesday of the month from 7.00pm and always welcome new tellers and listeners. Hopefully we will have some special guest tellers in the coming months.

Contact Sheila Kinninmonth
sheila@blethertaygither.org.uk or see www.blethertaygither.org.uk

2. Borders – Borders Bards
This has been a quiet winter for our group. We had our AGM in December and one of our main aims at the moment is to run a campaign to raise publicity and to gather new members, as we are currently low on attendees at sessions. We will also be looking at running more themed events. The next big event on our calendar is our annual Story Gathering weekend at Woolpaw Woods in August. Each month we aim to loosely work with the themes of the Celtic and the seasons. New members are always welcome at our cosy gatherings in our own room with the County Inn’s historical ambiance on the 2nd Tuesday of the month in the main bar at 7.30pm: £3 donation.

Music, Verse and Stories
Everything is changing for Music, Verse & Stories (MVS). The incarnation of the session as a monthly event ended last December. It looked like this would be the end of this well-known event, but this is not the case! Howard Purdie, Innerleithen poet and long-time host of the event, has decided to re-launch this year. MVS will be re-emerging as a more occasional and special event three or four times a year at a new venue in Innerleithen. As the new plans are formed we will put out announcements, so look out for more news!

Contact David McAleece
david@mcalseece.com 0785 384 5019.

3. Perthshire – Silver Branch
Over the last four months Silver Branch has been nomadic. We are still hoping to have Corbenic Cafe as our venue in Dunkeld, it’s a Campbell Community shop, really central and just what we need. We just have to be patient! In the meantime the biggest news is that one of our tribe, Lindsey Gibb, has been accepted onto the Directory. This is fantastic news as Lindsey has been storytelling for years, and having left SNH she can develop her practice and bring more storytelling to Perthshire!

We had a wonderful run of three weeks of storytelling in the Enchanted Forest last, autumn, and also the International Storytelling Festival came to Blair Castle, in the form of a celebration of Lady Evelyn Stewart Murray’s legacy of stories, collected in Perthshire in 1891. Also the Story Quilt found in Aberfeldy and dating back to late 1900’s has captured the imaginations of Highland. More to come on this and more stories!

We also have two projects that some of our members are involved in, both funded by National Lottery Heritage’s All Our Stories fund. One is Stories in the Land with the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, the other takes place at Stanley Mills and focuses on the 60’s and the women working at the Mill.

Overall we are doing well and starting to offer storytelling workshops for beginners, a monthly tree calendar for FEI Tayside cluster group and we are looking forward to Railway Stories this year to celebrate the coming of the railway to Pitlochry.

Contact Claire Hewitt
claireasach@btinternet.com or 01887 820339 or 07765 166034.

4. Fife – Kingdom Tales
Members of Kingdom Tales hosted the group’s first Christmas event Christmas in the Kingdom on Monday 17th December in the Whistlestop Cafe in Dunfermline, where Russian storyteller Maria Koroleva had also performed during the Storytelling Festival. This time owner Lorna even knitted some stockings to hang over the fireplace for us, adding to the ambience of the evening. Hosts for the evening, Beverley Bryant, Aileen Carr and Jen Dudley were delighted to welcome an inter-generational audience. Our teen tellers were, once again, the real stars of the show as they joined regular members to share stories of the nativity, mischievous leprechauns and even reminding us of that poignant story of the Christmas Day ceasefire.

The evening was filled with the warmth and wonder of Christmas, as well as mouthwatering cake, and so this looks set to become an annual fixture in the Kingdom Tales diary.

The next meeting of the club will be Monday 18th March at our regular venue, Workspace in Dunfermline (a combined arts and hairdressing studio).

Contact Andrew Elston
apelston@btinternet.com

5. Glasgow – Better Crack Club
Both clubs are jogging along quite nicely. The Better Crack Club Glasgow (for adults and accompanied older children) is still going strong, the venue, Tchai Ovna 42 Otago Lane, is often standing room only. Warm, welcoming and inclusive is how we like to see ourselves. We usually meet on the third Friday of month. The next few dates are: 15th March (featured teller Gerry Durkin), 19th April (Spring Is in the Air), 17th May (featured teller Alison Clark with theme And a Star to Steer Her By), 21st June (featured teller Beverley Bryant). All meetings start at 7:30pm.

