



**NOT JUST FOR REFERENCE**  
GOING BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE LIBRARY

# DISCOVER



The magazine of the National Library of Scotland

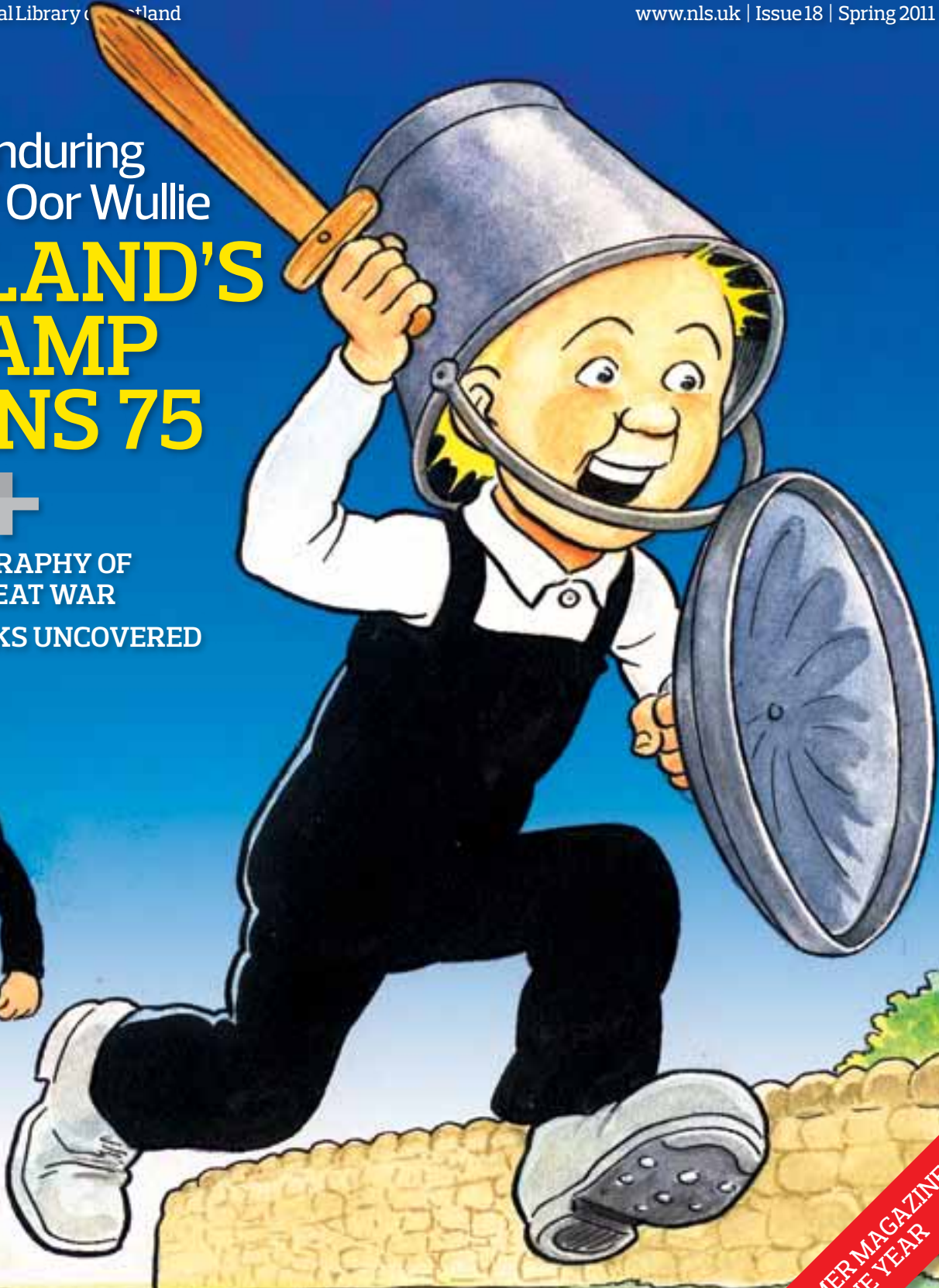
www.nls.uk | Issue 18 | Spring 2011

The enduring  
appeal of Oor Wullie  
**SCOTLAND'S  
SCAMP  
TURNS 75**



PHOTOGRAPHY OF  
THE GREAT WAR

ARTISTS' BOOKS UNCOVERED



**CUSTOMER MAGAZINE  
OF THE YEAR**

# Anniversaries and investigations



**DISCOVER NLS**  
ISSUE 18 SPRING 2011

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We welcome all comments, questions, submissions and subscription enquiries. Please write to us at the National Library of Scotland address below or email [discover@nls.uk](mailto:discover@nls.uk)

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This is a year of notable anniversaries. In 1711, the great philosopher David Hume was born. One of the most important figures in Western philosophy and the Scottish Enlightenment, he was also Keeper of the Advocates Library, from which the National Library of Scotland was eventually to emerge. Some of Hume's papers will be on display in the Treasures area of our Visitor Centre throughout May and June.

