Trad Arts Together

This issue of Blethers brings you stories of wizards and rhymers from the South, of fishing boats in the North, of rocks and pipers in the West. We reflect on the spirit of the ceilidh, an ancient tradition of gathering and sharing with the power for reconnection that is perhaps needed now more than ever in our fast-paced world.

We highlight the third annual TradFest Edinburgh, which kick starts this summer season with a feast of music, storytelling, dance, folk drama, folk film, literature & talks, crafts.

We introduce Tracs’ pilot education resource, ‘Gifting Every Child.’ This is a collaborative and multilingual project through which everyone living in Scotland can tap into our rich creative culture. What songs, stories, dance steps and seasonal customs should every child in Scotland know? What belongs to them regardless of origin, culture or language?

This year we also celebrate 10 incredible years of the Scottish Storytelling Centre. We take this opportunity to reflect on where we’ve come from and look forward to an exciting future. Working closely with the traditional music and dance networks, together we will explore and showcase the immense diversity and shared commonality across the traditional arts in Scotland and beyond.

TRACS: Scotland’s National Network for Traditional Arts and Culture

- A living flow of song, music, dance, story and wordplay
- Space for conviviality and collective energy open to all
- Creative practice inspired by shared memory and experience
- A wellspring for community identities and personal growth

Supporting

Traditional Music, Storytelling and Dance with their national Forums, respective networks and the languages of Scotland.

Engaging with

Lifelong learning, community development, ecology and cultural diversity, contemporary arts, crafts, social enterprise, responsible tourism, and social justice.

Nurturing

Creativity and cultural heritage in all parts of Scotland.
TRADITIONAL ARTS: CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Building on last year's Scottish International Storytelling Festival and its theme of Stories Without Borders, this year's TradTalk - TRACS' annual conference - takes as its theme the idea of crossing boundaries. We question the idea of participation: who participates, who might participate, and how do we widen the invitation?

The world is in the midst of volatile and overwhelming global challenges. We are living in an age of international migration and globalisation. Migration has inevitable connections with some of the most pressing issues in our societies, such as the mobility of people, diversity, equality of opportunity, sustainability and social cohesion or division.

In Scotland, the traditional arts are underpinned by the idea of hospitality: sharing what we have to offer as people gather together, by invitation or happenstance, providing a means for voices hidden from mainstream society to be heard. Storytelling, music, song and dance can play a vital role in promoting understanding between people of different faiths, nationalities and abilities.

The global influence on our day to day lives in Scotland is profound. Cultural diversity is inherent in the history of any nation, and Scotland has always been a place of migrations, influenced by the diversity of culture, language, religion and beliefs around the globe. The direct influence of countless generations of migration is underpinned by what we might call UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, or living culture. Scotland has adopted an inclusive definition of intangible heritage which embraces the diversity of cultures found in Scotland today.

The traditional arts have enjoyed a long, deep and meaningful history amongst the people of Scotland. Some of these traditions have far-reaching roots, others have been more recently developed or adopted, but whatever their origins and provenance, they continue to have great significance and value for us today.

Tradition is not static; it is constantly in process and open to new influences.

The traditional arts are generally characterised by re-creation, constant re-animation and reworking of material. New meanings are continually being created, where old and new combine into exciting entities of living value. Inevitably, the forms and patterns of cultural expression are ever changing and cross-pollinating. We might argue that the traditional arts are at their most vibrant and exciting when they connect and meet with cultures other than our own.

Far from belonging to our parochial past, the traditional arts are the symbolic medium of a particularly powerful form of cultural ecology: an agent of collective awareness and cultural renewal. Through the process of tradition we create a continually evolving sense of self, of community and identity. Our point of departure is a celebration of cultural difference.

TRACS is bold and innovative in its ambitions to take forward Scotland's traditional arts as a vital part of the country's contemporary wellbeing. We believe that the traditional arts are a vital and diverse element of Scottish cultural life, valued by people, communities, locally, nationally and internationally, whatever their background.

Mairi McFadyen
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@ScotStoryNetwrk

Mairi McFadyen is our new Storytelling Network Co-ordinator. With a background in ethnology, ethnomusicology, Scottish culture and heritage, Mairi is a passionate advocate for the traditional arts and is delighted to be able to contribute to the developing work of TRACS.
Traditional arts are the foundation of Scotland’s cultural heritage and national identity. Communities are bound by the stories and music that surround them. TradFest offers an explosion of culture to ensure that this history is kept alive and that the traditional Ceilidh arts continue to be given a platform, allowing them to flourish and shape Scotland’s culture for future generations.

Scottish and international artists meet with local performers for an exciting fortnight of music, storytelling, dance, crafts, talks, walks, workshops and folk film. With over 90 events across 25 venues, there is something for everyone!

The line-up also provides a great opportunity to place the spotlight on some of Edinburgh’s most iconic and unusual locations, with the Scottish Storytelling Centre - home of Scotland’s Culture - being the hub for the Festival.

"People are digging into that sense of local cultural diversity. It doesn't need to be a kind of ersatz Scottishness with everything mixed and matched. There are all sorts of different stories ... the music, the localities, the ways of life ... they are all part of it. The international aspect has always been in there as well but the point is it comes through the local traditions. We are not international for the sake of it, we are international because it is part of the story."

Donald Smith
www.tracscotland.org/tradfest
BOTH SIDES OF THE MINCH

In the autumn of last year I was involved in two different projects, both working with the elderly. The first was in Ullapool and organized by the lively arts centre, An Talla Solais. The second was on home ground, in the town of Stornoway. I felt that elements of both could be worth sharing with the storytelling community.