The Even Better Crack Club
Storytelling for ALL the family on the following Saturdays at 10:30 in the Fairfield Room of the Mitchell Library, North Street Glasgow. 23rd March, 11th May, 8th June. Why not join us for stories, songs and general feel-good factor? Come along and try us out!

Contact Frances Logan
loganfrances@gmail.com
Our 2013 programme got off to a great start with several workshops sold out already. The workshops, which are devised in collaboration with TRACS (Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland), offer a diverse range of skill-building and cultural opportunities for anyone interested in the participative arts or wishing to bring new skills to their professional work or community involvement. There are three main themes to the 2013 workshops:

1. **Crafting Your Skills**, clustered around January to March and then in the Autumn.
2. **Enlivened Communities** around spring and summer, focussing on community engagement.
3. **Scotland’s Cultures**, spanning Tradfest in April/May, Bardic Journey to Skye 20th-23rd June, and Culturefest July/August.

In response to feedback and suggestions from 2012 we have reduced the price of song workshops, revised workshop timings to try to suit more participants and offered new courses for more advanced storytellers such as **Deepening the Practice**, which runs over a period of six weeks and will be offered again in the Autumn. Due to great demand, **Starting with Stories 1 and 2** will run three times across 2013.

Workshop dates coming up include a free workshop for International Women’s Day on Friday 8th March (women only), followed by a ceilidh tea dance (men welcome to this), and a raft of exciting April/May workshops as part of Edinburgh’s new traditional arts festival TradFest. The full April to June workshop and courses programme is available on [www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk](http://www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk).

For more information contact Gica Loening - gica@scottishstorytellingcentre.com
I sometimes have a hard time convincing my family that I have a ‘proper’ job. You can see their point as I unpack my briefcase (actually a large wicker hamper) at the end of a working day and take out sweet-smelling puppets, feather cloaks, bells and bellows, soft quilts and squishy fish. ‘But I do work hard!’ I protest, as in the corner of my briefcase something gently goes ‘moooo’…”

In 2010 I received a Creative Scotland Storyteller’s Bursary to develop a programme of storytelling that would be suitable for children with severe and complex special needs. I worked in a number of special schools and received a lot of support from the charity PAMIS. PAMIS are based in Dundee and support families with a son or daughter with PMLD (profound and multiple learning disabilities) throughout Scotland. PAMIS has already shown, through their research, the value and benefits of storytelling to people with complex needs. Like me, they believe that everybody can enjoy a good story. And like me they believe that Scotland’s stories belong to all of us. But how could we make those stories more accessible? Together we hatched a plan…

Last autumn we received funding from Creative Scotland to create a set of story boxes: each will contain the multi-sensory resources to go with a Scottish tale, and the stories will be adapted to make them more accessible to children and adults with additional needs, including people with PMLD. We are working with Ruth Bailey, a professional prop-maker and lots of knitters to produce the multi-sensory props that will bring the stories to life for audiences who might otherwise be beyond the reach of oral storytelling.

We have already started piloting the boxes in schools and day centres, and this is the reason why I have a briefcase that tinkles, rattles and shakes! What makes this project such a rewarding one is the connection I feel with audience members during these sessions. There are moments of unexpected complete stillness or loud laughter, moments of shared looks and shared pleasure between members of the audience.

In October our project took an international turn when Professor Barbara Formefeld from Cologne University came over as a guest of PAMIS. Professor Formefeld and I led a workshop together in multi-sensory storytelling as part of the Scottish International Storytelling Festival. Loretta Lambe, director of PAMIS, presented the professor with Rashie Coat, our first story box, to take back to Germany and she in turn presented PAMIS with a multi-sensory version of Little Red Riding Hood.

By the end of the year we will have four multi-sensory story boxes ready to be used by the families, teachers, carers and friends of people with additional needs. They will be available to borrow from PAMIS in Dundee and there will also be a set available for storytellers to use at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh.