Within these pages we celebrate the centenary of the birth of the great Gaelic poet Sorley MacLean. Meanwhile, Oor Wullie has turned 75. Few comic strip characters have lodged themselves in our collective affection as firmly as the dungaree-wearing scamp with the upturned bucket.

Staff across NLS provide access to our collections, via our website and online catalogues and through our public services. We take a look at the work of Reference Services, who offer help to everyone, from first-time users to experienced researchers. From assisting those in search of a particular text, to running public training events and roadshows, the team facilitates the use of our many and varied resources.

Despite their dedication and knowledge, however, the answer to a question can sometimes seem unattainable, until one day it presents itself by chance. That's what happened to Dr Iain Gordon Brown, our Principal Manuscripts Curator. His tale of how he unearthed the identity of a previously unknown artist makes for a fascinating insight into how a scholar's mind and memory work.

With news also of another award for *Discover NLS*, I hope you find much in this issue to interest and entertain you.

*Alexandra Miller*

**Alexandra Miller**  
Director of Customer Services



**The answer to a question can sometimes seem unattainable**



## Three ways to follow NLS on new media

1

#### FACEBOOK

Become a fan on Facebook and be among the first to hear about news and events as well as any last-minute changes to opening times

Go to [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and search for 'National Library of Scotland'



2

#### TWITTER

Keep up to date with the Library by following NLS' regular tweets, including information about future exhibitions and recent acquisitions  
[www.twitter.com/natlibscot](http://www.twitter.com/natlibscot)

3

#### YOUTUBE

As well as a number of clips from the Scottish Screen Archive, watch short documentaries about the Library's collections  
[www.youtube.com/user/NLofScotland](http://www.youtube.com/user/NLofScotland)



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The task of identifying the heretofore unknown artist of an etching owned by NLS took Dr Iain Gordon Brown more than 32 years, culminating in a surprise overseas reunion

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NLS holds a number of rare and visually stunning artists' books

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“**Their friendship was forged in unthinkable circumstances**

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## Contributors to this issue include



**Dr Iain Gordon Brown**  
Principal Manuscripts Curator in the Manuscript and Map Collections, Iain is the author of *Rax Me That Bulk*



**Richard Beatty**  
A researcher for the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Richard uses NLS to help him trace the history of particular words



**Alison Metcalfe**  
Alison is a Manuscripts Curator and writes in this issue about the photograph albums of Mairi Chisholm



**Elaine Brown**  
Elaine has worked in Reference Services for 11 years, and has a particular interest in sources for family history research

# Inside NLS

# Using the National Library of Scotland

With a collection of around 14 million printed items, two million maps, 32,000 films, three miles of manuscripts, plus thousands of photos, getting around NLS requires a little navigation

## How to join

To use NLS' Reading Rooms and order up items from the collections, you need to hold a library card number. This can be obtained by completing the online form at <https://auth.nls.uk/registration>. Simply follow the steps on the website.

On your first visit to the Library, you should go to Registration where staff will take your photo and produce a library card for you.

Please remember to bring proof of your name and address, such as a driving licence or a recent utilities bill.

## Viewing material

If you know what you are looking for, we recommend making your request for the required material in advance of your visit to the Library.



The Visitor Centre at NLS' George IV Bridge Building

Requests can be made in person, by telephone on 0131 623 3700, or by email: [enquiries@nls.uk](mailto:enquiries@nls.uk)

In addition, if you have a library card number, books can be ordered in advance

via the online catalogue on our website.

More information about pre-ordering is available at [www.nls.uk/using-the-library/reading-rooms/general/preorders](http://www.nls.uk/using-the-library/reading-rooms/general/preorders)

## Digital resources

With over 300 million items, of which 85% are available remotely, NLS' licensed digital collections are a superb research tool

### ART AND LITERATURE

The Library's digital collections relating to art and literature include

- \* 19th Century UK Periodicals Part 1. Women's, Children's, Humour and Leisure/Sport;
- \* British Literary Manuscripts Online c.1660-1900;
- \* Naxos Music Library;
- \* Oxford Music Online;
- \* Perdita Manuscripts – Women Writers, 1500-1700;
- \* RILM Abstracts of Music Literature; Scottish Women Poets of the Romantic Period;
- \* SCRAM Digital Materials;
- \* Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive and
- \* SUR Digital Archive.

### BUSINESS

Online resources for businesses, including

- \* Business Insights (Reuters);
- \* COBRA – The Complete Business Reference Adviser;

- \* Economist Historical Archive; Factiva; FAME – information on over 2.4 million of the largest UK and Irish companies;
- \* Frost & Sullivan;
- \* Global Reference Solution;
- \* Key Note Market Research Reports; product and services database Kompass Database;
- \* Market Research Monitor and Mintel Market Research Reports.

### EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

Educational resources include

- \* ALPSP Learned Journals Science Collection; Blackwell Compass Journals;
- \* Electronic Enlightenment;
- \* Environment Complete;
- \* GreenFILE; \* JSTOR; \* MLA International Bibliography;
- \* Oxford Journals Online;
- \* Science Full Text Select;
- \* Standards Infobase and
- \* Web of Knowledge.

### GOVERNMENT AND OFFICIAL

A wealth of political information can be viewed online, including

- \* 18th Century Official Parliamentary Publications Portal 1688-1834;
- \* House of Commons Parliamentary Papers;
- \* Public Information Online and
- \* The Making of Modern Law – Legal Treatises 1800-1926.

### HISTORY, BIOGRAPHY, GENEALOGY

You can access

- \* 17th & 18th Century Burney Newspaper Collection;
- \* 19th Century British Library Newspapers;
- \* 19th Century UK Periodicals Part 2. Empire: Travel and Anthropology, Economics, Missionary and Colonial; British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries;
- \* Celtic Culture – A Historical Encyclopedia (via NetLibrary);
- \* InfoTrac Custom Newspapers;

- \* John Johnson Collection: an archive of printed ephemera – digitised images from the Bodleian Library;
- \* Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB);
- \* India, Raj & Empire;
- \* Sabin Americana, 1500-1926;
- \* The Making of the Modern World;
- \* Times Digital Archive;
- \* Waterloo Directory of English Newspapers & Periodicals 1800-1900, a bibliography of publications, personal names, issuing bodies and subjects;
- \* The Scotsman Digital Archive 1817-1950 and
- \* Who's Who (and Who Was Who).

For more information visit:  
<https://auth.nls.uk/ldc>

## Online

NLS has a vast range of electronic resources, including digital versions of reference works, massive full-text facsimiles and business databases (see below for a list). Many of these resources are available over the internet to readers living in Scotland, although restrictions do apply to some of the collections, in line with licence agreements. Your first port of call to access the Library's licensed digital collections is <https://auth.nls.uk/ldc>

## Visitor Centre

The Visitor Centre at NLS' George IV Bridge was opened in 2009. It features an exhibition space, a shop selling books, stationery and gift items, a café and PC terminals with access to NLS catalogues and other digital facilities.

## NLS locations

### FILMS

Scottish Screen Archive  
39–41 Montrose Avenue  
Hillington Park  
Glasgow G52 4LA  
Tel 0845 366 4600  
Email [ssaenquiries@nls.uk](mailto:ssaenquiries@nls.uk)

### MAPS

Causewayside Building  
159 Causewayside  
Edinburgh EH9 1PH  
Tel 0131 623 3970  
Email [maps@nls.uk](mailto:maps@nls.uk)  
Mon–Fri 9.30am–5pm  
(Wed 10am–5pm),  
Sat 9.30am–1pm

### OTHER COLLECTIONS

George IV Bridge  
Edinburgh EH1 1EW  
Tel 0131 623 3700  
Email [enquiries@nls.uk](mailto:enquiries@nls.uk)  
Mon–Fri 9.30am–  
8.30pm  
(Wed 10am–8.30pm),  
Sat 9.30am–1pm



The British Empire as featured in the 19th Century UK Periodicals Part 2 digital resource

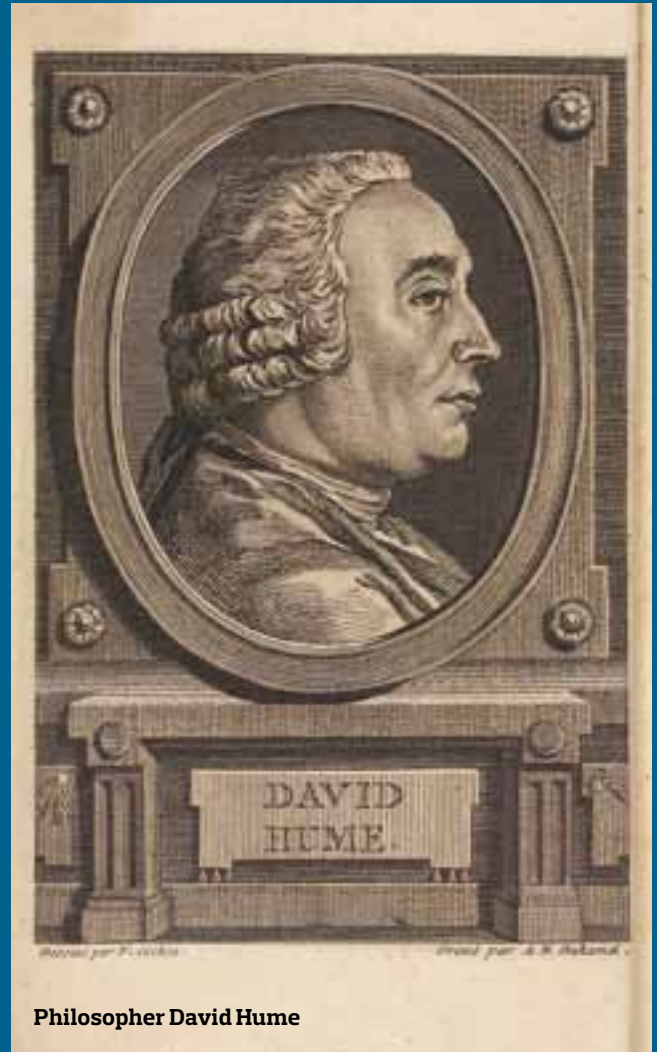
### REFERENCE WORKS AND CATALOGUES

\* **Credo Reference** gives you access to 400 high-quality reference books from the world's leading publishers. Other online reference works available via NLS include:

\* **Early American Imprints, Series 1 – Evans, 1639–1800;**  
\* **Early English Books Online 1475–1700 (EEBO);**  
and \* **Eighteenth Century Collections Online**

(ECCO) Parts 1 & 2;  
**Oxford English Dictionary Online** and **Oxford Reference Online.**

\* All collections can be accessed through the electronic resources search service at the Library. Collections that are marked with a \* can also be accessed outwith the Library (although please be aware that some require registration for remote access).



Philosopher David Hume

## FOCUS ON Foreign Language Collections

NLS' forerunner, the Advocates' Library, acquired its first foreign books in the 1680s. Ever since, the Library has amassed a substantial collection of books from home and abroad, all written in a foreign tongue.

Items from France and French-speaking countries form the largest part of the Library's Foreign Language Collections. The collecting of French language material was advanced by the Enlightenment philosopher and former Keeper of the Library David Hume, who later encountered controversy when three books he ordered were deemed indecent and struck off the register.

With a current policy that focuses on Scots abroad and foreign translations of Scottish authors, the Library continues to be an important source for print in foreign languages.

# Alice and Hume on display

## TREASURES

In conjunction with Scottish Ballet's production of *Alice*, NLS' Treasures space currently features a selection of delightful early editions of the children's classic.

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, written by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll, was first published by Macmillan and Co. in 1865. The first issue was recalled after the artist, John Tenniel, expressed dissatisfaction with the reproduction quality of his illustrations.

When *Alice's* copyright expired in Britain in 1907, a host of publishers brought out editions with new illustrations. Notable artists such as Arthur Rackham provided interpretations of scenes in the book.

Treasures on show include a rare copy of the withdrawn 1865 first issue, alongside letters from the author, and other Lewis Carroll works. Original costume and set visuals, and a behind-the-scenes film montage from Scottish Ballet's *Alice*, accompany the display.

David Hume – often regarded as the most important philosopher to write in English – will follow *Alice* into the Treasures space. Hume's philosophical work was more appreciated after his death than in his lifetime, when he enjoyed a greater reputation as an essayist and historian. In the 1750s he was Keeper of the Advocates' Library, predecessor of the present National Library of Scotland. NLS today is a major centre of Hume scholarship, with world-renowned collections of his



### David Hume's papers on display

papers, books and correspondence. To commemorate the tercentenary of Hume's birth, highlights from

these collections will go on display from 5 May.

The *Alice in Wonderland* display runs until 2 May 2011. Visit and enter a competition to win tickets to see *Alice* at the Festival Theatre, Edinburgh (20-23 April). Hume manuscripts and printed editions take over from 5 May until 28 June.



A John Tenniel illustration of Alice

## Customer magazine of the year... again

### AWARDS

On a particularly snowy night at the end of 2010, *Discover NLS* was named 'Customer Magazine of the Year'. The Periodical Publishers Association (PPA) Scotland

Awards is an annual event that celebrates the best of the Scottish magazine industry. The 2010 awards were held on 1 December in Glasgow, and the night marked the second year in a row that *Discover NLS* has won the coveted customer magazine award.



# The search for Scottish celluloid

## APPEAL

**S**cottish Screen Archive has begun a new, targeted acquisition programme. It's designed to address a significant gap in the NLS moving image collection of productions dating from the end of the era of celluloid film and the transition to shooting on videotape. Working with an academic team at the University of Glasgow, the Scottish Screen Archive Acquisitions Curator Kay Foubister is appealing for productions made in the last quarter of the 20th century.

The Scotland-wide collecting programme will run concurrently with the research project for the next two years, and will target cine and video clubs, community



Stills from two community made amateur films capturing the experience of childhood



groups and video workshops, local organisations, schools and arts associations, as well as individuals who may have videos reflecting local community events, industries, or customs.

If you know of footage from the 1970s onwards, please contact the project using the

online submission form at [www.gla.ac.uk/cams](http://www.gla.ac.uk/cams) or by writing to Kay Foubister, Scottish Screen Archive, 39-41 Montrose Avenue, Hillington Park, Glasgow, G52 4LA. If you were part of a group that ran video workshops for children, or were a child that participated in movie-making between

the 1970s and 2000, the academic researchers would be delighted to hear from you. Further information can be found on the project website [www.gla.ac.uk/cams](http://www.gla.ac.uk/cams) or by writing to Dr Karen Lury or Dr Ryan Shand, School of Culture & Creative Arts, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, G12 8QQ.