ULLAPOOL - PORTABLE ART

On Tuesday 9th September, I caught the ferry to cross the Minch from my home port of Stornoway. Much of my work begins as extracts of logs of journeys by sea, out from the harbour town where I was born. This time, I sat back on the comfortable new Loch Seaforth and thought of the stories I might tell to an Ullapool Seniors group to link with an exhibition, originated in Ullapool but also shown on a barge in London and in a castle in Galicia. The hope is always that one story evokes another.

I was one of the artists invited to devise a work which could travel, from port to port, in the confines of a standard cardboard post-box. I sent a video recording of the son of a previous owner of my own vessel El Vigo, describing how he and his father navigated the yacht from Strangford Lough back to Vigo in Spain and the yard where it was built, twenty years before. There is a hard sting in this tale of a successful voyage.

First, I described how four artists from each of the countries, Scotland, England and Spain, were invited to make a portable work which would fit into a small postal box. Then I shared some stories from my own home background - come down from my Lewis grandfather through my mother and my uncles. For me, these stories of a witty trickster or a poacher or a village distiller of illegal whisky are part of the fabric of my home port. These led to the stories brought to mainland and island Scotland by Travelling people. There is the witty daughter of a poacher - the crop-haired freckled lass - who gets the better of the laird. She re-appears throughout the countries of Europe and through the centuries. In return, I was soon afloat again, on a tide of strong stories from members of this friendly group. We chatted over coffee and I'm sure there could have been a yarn to be had with each and every one, if there was only time for that. Three of the individual stories were so powerful that I transcribed them and checked them back with the tellers. The full accounts were published in The Ullapool News.

Ike Gibson was born Isaac Goldberger. He was the youngest of five siblings who boarded the second last Kindertransport out of Nazi Germany in 1939. His story was all too topical at a time when refugees were travelling all through Europe. Jessie Osborne told me how her husband Roy, a Gairloch man, bought one of the sleek 'Windfall' yachts which came to Britain as trophies after the Second World War. Roy and Jessie's family were soon that team, charging through spray in the fast but wet yacht. Their daughter was no exception and her mastery of sextant navigation proved her abilities as a sailor in her own right. Florence Jamieson took part in a seminal Scottish exhibition of paintings - The Glasgow Girls. But the story she had to tell me was not really about her own achievements. Rather it was about how skills and stories, knowledge and experiences are passed on - in fact very like the works in the Portable exhibition.

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EILEAN | ISLAND

Eilean | Island is the title of a project initiated by the Borders artist Pat Law in partnership with an Lanntair, the Stornoway arts centre. Pat’s concept was to explore the shared territory between netmending and storytelling.
A few years ago I had talked to storyteller, singer and songwriter Ewan McVicar about my idea and he said if I ever wanted to go ahead with it, he would help me. Ewan's father was a 'Habbie' as all folks born and bred in the village are named, after Kilbarchan’s 16th piper Habbie Simpson.

With support from Creative Scotland’s TASGADH small grants scheme, the project began to take shape. The first stage was research into Kilbarchan’s history, traditions and culture. The next involved working with the p5/6 class over two months. We explored local stories, oral storytelling and songwriting. The project culminated in a performance titled 'Warp & Weft - Kilbarchan Woven in Story & Song,' involving talented locals as well as the children’s own work.

This final performance was part of the Scottish International Storytelling Festival, tying in with the 'Dig Where You Stand' local campaign which encouraged communities ‘to unearth a treasure-trove of stories and legends in their community or local area.’

Into the mix came members of Kilbarchan Pipe Band, who brought Habbie Simpson’s tunes alive. The local ladies ‘Village Voices’ choir sang ‘Lilias Day,’ written and last heard in 1933 for the village’s unique annual festival day. Though a wild and wet evening, the hall was packed with locals and it was voted a great success.

From this event came two offshoots in November. The first was a mini 'Warp & Weft' event for the whole of the school - the P5/6 class performed their songs for the others. The second was an event for the Lowland & Borders Piper’s Society in Peebles, telling the story of the 16th century piper Habbie Simpson. We were joined by piper Pete Stewart, who dressed as Habbie and played tunes that Habbie would himself have played, on a set of pipes specially made.

What a wonderful, exciting, challenging and fulfilling project it was! It is hoped that much more may yet come from the seeds that have been sown in the bringing alive the traditions, culture and rich history of this little village.

Anne Pitcher
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www.kilbarchanwarpandweft.webs.com
GIFTING EVERY CHILD

As Digital and Languages Apprentice for TRACS, Morag Wells has edited and developed the Gifting Every Child resource alongside guest editors Bea Ferguson, Christina Stewart and Mats Melin. Her focus is on developing and expanding the resources available on the TRACS website, with a particular focus on Gaelic and Scots. She can be contacted at morag@scottishstorytellingcentre.com.

Whit songs, tales an dauncin culd we gie lika bairn in Scotlan fir a richt guid handsel? Tae stert oot wi as a smidgin, a wee seed whilk micht graw intae muckle trees o pleisur an wunner. Here’s a wee mindin tae begin wi fir aabody, reidy tae yaise an free tae aa.

Dè na h-brain, sgeulachdan, dannsaichean, agus cleachaidhean tradaisenta nan ràithean, air am bu choir do gach leanabh no pàiste ann an Alba a bhith eòlach? Dè tha buntainn leotha as bith cò às a tha iad, no dè an cultar no an cànan a th’ aca?

What songs, stories, dance steps and seasonal customs should every child in Scotland know? What belongs to them regardless of origin, culture or language? Gifting Every Child is a perfect starting point from which parents, teachers and youth organisations can build their own local collections.