In the meantime knitting needles click, sewing machines whirl and my briefcase gently goes ‘moooo’.

Ailie Finlay
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Excavate the World of the Celts

Recently archaeologists were exuberant and excited to excavate and identify the skeleton of Richard III of England and acclaimed it as a recovered lost treasure.

Here in Scotland too there is a lost treasure, the rich tapestry of the tales of the Celts, that needs to be excavated, prized and given the breath of our storytellers. Like the skeleton of Richard III, these tales have remained largely hidden or neglected, and legends like Arthur’s, that says the King will return in the hour of the nation’s need, carry a wisdom urgently needed in our times.

These tales have all the drama, wit and excitement that characterises the best of heroic stories. Mixing humour and romance, fantasy and epic, the wounds of war, hunting and heart-blinding love, these mesmerising stories bridge the centuries. From the earliest Celtic times and the stories of Fionn with his legendary brotherhood of heroes to the doorstep of tomorrow, they are among Europe’s greatest cultural riches.

Few know that the first ever mention of Arthur himself is in the 6th century poem The Gododdin, which is set in the Lothians of Scotland, by the bard Aneirin who was one amongst three survivors of an inglorious defeat at the hands of the Anglo-Saxon warbands at Catterick.

The seaways in those proud and far-back times connected the Celtic Kingdoms of Erin and Alba in their shared legacy of tales: from the mythic origin of the aboriginal people, half god and half human, to the coming of the Gaels and the origin of the hidden folk, the fairy people.

To the Celts the riddle was king. Riddles of the heart, the hunt and the world of nature are at the heart of many of their tales. And so was the great riddle that stood at the doorway to the other world, for the Celt had no doubt that nothing dies, but changes form and lives on in another realm, so that there is no death.

Wonder and connection were in everything, the earth and all things in it were alive and had a spirit. Their deepest belief, shared with the sages of ages, was that the greatest music of all is the music of what happens, the living in each moment, or as the Romans put it centuries later, carpe diem, seize the day.

The beauty of it is that their wise understandings are invisibly sewn into the tapestry of their stories. By their stories shall ye know them and enter their consciousness of wonder and connectedness, attributes dimmed and lost in the pace of the acquisitive-driven culture of today. Their songs, dances, poems and stories tell who they were, a treasure waiting to be excavated and given breath.

David Campbell
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Tea, cake and a Bridge of Tales

Tea and cake play an important role in storytelling and a good few stories are told over a cuppa, but sometimes tea and cake can lead to something unexpected. Debbie Maxwell and I, both members of Blether Tay-gither storytelling group, had just returned from a trip to the busy Festival at the Edge nestled in the beautiful Shropshire hills.

We had been impressed by the whole set up, particularly by how the local community had been involved and we got to thinking, over tea and cake of course, how we would like to do a similar event. We had been involved in the Three’s Company and Four Tell events where some of the local storytelling groups got together to network and share training, and we thought we would like to enlist the help of someone who had organised things like this before, someone like Owen Pilgrim.

From the beginning we were clear we wanted the event to involve the local community, include skills development for tellers and have opportunities for networking, so we agreed on a mix of workshop and sessions for storytellers and performances for locals to attend. After a recce of a number of villages, Bridge of Earn emerged as our preferred location. It has a great venue at the Institute, good public transport links and lots of parking, plenty of places to eat and stay. With the location sorted the event name came too, and Bridge of Tales was born.

As we were keen to showcase what Perthshire has to offer, we looked for local tellers to lead the weekend, and Jess Smith and Margaret Bennett enthusiastically agreed to get involved.

Bridge of Tales will be held on Saturday 6th April 2013 at the Institute in Bridge of Earn. More info can be found on www.bridgeoftales.org.uk.

Lindsey Gibb
info@bridgeoftales.org.uk
Recording Tales

I love storytelling to any age group, and I particularly love telling to babies and toddlers anywhere, in any setting, and love doing 'Tiny Tales' at the Scottish Storytelling Centre. In the course of doing these events I discovered that there is not much storytelling for the wee ones available on CD out there, so I thought 'I'll do one myself'.