## NLS at the movies

### COLLECTIONS

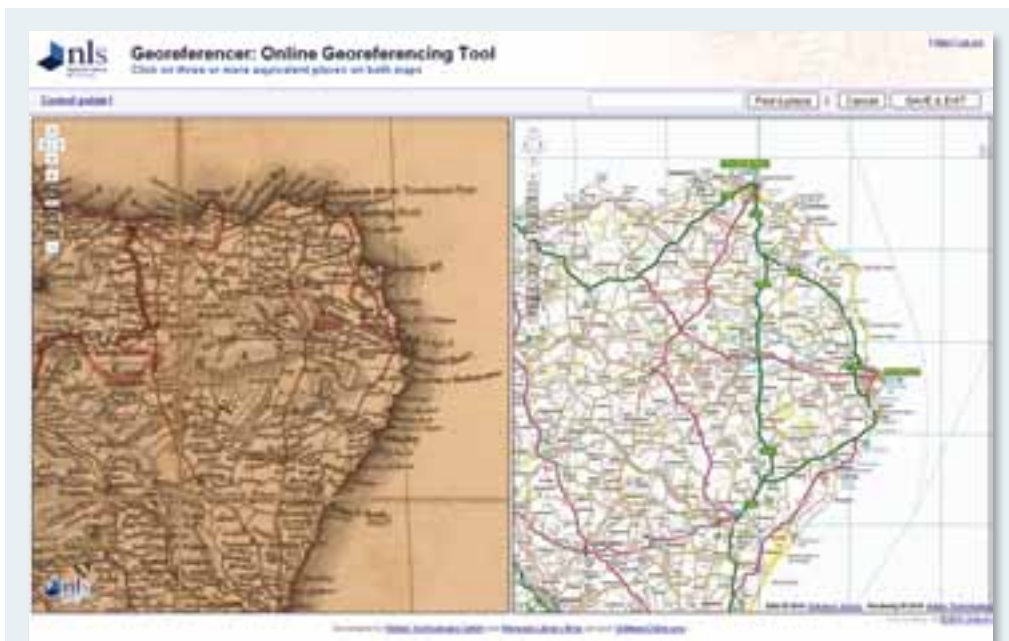
**T**he Library has recently completed the purchase of a number of film posters, lobby cards, pressbooks and stills for classic films made or set in Scotland. Among the items acquired is a particularly rare promotional poster for the 1935 film *The Ghost Goes West*. Made by London Film Productions, this romantic comedy tells the story of an 18th-century ghost who haunts a Scottish castle. It starred Robert Donat, and was voted best film of the year by *Film Weekly* magazine.

Other items purchased include a French *Whisky Galore!* poster and a poster, pressbook and lobby card for *Whisky Galore!*'s rather less well-known 1957 sequel, *Rockets Galore!*



London Film Productions' *The Ghost Goes West*

DEL REY LOVEN, ALAMY



## Overlaying Google Earth with historic maps

### ONLINE

A new collaborative application has been launched by NLS. It allows you to locate the position of various online historical maps of Scotland (including county maps, town plans and coastal charts), and then view them as an overlay in Google Earth, or using the Google Earth browser plugin.



Georeferencer at work

The application, known as the Georeferencer, allows you to compare historical maps directly with present day satellite images and view the maps alongside other georeferenced historical maps of the same area.

Try out the Georeferencer at [geo.nls.uk/maps/georeferencer](http://geo.nls.uk/maps/georeferencer)



## Maps join online resource

### COLLECTIONS

NLS has added 18,000 maps to ScotlandsPlaces, a collaborative website, hosted by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS). The website offers access to records and images of material held by the National Archives of Scotland, RCAHMS and NLS.

[www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk)



## National Library's Cate Newton retires

### PEOPLE

**The Director of Collections and Research oversaw digital expansion**

Cate Newton, Director of Collections and Research, joined the Library in 2000 and stepped down from her post in January 2011. 'This has been a very exciting decade for collecting in NLS,' she tells us. 'The shift in publishing from print to digital has brought some amazing opportunities and challenges.

In particular, I have been very pleased to be involved in the increase in licensed online publications purchased by the Library.'

Cate also oversaw an enormous increase in digitised images of the Library's existing collections and was involved in the acquisition of the John Murray Archive and the merger of the Scottish Screen Archive with NLS.

'I have been keen to see wider access to the excellent research work done by our staff,' she says, 'and it is gratifying to see this being



made available in a range of popular and scholarly publications – including of course *Discover NLS*.

'It has also been a pleasure to achieve many valuable partnerships with universities and other organisations in order to bring our collections to a wider range of people.'