Scotland’s traditional arts scene cannot be underestimated in its vibrancy and variety. But it is vitally important that we do not become complacent in assuming that its current good health will be transferred automatically to the next generation. In our increasingly digital world, the oral tradition and intergenerational passing on of songs and stories is in decline. However this does not need to spell disaster for future generations, as new opportunities to engage larger audiences with the traditional arts through digital means are emerging.

This was the thinking behind the Gifting Every Child resource project. In providing educators, parents, teachers and anyone else who wishes to engage in creative work with children with an accessible selection of some of the best examples of the traditional arts, we in turn gift the children with an introduction to Scotland’s creative culture and indigenous languages which could serve them a lifetime of benefit. Incorporating a multimedia format of text, audio files (both streamable and downloadable) and video, the resource is ideally designed to suit various abilities and levels of interest - whether you want to meticulously engage with each piece of the resource, or pick and choose from what is available. The inclusion of Gaelic and Scots throughout is vitally important, with the material provided also being very much geared towards the 6 to 9 age group, so as to ensure that it is just as accessible as the material in English.

So what went behind choosing these specific materials - the stories, songs, dance steps and customs? The target age group of 6 to 9 year olds was kept to the foremost throughout the curation process, while leaving room for flexibility on either end. Guest editors Bea Ferguson (story), Christina Stewart (song) and Mats Melin (dance) have years of experience in their respective fields, and especially in engaging with children and education. The inclusion of basic dance steps which fit naturally into many forms of Scottish dance aim to enable children (and educators!) to feel safe and enjoy Scottish dancing on their own terms.

Furthermore, Donald Smith’s calendar of simple Scottish seasonal customs is a lovely and accessible way for young people to grow up appreciating an awareness of the different times of the year and ways in which we can mark these.

When thinking back to our own childhoods it is often the association with specific seasonal traditions that comprise some of our most precious memories, as well as having the potential to strengthen intergenerational bonds within families and communities. On this note, Christina Stewart states: "One of the things that really excited me about the Gifting Every Child project is the opportunity for intergenerational interactions. In order for Scotland to have a robust living tradition, it needs to be something that our young people have that they feel is theirs, and something that they can share with adults and people of other age groups."

At a time where evidence of creativity in the classroom is being given a significant push - not simply as an aid to pass tests and exams, but as a key skill which can benefit children for years and years onwards, TRACS feels that the Gifting Every Child resource provides a perfect starting point for teachers, educators and youth group leaders to engage with the traditional arts through learning in fresh and innovative ways.

Moving forward with the Gifting Every Child project, TRACS would like to highlight individuals, organisations and groups who can assist in delivering the traditional arts in education of all kinds - in schools, after-school clubs, community groups, youth clubs etc. If you and your work in the traditional arts would be interested in being included on a listing of suitable educational practitioners, please email morag@scottishstorytellingcentre.com to request an application form.
Spirit of the Ceilidh
Douglas Mackay reflects on the sharing of stories and his work in Community Development

"You know, in times past, ceilidhs weren't all about skipping around community halls. It wasn't just about the dancing, but gathering and sharing, with stories, songs, and whatever else folk had to offer. More about the craic than sets and reels."

That's as far as I understand it anyway, and whilst I'm sure very few reading this need explanation, over the past few years this summary has often passed my lips. "Really?" I'm often answered with a glint in the eye, "I had no idea. That's fantastic."

I agree. People seem to feel some sort of excitement at this revelation. Maybe it's excitement at learning some archaic hidden knowledge, some trivia to impart to curious pals, or discovering something of our cultural inheritance. Maybe it's excitement at the thought of replicating such a timeless gathering and feeling a rich sense of connection.

Something in the nature of the ceilidh excites and enchants me as much as the stories themselves: not quite the adrenaline rush of skydiving or the like - more the familiar buzz of an old pal returning from their travels, an unexpected joke tickling your ribs or noticing the turn in the seasons reflected in the natural world. A wee additional buzz comes at the sense of being ahead of the mainstream curve, like tapping into the next big thing before the hipsters have arrived, as surely the ceilidh's time has come again.

With a background in Community Learning and Development, the intrinsic value and social necessity of such a gathering speaks clearly to me. Personally speaking, if it wasn't for the ceilidh, I wouldn't be writing this article, or spending a good part of my week out and about telling tales. The ceilidh was where I first began my storytelling experimentation. A number of years ago, a friend organised a storytelling event in Edinburgh. This was my first introduction to storytelling in any kind of semi-professional, artistic capacity. Collectively entranced, we journeyed to the village of Kitterumpit and bore witness to a witch with an unusual name trying to steal a baby (the baby of course being the mother's dearest love, except for a poorly pig called Grunty Grice). It was mad, enthralling, and it heralded the start of something special. The gates of the storytelling world burst open to me.

I found a book called The Power of Stories, and that was it: I had to tell them. I wanted to tell the tale of Jumping Mouse to the young people I worked with...but how to get there? I would surely need some practice before telling stories to surly teenagers. So I too organised ceilidh gatherings. About ten of us would meet in a friend's house, and we'd all try out something new. Many in the folk scene ken it well, but for us, at that time, this was something new, fresh and dynamic. I could feel a community growing around me. There was a richness in the sharing - and we got a bowl of soup into the bargain.

People loved these simple gatherings, and with my development head on, the buzzwords were jostling through my brain like monkeys up a mango tree. 'Sustainable entertainment.' 'Community capacity building.' 'Engagement.' 'Empowerment.' Confidence grew measurably. Many people shared something in public for the first time. Bonds were built. There was a lot of gratitude in those spaces. These gatherings also highlighted something special in a particular style of storytelling: having the right story for the right moment - a responsiveness to the place and the people present that elevates the story sharing experience. This involves not only honing one story to pristine perfection, but having a treasure trove of tales to draw upon, each with its own moment to create the magic. It's about having a sensitivity to the right 'story-medicine' for the right moment. At the time I was lucky if I could remember the ending of the stories I was attempting, but still something in the storytelling alchemy just worked.