At the end of last year, after much preparation, the trauma that is recording storytelling and trying to weave music around and within it began. My brother Andy Shanks, an internationally acclaimed singer and song writer didn’t know what he was letting himself in for either, when he 'volunteered' to work with his big sister. I had set aside two days at Woodston Studios to do the recording, thinking we'd get the whole lot done in that time. I had my stories and songs carefully thought through and knew them well. Andy had a rough idea of what I was after musically and had lined up a variety of instruments. Our supersensitive microphones were in place, our headphones were on, and the recording equipment was poised and ready. We had thought it would be better for me to read my stories so that if there was a mistake, we could go back and record over it.

But it sounded too wooden. Andy tried to weave his music around the story but the volume at times overpowered the story. So I tried telling without a script and Andy wove music to begin each story, in the spaces, and to accompany the songs I’d chosen. Simple you say - done in a few hours you say - no way! Even though I had experience in storytelling on the radio, this was very different and I realised that my text was not rich enough. Not having my face, body or my usual puppets and props - things to feel and see and touch - made conveying the story very challenging. Everything was in the spoken word, the tone, the pace, the volume, the pauses. I had to re-work my stories. Also we were learning how music and sound can create a sound-scape for the story.

To make things worse a story told from memory, as all storytellers know, changes a little with each telling, even when you really know it inside out. As a result mistakes are more difficult to delete and change in the recording, so the whole process just requires so much concentration all the time. At the end of the day I felt like I had been pulled through a hedge backwards, and all we had to show for our efforts were 15 minutes of recording! The second day worked better as we let the stories and songs evolve together and less struggle was needed to end up with another 15 minutes of recording.

So we will have to be back to the studio to complete the CD. Remarkably (and luckily) Andy says he’s keen to record the rest soon. All I can say is, if you decide to record a CD with both story and song, be prepared for a tremendously creative but also very tiring (and at bits traumatic!) experience.

Anne Pitcher
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Two years ago my son Ross married a Vietnamese girl, Nga. Five Scots flew out to Ho Chi Minh for the wedding, which was quite a climate shock. When the city wasn’t deluged by sudden downpours leaving the hot streets steaming, we found ourselves drenched in sweat by the humid weather.

Naturally, I wanted to learn more of the Vietnamese culture. Nothing is wasted with these people. In the North, the Cambodians harvest the crickets to deep fry as cricket kebabs! I also found examples of Vietnamese folk tales. One concerns a tiger, who loyally returns to the house of the old woman whose son he killed, to feed her. Then there is the strange story of the worm and the snail, born to human sisters, who are ostracised by the village but in time regain human shape and are accepted. The Tale of the Rice Cake is the old motif of three sons sent off to find the finest food for the emperor, their father. The winner, of course, brings home not the rarest food but the humble rice cake.

The Moon Boy, Cuoi, is the legend of a trickster who marries a village girl. He discovers a magic banyan tree with curative powers, uproots it and plants it in his yard. His wife, jealous of the tree, tips excrement on it, whereupon the tree uproots itself and flies off to the moon. Cuoi grabs hold of its trunk and goes to the moon with his tree.

In the Water Melon tale, an adopted son of King Hung tells his father that he doesn’t approve of gifts. Angered, his father banishes him to an island where sea birds bring him melon seeds. Sometimes, he cuts his name on a melon fruit and floats it off... Eventually, one reaches the King, who relents and brings his son home.

The Witness is the tale of a moneylender and a poor farmer’s son. The boy tells riddles as to where his parents are, but promises to explain them if his father’s debt is cancelled. This is witnessed by a gecko. When later on the moneylender denies making the deal, in the presence of a judge the boy reminds the moneylender that the gecko on the wall was a witness, causing the moneylender to shout that the gecko was somewhere else, tricking him into admitting the bargain had indeed taken place.

The Legend of the Milky Way concerns the Jade Emperor’s daughter and her husband, a shepherd, who angers her father. Now they are parted by a silver river in the sky, the Milky Way, until the seventh month of the moon year, at the end of summer, when crows fly up to make a bridge for the lovers to cross.