### BY THE NUMBERS

# 6,700

press releases issued by four of Scotland's political parties were faxed to the Library between March 1999 and February 2004

Find out more at [www.nls.uk/collections/british/political](http://www.nls.uk/collections/british/political)



## Click on Flickr ONLINE



The National Library of Scotland houses many treasures, and as of this spring, a small selection of

special collections will also be available on Flickr, an online repository for digital images.

The Flickr collections will provide international access to a number of Scotland's rarest manuscripts, books, maps and photographs, dating as far back as the 1280s. The images will serve as a sample of NLS' overall digital collections.

Take a look at NLS on Flickr at [www.flickr.com/photos/nlscotland](http://www.flickr.com/photos/nlscotland)

View the Digital Archive at [digital.nls.uk](http://digital.nls.uk) and browse the Library's Digital Gallery at [www.nls.uk/digital-gallery](http://www.nls.uk/digital-gallery)

## Brilliant bookbinding

### AWARDS



Earlier this year, the annual Elizabeth Soutar Bookbinding award ceremony

took place at NLS. The awards, set up 18 years ago, recognise excellence in the field of craft bookbinding from Europe and beyond. The 2011 winners are Toby Gough, who secured the Best Craft Binding prize, and Antonio Leal (pictured above), who won the Best Creative Binding title for his bound edition of *Mascarades*.

# 'Close friendships forged in unthinkable circumstances'

## CURATOR'S CHOICE

**Alison Metcalfe, Manuscripts Curator, on the photographic albums kept by a young woman determined to help the First World War effort**

**M**anuscript collections at NLS offer a variety of valuable resources for the study of the First World War. Included are papers of leading military figures, perhaps most notably those of Field Marshal Haig, whose leadership on the Western Front is still hotly debated. In addition, a wealth of diaries, letters, notebooks and photographs offer an insight into the personal experiences of those involved across all ranks and in all theatres of war. Among the highlights of the collections are the scrapbooks and photograph albums of Mairi Chisholm, who spent her war at the front in Pervyse, Belgium.

Mairi joined Dr Hector Munro's volunteer Flying Ambulance Corps (FAC) and, along with her friend Mrs Elsie Knocker, travelled to Belgium, keen to play an



**Mairi and Elsie**

active role in the war effort. The women were stationed in Pervyse, collecting wounded soldiers from the front and transporting them to hospital. As fighting in the area escalated, the FAC tried to evacuate the volunteers' post, but Elsie and Mairi were determined to stay put and, after a battle with the authorities, established a first aid post in what remained of the town. To begin with the women funded the post out of their own pockets then later, as news of their efforts spread and their celebrity increased, they made successful fundraising trips to the UK.

Photographs of Mairi, Elsie and friends striking poses for the camera are interspersed

with images of devastated landscapes, ruined buildings and human casualties. The albums bear testament to the dangers and difficulties the women were exposed to daily, and to the close friendships forged in unthinkable circumstances during their three and a half years in Pervyse. Mairi's scrapbooks reflect how well known the duo – 'the Angels of Pervyse' – became, and include letters and poems from some of the soldiers, grateful for the medical attention and care they received.

As German efforts to take Pervyse intensified, the work of the first aid post was halted abruptly when a gas attack in the early hours of 17 March



## Queen Mary in colour

### RARE FILM

**S**cottish Screen Archive is able to present, for the first time, colour footage of the Cunard liner Queen Mary leaving the River Clyde in March 1936. The footage was shot by amateur filmmaker James Blair on the then new 16mm Kodachrome colour film stock, supplies of which had just arrived in Glasgow that very month.

Scottish Screen Archive holds three sequences and restoration of the film was only made possible thanks to digital restoration tools and painstaking frame-by-frame work over the course of 18 months.

View the film at [ssa.nls.uk/film.cfm?fid=2194](http://ssa.nls.uk/film.cfm?fid=2194)



Two stills from the film

### Alison Metcalfe with one of the albums

1918 almost killed the women. Elsie was forbidden from returning to the post, but Mairi made a brief return until a second gas attack resulted in the post being closed permanently by the Belgian army.

The story of this remarkable duo is told in Diane Atkinson's *Elsie and Mairi go to War*, which was turned into a performance at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2010. Work to digitise Mairi's photograph albums is under way, and once complete, the images will be added to the digital archive on the NLS website.

NLS' digital archive can be accessed at [digital.nls.uk](http://digital.nls.uk)

MALCOLM COCHRANE, HENRY SOTHERAN



**COLLECTION** With the National Trust for Scotland's Robert Burns Birthplace Museum now open in Alloway, a new addition to NLS' Modern Scottish Collections reminds us how visitors from a previous era journeyed to the bard's childhood home. The artist Norman Wilkinson (1878-1971) was responsible for many classic travel images of Scotland, including this railway poster from 1935.

## Spring events at NLS

All events take place at the National Library of Scotland, George IV Bridge, unless otherwise stated

### TAXI!

5 April, 6pm

Join Leith-born author Douglas J Findlay as he takes a trip down memory lane in this hilarious talk about his time as a cabbie in post-war Edinburgh. Never one to turn down a fare, Douglas encountered an extraordinary range of colourful characters and ended up in the most bizarre situations.