Now, the essence of the ceilidh underpins most of my current story sharing activities: A quality of listening to the needs of the space and including those within it. A simplicity and adaptability that makes it the key to the door linking storytelling and community development.

Undoubtedly the ceilidh is a fantastic and under-used cultural resource. It reminds us of our heritage of inclusion, hospitality, equality, self-sufficiency and decent craic. This a resource dearly needed, perhaps now more than ever in a time with escalating cultural trends of isolation, competition, disconnect from the natural world and each other, and empty consumerism. Despite the ceilidh's subtle, understated nature, it's something of a radical act to be gathering and sharing in such an inclusive way and to actually listen to each other. It reclaims a means to participate. It's about togetherness and enjoyment (and maybe a dram or two). Through the ceilidh, we can appreciate organic, social entertainment in a way echoed around the world and throughout the ages. Instantly, in some small way, it brings us into harmony with people across the planet: those who've come before us, and hopefully future generations too.

So, in that spirit, I'm championing the ceilidh as key to these times. Whether via the hottest inclusive arts festival this side of the Sahara, having pals round for a hearty gathering, or sparking something off whilst waiting at the bus stop, the spirit of the ceilidh is an adaptable ally. This is about rebuilding the chords of connection, establishing creative communities and exploring an ancient tradition that in the modern cultural context is more pertinent than it has likely ever been. And unless something goes seriously wrong, it should be decent craic.

Dougie is currently working with The Village Storytelling Centre in Glasgow, and in 2015 initiated and organised the Inverness Storytelling Festival.

Douglas Mackay
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Issue 32
Summer 2016
10 Years Young . . .

There have been so many wonderful stories, experiences, laughs and tears during this time, and to celebrate, we have programmed some extra special events in our calendar.

We are also honouring our founding patron, Orkney poet and storyteller, George Mackay Brown, 20 years since his passing. We will bring visual arts together with storytelling performances, music and workshops, with opportunities for audiences to participate. The Ceilidh spirit alive and well, and here’s to many more years.

Daniel Abercrombie - Programme Manager, Scottish Storytelling Centre

Donald Smith was the founding Director of the Scottish Storytelling centre and is now Director of TRACS. Here he reflects on this long journey and looks to the future. This June we mark 10 years since the opening of the Scottish Storytelling Centre.

Some of the things that have happened since then were anticipated. We wanted to raise the profile of oral storytelling and put this precious artform back on the map. That has certainly happened though there are plenty of battles still to be fought.

What was unexpected has been the huge international interest and the boost that this has brought to Scottish storytelling and to our international Storytelling Festival each October. The Centre has been a beacon for others, at a time when Scotland generally has raised its profile worldwide.

Also beyond our expectations has been the stream of organisations across Scotland who have brought their story to our Centre. We are a national and international meeting point where art and society meet - a place for people to share and exchange, a Table genuinely open to all.

More unsettling and also unexpected however was the way that our lead initial funder the Church of Scotland changed its mind about the Scottish Storytelling Centre soon after our opening. Financial pressures squeezed out their initial commitment to the widest possible community dialogue and exchange. Some turbulence ensued but in the end the Church’s difficulties forced us to face another central challenge.

How can a national centre truly engage with local communities and cultures? We have found a way of beginning to answer that question by joining with the Traditional Music and Dance networks in our new TRACS umbrella – Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland. This has provided a much wider field of local engagement and an activity base that justifies the support of public funders for our next phase of growth across Scotland and beyond. We warmly acknowledge the assistance of both Creative Scotland and Edinburgh City Council in negotiating those new partnerships.

HAMISH HENDERSON 1919 - 2002
Poet, singer and songwriter, champion of the Travelling people. Hero of the Italian partisans, socialist, internationalist, peace activist.

Portrait bust by Tony Morrow, gifted by the artist and by Timothy Neat.
This June we mark 10 years since the opening of the Scottish Storytelling Centre

Some core things however remain constant. George Mackay Brown is our founding patron and we also mark this year the anniversary of his death.

His inspirational grounding of the universal in the local, his incarnation of words in living communities of music, story, dance and seasonal celebration remain a guiding light through changing circumstances.

Making the Scottish Storytelling Centre possible was a huge labour of love on the part of many people. I would like to think that we have not let them down and that in the next ten years our planting will blossom into an ever finer young tree whose roots go deep and whose branches reach out into all areas of our common life.

At the opening ceremony we had a hantle of blessings in the tongues and traditions of old and new Scots. All were inspiring but it was hard to better Stanley Robertson’s Traveller wisdom:

_Here’s health and happiness aa yer days,_
_Plenty o money and plenty o claes,_
_A sugar bowl and a horn spoon,_
_And anither tattie whin that een’s dune._

Onto the next course!

_Stanley Robertson, Traveller’s Joy 2007_

"It is the word, blossoming as legend, poem, story, secret, that holds a community together and gives meaning to its life."

George Mackay Brown

“Under the earth I go

On the oak-leaf I stand
I ride on the filly that never was foaled
And I carry the dead in my hand.

There’s method in my madness!...

Change elegy into hymn, remake it -
Don’t fail again. Like the potent
Sap in these branches, once bare, and now brimming
With routh of green leavery,
Remake it, and renew.

Maker, ye maun sing them...
Tomorrow, songs
Will flow free again, and new voices
Be borne on the carrying stream.