When they part, they weep so much that the rain season arrives. A local version of the Excalibur legend tells of the gold Turtle God who gives the Emperor Le Loi a magic sword. When the Chinese finally grant Vietnam independence, Le Loi is boatting on the lake of Hanoi, and a giant turtle rises up and takes the sword back to the Turtle God. The Lake is named Hoan Guom, Lake of the Sword Retaken. In 2011 a giant turtle was found in the lake, proving that every legend holds a little truth at the core.

Some of these tales I have collected in Peach Blossom Petals: Folk Tales & Poems from Vietnam, published by Malfranteaux Concepts. ISBN : 978 1 870978 90 3 (2012)

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Anither Fine Hairst
I have to begin this column with a confession. The ‘discovery’ of the fifth branch of The Mabinogion - Wales’ classic medieval storytelling masterpiece - as featured in the last issue of Blethers, turns out to be a ‘recreation’ and not a true original. Bob Pegg was the man who shattered my illusions. Nonetheless Amaethon Son of Don by Mark Williams is a wonderful piece of narrative invention; google it to see for yourselves. From now on, though, I’ll be writing this column under the pen name ‘Ossian’.

On a wholly authentic note, Up Yon Wilde and Lonely Glen by Elizabeth Stewart with Alison McMorland is now out, and more than lives up to its promise. The subtitle describes it well - ‘Traveller’s Songs, Stories and Tunes of the Fetterangus Stewarts’. By putting a tremendously rich family tradition, passed through several generations, into its social, cultural and human context, the authors have produced a classic work not just for folklorists but for all who love the resonance and rooted depths of Scotland’s culture. It’s a muckle work that delights and intrigues throughout.

Staying with the North East, Aberdeen Folk Club and Ewan McVicar’s Gallus Publishing have produced a fine introduction to Arthur Argo. Arthur Argo Collects 1960 combines background information with Arthur’s Press and Journal pieces and some of his recordings in CD form. It’s a fine wee handsel for an important grass roots influence on the folk renaissance, and hopefully a harbinger of more to come on Argo’s contribution.

Grace Notes continue their contribution to folk publishing with a hat trick volume on Hamish Henderson and the folk revival, At Hame Wi Freedom. Again genially edited by Eberhard (Paddy) Bort, this essay collection is associated with the 11th Carrying Stream Festival. There are multiple riches and perspectives here on biography, songs, politics, poetry (a fine essay By Fred Freeman), Sectarian Songs (the incomparable Owen Dudley Edwards), and new Scots-Italian poetry inspired by the Anzio Band. Fertile soil indeed.

Back to the North East to experience two Stanley Robertson tales translated into British Sign Language by Frankie McLean. Entitled Storytelling as a family Activity this CD/web resource is a brilliant link between traditional culture and the culture of Scotland’s deaf community. Congratulations to all involved – for more info see www.bsluptake.org.uk/info/?cat=756.

The project was launched by Stanley’s family at the Scottish Storytelling Centre last November. Iain Forde’s Twelve Traditional Children’s Tales in Scots and Gaelic (with English translation) offers an attractive storytelling resource in both print and audio form. Fons Scotiae is the name of this entering small publisher determined to put high quality linguistic resources in the hands of Scots of all ages. ‘Sumbuddee bene suppin ma pambah!’

An important recent book is Gary West’s Voicing Scotland: Folk, Culture, Nation. Though he focuses on music and song and does not cover storytelling traditions directly, storytelling is an omnipresent background as the author explores the relationship between evolving traditions and changing social contexts. While academic in its import, Gary West’s style is exploratory, personal, accessible and very rewarding. These important topics will feature at a conference, inspired by this volume, in the forthcoming TRADFEST Edinburgh; Dùn Éideann.

Finally, storytelling enthusiasts could do worse than dip into www.thehistorypress.co.uk following the local history and then folk tales headings. This UK publisher is trying to produce collections for every part of the country including bit by bit Scotland - the Highlands are already represented by Bob Pegg’s recent volume. Given the hunger for locally rooted material this series may prove a treasure trove in the making. The great existing strength are the English counties and regions including a Cumbrian volume by Taffy Thomas.