### Alice is coming to Edinburgh SCOTTISH BALLET

#### ALICE PODCAST

21 April, 7pm

NLS is broadcasting live from backstage at the Festival Theatre in Edinburgh's new production of *Alice*.

### INSPIRATIONS AT NLS:

#### MICHAEL PALIN

27 April, 6pm

Join actor, writer and presenter Michael Palin CBE as he visits NLS to reflect on the things that have inspired him during his life, from the surreal and absurd Goon Shows to the pioneering work of explorer David Livingstone. This really is an event not to be missed, so book early to avoid disappointment.

#### ULLAPOOL BOOK FESTIVAL



### Two very different films on St Kilda will get a screening at NLS

7 May, 7.30pm

NLS presents Bernard MacLavery at this year's Ullapool Book Festival. Tickets are £7 per session or you can buy a weekend ticket for £85. [ullapoolbookfestival.co.uk](http://ullapoolbookfestival.co.uk)

### BOTTLED TEARS: SCOTTISH WAR BRIDES OF WORLD WAR TWO

12 May, 6pm  
Over the past 10 years, Beverley Tosh, a New Zealand-born Canadian artist, has been consumed with the exploration and creative reinterpretation of the historical phenomenon of war brides – those women who married foreign military personnel during the World War Two era and then began a new life in their husbands' homelands. Join us for this fascinating audio-visual presentation.

### DAVID HUME – PHILOSOPHER AND HISTORIAN

25 May, 6pm

Hume's contemporaries knew him as a historian as well as a philosopher. His massive *History of England* was and remained a best-seller for half a century after his death. Nicholas Phillipson explores the life of this fascinating man.

### BYRON: FAME AND INFAMY

3 June, 6pm

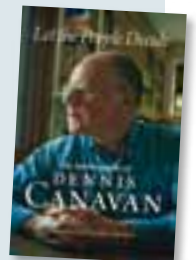
The Byron Papers in the John Murray Archive include his poetical, publishing and personal papers. Join curator David McClay for a journey through the collection. The event will include a manuscript display and a review of NLS' Byron-related activities.



### LET THE PEOPLE DECIDE

7 June, 6pm

Political correspondent Brian Taylor discusses Dennis Canavan's fascinating book, *Let the People Decide – The Autobiography of Dennis Canavan*, with the man himself. A booking fee of £4 applies for this event (includes refreshments).



Book events online at [www.nls.uk/events/](http://www.nls.uk/events/) booking or call 0131 623 3918

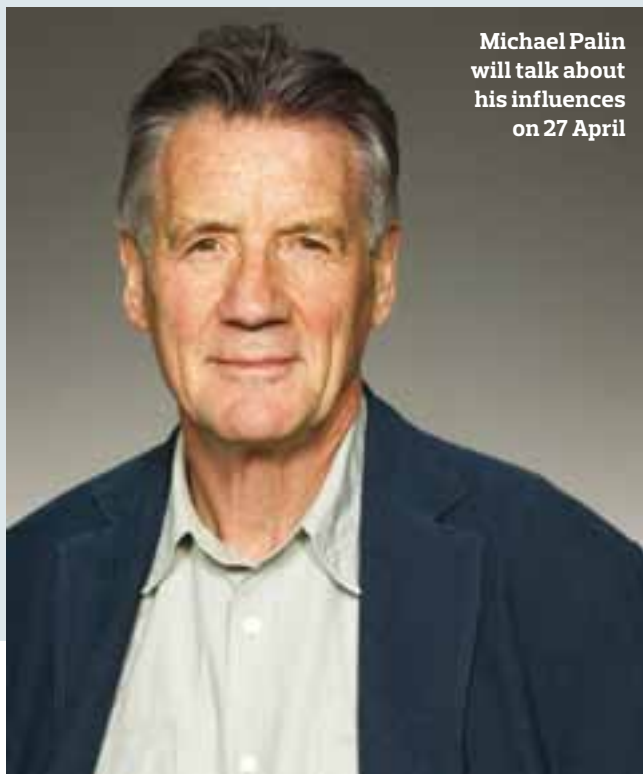


See Bernard MacLavery at the Ullapool Book Festival

### NLS FILM CLUB – ST KILDA

12 April, 6pm

*St Kilda – Britain's Loneliest Isle* will be screened to celebrate its inclusion in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. Originally silent, for this showing the film will be accompanied by a musical soundtrack specially composed by David Allison. In addition, a more recent film from 1967, *St Kilda – The Lonely Islands*, will also be shown.