Hamish Henderson (1919 - 2002)"
At the recent colloque, 'Who's Got an A?' which focused on questions about how we go about organising teaching and learning in traditional music, Kathryn Deane suggested that we launch an investigation and call it 'How Ever Did It Go So Right?'. Kathryn runs Sound Sense, the national community music organisation, which has long grappled with many of the questions we were dealing with. The headquarters on the cover of recent issues of their magazine, Sounding Board, include, for example, 'On the importance of Reflection', 'On the Problems of Evidence', 'How to Ensure Music Education is for All'. The suggested title was in response to discussions around standards of knowledge, skills and understanding, quality of teaching, lack of frameworks, patchy training and so on. And yet despite these apparent problems the standard of playing seems to do nothing but improve.

Or that is the anecdotal account at any rate. How do we know? What are our points of comparison? In traditional music we have a wide range of informal practices contained within an ad hoc system for teaching and learning outside formal education, and a formal education framework that has arisen in response to demand created in the non-formal system. You only have to go back twenty years to find a Scotland with no Plockton, no Scottish music course at the Conservatoire, and no traditional music courses in Further Education either. All of these initiatives were put in place to build on the work happening with young people in communities up and down the land. But twenty years ago, as now, the set up for providing learning opportunities for young people and adults alike was based on a 'little black book' approach to finding and hiring tutors. 'We need a fiddle tutor. OK you play the fiddle - can you come and do it?' Not a lot of rigour involved.

That does not apply to the piping world, however.

The teaching of the bagpipes has long enjoyed a progressive, structured approach with a Piping and Drumming Qualifications Board, agreement on a world-wide standard of instruction, and a general acceptance of the value of the certificates which back this up. Yet in the world of teaching and learning traditional music beyond piping it is still the case that when the door of the teaching room closes the people hiring the teacher by and large have no idea what is taking place, the students have no idea what they are going to get, and the teacher has no benchmark by which to figure out what is expected and how they are doing.

On the other hand, I think we owe it to ourselves as a community to do better, which might be possible if we think about adopting a framework common to non-formal teaching and learning organisations across the country, that the largely voluntary people running these organisations can buy into; if we give people who are offering teaching a set of common standards within a plurality of activities and approaches (standards do not have to mean standardisation); if we put in place a proper system for coaching and mentoring those we charge with passing on the tradition.

In advocating for the latter approach I might be accused of seeking to professionalise something that has always worked, however haphazardly. However, with over 10,000 people learning traditional music on a regular basis across Scotland, and with people paying for the privilege of doing so, I think we owe it to them to emulate the pipers and take a radical look at how we can act together to improve the system as it stands. Otherwise we may one day stop asking 'how did it go so right?' and start asking the other question instead.

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G is for Golden Moments

When a storyteller comes to one of my coaching sessions and shares a story, I follow the telling with a ritual I call "Golden Moments". This is a time for the group to share appreciations or "golden moments" with the teller - positive expressions of something which touched us or otherwise resonated with us. It might be a particular image, a gesture, or any number of nuances in the story or the storyteller's performance.

I borrowed the concept of the "golden moment" from my coaching work with American storyteller and story coach Doug Lipman. Lipman believes very much in the power of praise. Listening to appreciations helps tellers form an overall impression of the telling and helps identify particular aspects of the performance which worked well. Of course, praise should be sincere and honest. Perhaps it is because we have become so jaded with insincerity that our society has become uncomfortable with offering appreciations. "Since our society is so squeamish about giving praise," Lipman explains, "most of us have not developed this art to fullness. It takes practice to become an expert at this fundamental coaching skill."

Lipman suggests two essential reasons for using appreciations in a coaching session: firstly, the practice helps those offering praise to pay closer attention to the gifts they're about to bestow. By separating an appreciative response from a criticism, one can more clearly hear whether an appreciation is just that - appreciative and sincere - or simply a segue into a critical response or interpretation. Secondly, the practice of "golden moments" assists the storyteller in receiving appreciations. By hearing a cluster of honest appreciations, it's more difficult to dismiss them as simple pleasantries. You have to accept them at face value. As Lipman explains, it's not easy for us to accept praise. Our emotional armour, designed to protect us from pain, also screens us from praise. To open ourselves to praise, we must open emotionally.

In our "golden moments" session, we offer two forms of praise - global and specific. **Global** or general appreciations such as, "I loved your story", "You created a beautiful picture in my mind" or "That was such a sensitive telling" are often emotional or intuitive. When heard in tandem with others' appreciations, these can help the teller form a general impression and emotional response to his or her story. **Specific** praise offers a more detailed response to particular aspects of the storytelling - a resonant image or phrase, an innovative story structure, a gesture, some movement or vocal inflection, or an aspect of characterisation. Specific praise further helps tellers identify those aspects of their performance that worked, thus answering the teller's initial questions, "Was I good?", "Did they like the story?" and "Did I achieve my goals?"

The offering of praise circumvents the offering of criticism. The teller has the right to refuse further offers of criticism or suggestions. For some tellers, just telling a story and hearing the appreciations is enough for one session. Criticism and suggestions can wait. For others, further feedback is welcomed. Whichever the case, the storyteller's decision is respected.

The offering of "golden moments" has become a ritual in my coaching practice and I urge anyone who coaches, mentors, or teaches others to adopt it. When praise is linked to actual observations of behaviours, manners of speech, gesture, imagery, or characterisation, storytellers can more readily identify those aspects of their practice which have made an impact. "Golden moments" serve as a positive springboard into constructive development. Appreciations open us up emotionally to ourselves, our colleagues, and the stories we tell. By encouraging us to lay down our emotional armour, our inner storytellers can fully emerge into the light and we can become the storytellers we truly want to be.

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At the House the Wizard Built

A few miles down the Tweed from home, set a little back from the river and surrounded on three sides by wooded hills, is the great turreted pile of Abbotsford House. After extensive and expensive refurbishment, Sir Walter Scott’s ‘conundrum castle’ re-opened to the public in 2013.

Even in his own lifetime, the extraordinary success and almost global appreciation of his writing lent Scott the title 'Wizard of the North'. I must say that my association as a storyteller with the house and grounds the wizard built has brought an unexpected magic into my life - but as we all know, magic can be unpredictable!

Early last autumn, the Estate Manager, Philip Munro, invited me to bring input to an existing collaborative project between Abbotsford Trust and Cornerstone, a charity offering care and support to adults with disabilities and other support needs. Having worked for a number of years with adults with learning disabilities, both as artist and storyteller, and as support worker, I was delighted!

Earlier sessions had focused on the outdoor environment - practical and craft activities aimed at providing stimulating experiences to promote health, wellbeing and social inclusion. Whilst successful in many ways, there was an identified need to offer a wider range of activities to enable all participants to engage with the sessions, whatever their ability. Over subsequent weeks of kindly autumn weather, I told stories of trees, full of magic and wonder, linked to Scott and his home, this man who was an avid tree-planter, and who shaped his world.

I carefully tailored each making session to be accessible and achievable. Possibly my favorite was creating 3-D birds to inhabit our special tree, using pine cones found on our walk, plasticine and native and exotic feathers. This particularly enjoyable session brought out a creative streak in the whole group, including staff of both organizations! The sessions were very popular with Cornerstone staff, who enjoyed learning new skills which they could develop at the Support Centre. This was a joyful and nourishing project to be part of, offering a group of local vulnerable adults the opportunity to develop a meaningful relationship with a heritage venue in tactile and intangible ways.

My first contact with Abbotsford Trust had been in the early spring of 2013, before the re-opening, when the Learning and Engagement Manager, Dr Sandra Mackenzie approached me about storytelling. Following enthusiastic discussions, an initial project was commissioned to design and deliver a three day storytelling, art and story-making project for Tweedbank Primary school. This transition project with P7 classes was to link Abbotsford’s grounds, Scott’s life and work, and tree folklore, a theme echoed in the above, most recent venture. This was the beginning of what has continued to be real enjoyment of ‘The Shirra’, the polymath and his work, and an appreciation the breadth of his influence.

My plan for Tweedbank required multifaceted elements woven together to form a cohesive, manageable and relevant experience for the pupils, focusing on group and individual participation. By highlighting the relevance of oral storytelling to Scott’s inspiration as an author, I hoped to raise pupils’ awareness of storytelling, and its value as both a shared and personal resource. Fundamental was my wish to encourage a sense of identity with the participant’s locality, and with the rich oral tradition that makes it so special.

Soon after this I was commissioned to develop a new ‘dressed character’ to interpret Scott’s house and collection, through storytelling, for the educational program. This request had been inspired by ‘Mistress Quill’, an identity created as part of my repertoire, and a second seemed too many. My Initial reluctance soon gave way to enthralling emersion in the research and creation of ‘Mrs Oakley, Visitor from the Past!’ Dressed for 1835, telling legends and tales - historical, supernatural and local - which inspired Scott’s work, with options offered to combine with creative workshops in the Learning Centre. I was also heartened to perform on Scott and Ballads to jam-packed international audiences in Edinburgh Museum, for SISF. And on a memorable snowbound evening in Yarrow valley - in company with ‘The Fisher Lassies’ - we had a full house for song and story at the ‘Gordon Arms’ where Scott and James Hogg last met. I think storytelling and song gives genuine expression to what moved, inspired and sustained Sir Walter Scott, and to what fed his energy and determined genius. And after all, should there not be stories told in the House built by the Wizard?

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WALK THE LINE: GETTING LOST AT THE BORDER

Have you ever found yourself wondering about borders? We have been repeatedly told this year about people ‘crossing borders’ into or out of ‘their’ country. Politicians have spoken of protecting their borders, of strengthening and fortifying the outer limits of their lands. Consequently these lines take on huge political and social significance. We define ourselves based on which side of a line we were born on.

Yet, what are they? Frequently they are passing places that we give only a split second thought to. There may be a cheer or boo that resounds around the car depending on your particular sense of belonging. Maybe you take your last few breaths of Scottish air before you cross over to ‘the other side’. You might even pull into Carter Bar, take a photo of the bagpiper and grab a bacon butty from the perennial burger van that seems to reside there. However, what would happen if you decided to spend some time there, make it your destination, even walk along it from one side to the other? Well that’s what I did.

Having grown up forty miles south of the Anglo/Scottish border and now currently resident in Glasgow, it felt right to choose this one. I wondered if this line had taken on a greater significance following a fraught year of independence referendums and whitewash general election results. I wondered if the line meant more or less to the people who lived close by and perhaps more significantly, did it mean anything to me. Some might say that this was a frivolous attempt to avoid actually sitting at my desk and writing my Masters dissertation, which in hindsight may have been considerably easier, or at least drier.

Nevertheless, on the 7th August, I set off from Gretna. With all my food, accommodation and kitchen equipment attached firmly to my back I had seven days to get to Berwick-upon-Tweed, when my train was booked back to Glasgow.

So where does storytelling come into this? Well, I decided to take a story as a walking companion. After some not inconsiderable trawling through borders folklore, I settled upon Thomas the Rhymer. In short, Thomas gets whipped away to Elfland for seven years by the Queen of the Faeries herself and returns with the gift of truth and prophecy.

My plan was to tell the story at night in pubs to patrons as I worked my way along the border line. For me the story brought up themes of Nationalism and Unionism that I hoped would sow the seeds of debate long into the night. Maybe I’d return with some truths of my own.

So what happened? To cut a long story short, I got lost, a lot. I failed to follow the border exactly on many occasion and I would regularly find myself toppling face first into thistles whilst completely alone. And lost. However, no matter how elusive it seemed, I kept trying to walk the line. I don't mean this in the Johnny Cash sense. He never really accomplished his own interpretation anyway. I mean that I constantly searched for a position, a position of perfect inbetween-ness, of neither being in one place or the other. In search of a position that allowed me to look, question and challenge both sides. To understand the ridiculousness of a line that separates people and yet also the sense of belonging that comes from treading on the land where you live, where you’re from.

As I travelled, I found myself walking into the story, white horses and pitch black rivers appeared in my path as if the story was unfurling in front of me and all I needed to do was place one foot in front of the other. The line between the real world and the story world became more difficult to see, I moved quite seamlessly between the two worlds as one influenced the other. All the while, there was another story playing out in front of me. An unexpected story. My own. An image emerged that thrust me back twenty-five years to a memory: a hazy picture of my mother taking me to the border when I was six years old. An image that I have played over and over again in my head throughout my adult life.

What started as a journey into an unknown world of Scottish and English politics turned into an emotional trip into my past and the discovery of my need to tell a part of my own folklore, a story of loss and grief.

Throughout all this I tried to walk the line, inhabiting a position of constant reflection, allowing each world to blur into one another. I suppose that this is my challenge to storytellers out there. Go take a story for a walk. Let your feet guide you. Go and make discoveries under the rocks and in the rivers. Trudge and amble your way through several stories at once. Try though, to walk the line, the line between one position and the other. Challenge your common held assumptions about belonging and folklore and tradition. We as storytellers are too often comfortable with our images and our words as we describe a deserted forest to a group of wide eyed school children. Well, stop. Go into that deserted forest, stand on the line between the ‘real’ world and the story, and most importantly let your tale come through too. We storytellers are constantly training our minds to wander freely between many places, well why not let your legs go wandering too?

One important point though: If you do find yourself in a deserted forest, please keep your eyes peeled because I might be lost in their too and I’d quite like a nudge in the right direction.

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COLIN MACKAY 1936 - 2015
Always known as Colin, this great friend to storytelling died just before Christmas 2015. Many tributes to Colin Mackay record his outstanding public service as teacher and headteacher, memorably at Craigmuir in Pilton, as Scout leader and pioneer in Scouting for disabled youngsters, and as a lifelong church volunteer at St David’s in Broomhouse.
However, we especially celebrate Colin as a storyteller, flourishing after his retirement in 1998, building on decades of work with young people. Being Colin, he also took a leading role in supporting storytellers and was Chair of the Scottish Storytelling Forum during the vital years leading up to the opening of the Scottish Storytelling Centre. He was also a pioneer in the Life Stories group working creatively with older people, and co-edited Blethers with Ann Davies.

ANGIE TOWNSEND
Our storytellers share their memories of their dear friend below.

Angie
We ate scones, crammed with fruit no butter your choice
You sipped tea from a china cup green tea, of course
You planned to delight the world with stories ...
Of Elsie you talked of courage 'her story should be told'
Yet, in telling we saw you your true colours standing there out front, lights up veins full of chemo hair barely grown
Never had we seen one so determined, so, defiant
You delivered alright left us marvelling as though witnessing a comets trail a blazing red headed comet love and inspiration in your wake, touching each and every one of us as you passed through
Angie, Storyteller, song writer, singer, radio presenter, teacher, brilliant mother and wonderful friend. Missed and loved beyond words but carried forever in our stories xx

Lea Taylor
Angie & I were both wearing pillowcases on our heads when we first met, that was our version of medieval royalty! From that a friendship was born. I was struck by her warmth & compassion and this was apparent in everything she did. We had several storytelling adventures, enjoying ourselves thoroughly each time.
Her powerful telling of Elsie Inglis' story was simply one of the best things I've seen.
Angie was, without doubt, a shining light and while she will be much missed her memories, spirit, stories & songs live on with us.

Lindsey Gibb
Goodbye Angie Townsend, my memories are many but perhaps the most vivid... The Roman Walk, March 2012. Romans are not my thing, so my research involved watching Gladiator but as usual you threw yourself into the project with enthusiasm and became obsessed by Mithras. On the night I dressed as Cleopatra along with a fake asp and you were a Votadini complete with shopping trolley; we stopped traffic that night, a police car if I recall. The world was a better place with you in it. X

Nicola Wright
Angie made every minute she had left count and amazed us all with her incredible ability to remain upbeat & cheerful despite all the gruelling treatment she endured. I am desperately sad for Chris, Bethany & Ceri-Anne that Angie can't share their future. However, I know their faith, friends & family will be there for them always.
No-one who knew Angie will ever forget her.

Robbie Fotheringham

In Memory
This past year we lost two great friends in the world of storytelling, Colin Mackay and Angie Townsend.
Music Blethers

This past season has seen a huge number of new music releases filed under folk. We offer a selection below. Highlights for us include Hamish Napier’s The River, Songs of Separation, Jarlath Henderson’s Hearts Broken Heads Turned and Rachel Newton’s Here’s My Heart come Take it.

NITEWORKS - NW
26 Oct 2015
Comann Music
Nitework’s debut album combines bagpipes, electronic effects and keyboard work with guest Gaelic vocals.

WOVEN - Sarah Hayes
20 Nov 2015
Sarah Hayes
An ensemble suite of music and song with traditional roots and classical influences.

BLAZIN FIDDLES - North
11 Dec 2015
Blazin' Fiddles
The eighth album release from the award winning Blazin' Fiddles.

HAMILSH NAPIER - The River
1 Jan 2016
Strathpspey Records
Hamish Napier’s multi-instrumental composition for Celtic Connections’ New Voices series, partly inspired by the Spey.

JARLATH HENDERSON - Hearts Broken, Heads Turned
27 Jan 2016
Groundbreaking debut solo album features traditional songs interpreted for the modern day.

NUALA KENNEDY - Behave the Bravest
28 Jan 2016
Under the Arch Records
Fourth solo album of beautifully produced songs and tunes from singer and flautist Nuala Kennedy.

BOREAS - Ahoy Hoy
29 Jan 2016
ISLE Music Scotland
Female vocalists and instrumentalists explore the connected cultures of Scotland and Norway.

Songs of Separation
29 Jan 2016
Navigator Records
Bringing together ten female folk musicians from Scotland and England, to create a recording which reflects on the issue of separation.

SCOTIA NOVA: Songs for the Early Days of a Better Nation
5 Feb 2016
Greentrax
Unique album showcasing a broad variety of songwriting styles and singers, each inspired by the idea of a new Scotland.

MAIRREAD GREEN - Summer Isles
26 Feb 2016
Buie Records
Second solo album from highland multi-instrumentalist Mairearad Green with new compositions inspired by The Summer Isles.

IMPRINT - Aidan O’Rourke
Feb 2016
Reveal Records
A suite of music inspired by abandoned human settlements in North East Aberdeenshire.

ASTAR - Breachach
11 Mar 2016
Breachach Records
New album takes inspiration from the sights and sounds of Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Québec.

DEAD STATIONS - Mike Vass & Charlotte Murray
2 Mar 2016
Unroofed Records
Combines live music, song writing and recorded audio drama to tell a thrilling tale.

DELIVERANCE - Nordic Fiddlers’ Bloc
8 April 2016
NFB Records
Combining the rich music heritage of Norway, Sweden and the Shetland Islands with sparkling touches of innovation.

MATTER OF TIME - Dallahan
11 Apr 2016
Dallahan Music
Second album exploring a mix of Irish, Scottish and Hungarian heritage to create a unique and seamless musical montage.

HERE’S MY HEART COME TAKE IT - Rachel Newton
15 Apr 2016
Cadiz Music Ltd
Drawing on folklore and tradition, multi-instrumentalist and singer Rachel Newton performs songs in English and Scottish Gaelic, alongside original instrumental compositions.

RECLAIMED - Lothian and Borders Pipers Society
Tunes and songs with strong Border resonances, many of which have not previously been recorded.

RANT - Reverie
13th May 2016
Make Believe Records
Hypnotic and many-layered, the second album from Scotland’s chamber-folk quartet.
**Book Blethers**

George Gunn’s *The Province of the Cat* is based on a life lived close up with the most northern part of the Scottish mainland. The book is eloquently about poetry, storytelling, literature, the environment, politics and our connection with all of the above. It is an outstanding book that deserves to be read, re-read and cherished, both for what it is and for what it aspires to for a renewed Scotland.

*We Are the Engineers!* by Margaret Bennet opens up the experiences of working people with a focus on Perthshire and Fife, and in particular the Melville-Brodie Engineering Co. The book is one outcome from a Heritage Lottery project which explored a variety of trades and professions under the title 'End of the Shift'.

*Science Through Stories* by Chris Smith and Jules Pottle is another strand of the Storytelling Schools initiative supported by Hawthorn Press. The stories range over many aspects of science and are contextualised with active learning resources, and cross-curricular connections. The narratives themselves are eclectic - traditional, contemporary, devised, historic - all driven by their potential to stimulate curiosity, imagination and learning.

*High Hopes - the Weslo Story* by Raymond Ross takes us into the world of social action and community development. Ross has been given a free hand to tell the story of this West Lothian Housing association from the perspectives of tenants and staff. He does a good job - in line with what Weslo has achieved for its communities.

*Or Words to that Effect* is an impressive academic volume on orality and literary history, encompassing some of the latest research and perspectives. We note it here because of the contribution of storytellers - Dan Yashinsky, and our own Stuart McHardy whose article is titled ‘The Story of Story- and a Canon of Story’, emphasising the historic, educational and cultural contribution of oral traditions. It is gratifying to see the increasing recognition being Given to Stuart’s ideas, many of which were first shared in these pages.

*Wicked Willi’s Saga* is a rare one-off, a tale of Hebridean cats couched as a Norse saga, as written by eminent folklorist John Lorne Campbell. The book is a delight combining JLC’s characteristic lucidity and grace of language with excellent illustrations by Laura Barrett. Beautiful work by Grace Note Publications, and a storytelling treasure not least for cat lovers!

We would like also to commend *Fantasies, Fables and Frolics* a collection of stories by traveller and mountaineer Hamish Brown - inventions in the manner of traditional tales; *Silver Lines* which next in the saga of Leith lives that Millie Gray’s books have brought to vivid attention - surely there should be TV adaptations or a film; and *Eavesdropping on Myself*, a memoir of childhood by the multi-talented and complex Norman Maclean, whose storytelling defies genre distinctions. Last but far from least, Michael Kerins series of weetom books continues with *weetom and the New Bed* upholding a proud tradition of miniaturist people in storytelling.

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**THE PROVINCE OF THE CAT**
George Gunn
The Islands Book Trust
ISBN 9781907443428

**WE ARE THE ENGINEERS!**
Margaret Bennet
Grace Notes Publications
ISBN 9781907676666

**SCIENCE THROUGH STORIES**
Chris Smith and Jules Pottle
Hawthorn Press
ISBN 9781907359453

**HIGH HOPES - THE WESLO STORY**
Raymond Ross
Weslo Housing Management
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**OR WORDS TO THAT EFFECT**
Daniel F. Chamberlain and J. Edward Chamberlain
John Benjamins Publishing Co
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Michael Kerins
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