Michael Palin will talk about his influences on 27 April



# An old friend recognised by moonlight

NLS has in its collection a fine etching long thought to be by an unknown artist. As he explains, it took a holiday in Copenhagen for **Dr Iain Gordon Brown** to work out who had made this evocative work



**Above** Johan Christian Dahl's painting of Piazza di San Pietro in Rome

**Left** The etching of the same location, long unattributed

In 1950, a collection of miscellaneous manuscripts from Newbattle Abbey in Midlothian was presented to NLS under the terms of the will of the 11th Marquess of Lothian. Many of the items are of great interest and some of great beauty. Two in particular have attracted me since I first became aware of them early in my career at the Library. These are two finely bound volumes, best described as late Grand

Tour souvenir albums (MSS. 5791-2). They had been compiled by, or for, a traveller (probably a woman, and probably not a member of the Lothian family) whose identity is unknown.

It appears that these rather smart albums, which together contain some 160 watercolours, drawings and prints of typical Grand Tour themes, were assembled around the year 1827. Forming a topographical record of a characteristic travelling itinerary, largely in Italy, the volumes include many views of the sights traditionally enjoyed by Grand Tourists of this period.

When I first came across the albums, I had only the very brief description in our published *Catalogue of Manuscripts* to guide me. The catalogue description names only two artists of the many represented, and a great number of the images are anonymous. On first encountering the albums, one page in MS. 5791 especially attracted me.

Laid down upon it was a large etching of fine quality, highlighted with white gouache or body-colour and framed within a pattern of ink borders. The subject is Piazza di San Pietro, Rome, by moonlight. It is a striking subject, most effectively treated.

I was already seriously interested in the subject of the Grand Tour. It's a cultural topic I have pursued over many years in a number of ways, including several exhibitions for the Library which have touched upon the subject of the Grand Tour, as well as much scholarly writing on that and related themes. When I first chanced upon this view of St Peter's Square, it so happened I was seeking something that would fit into a section on Robert Adam in Italy for the exhibition 'Scottish Architects at Home and Abroad', mounted in 1978 to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Adam's birth. I wanted a striking (and, if possible, little-known) image that would evoke the Rome that Adam so relished in the 1750s. 'Rome is the most glorious place in the universal world', Robert Adam had written; 'a grandeur and tranquillity reigns in it... In fine, for a man of taste the day is too short...' Quoting this in the exhibition catalogue, and focusing on

Thorvaldsen  
Museum,  
Copenhagen

this print, I applied to the image Adam's reflection that, by the light of the moon, Rome appeared 'horribly Antique and pleasing'.

The etching (on stylistic grounds clearly later in date than Adam's Roman years) is unsigned, but the sheet on which it is mounted appeared to be inscribed 'The Gift of Monsr. Flattel'. I was not then to suppose that this person was any other than a generous Frenchman, probably a contemporary tourist, who had given the compiler of the album this print for her collection. As time passed, I thought no more about possible authorship of the etching, even though it remained in my mind's eye – to the extent of using the image (solely on account of its outstanding atmospheric qualities) in lectures here and there and, in 2008, as an illustration for an article published in a *Europa Nostra* book on the Grand Tour.

**I**n October 2010 my wife (also a Grand Tour scholar) and I were on a short break in Copenhagen. Holiday or not, the pull of the city's excellent museums and galleries was irresistible. Prime among these was the remarkable Thorvaldsen Museum, dedicated to the work and collections of the great Danish neo-classical sculptor who had enjoyed extraordinary, world-wide fame.

And there, in Room 25, I made a discovery, akin to the encountering of a long-lost and fondly remembered friend. Hanging in front of us was an oil painting by the Danish artist Johan Christian Dahl (1788-1857) showing St Peter's colonnade by moonlight. It was, I was sure, the same view, and handled in the same way, as in the etching in the album in Edinburgh. Helpfully the Thorvaldsen Museum provides leaflets, in English, as exhibition guides. The Dahl was featured in the appropriate one. Prompted by the notes written by the Thorvaldsen curator, William Gellius, I learned that Dahl had in fact derived his



“  
**Returning to  
the National  
Library I went  
immediately  
to the strong-  
room and  
fetched the  
manuscript**

**Dr Iain Gordon  
Brown**

composition – painted in 1821, possibly at Bertel Thorvaldsen's behest and perhaps to complement a daylight scene of the Piazza by Christoffer Eckersberg, which Thorvaldsen already owned – from an etching by Franz Ludwig Catel, itself done in 1818.

On returning to the National Library I went immediately to the strong-room and fetched MS. 5791. More than 32 years after I had first seen that evocative etching I was able to attribute it to a known (and reasonably distinguished) German artist. And of course the inscription on its mount could now be re-read and re-interpreted. The 'Monsieur' of the

inscription did not mean the donor was French: it was merely contemporary use of the then international language of cultural travel. Nor was the name 'Flattel'. Unclear writing, misspelling and my own resulting misreading, had combined to turn 'F. Catel' into something erroneous. The etching had been presented to the album's compiler by the artist himself.

Franz Ludwig Catel (1778-1856) is hardly a household name in Britain. But I did know something about him having seen and admired his work in Berlin and elsewhere. Berlin-born, and once a book illustrator, Catel studied painting in Paris and went to Rome to become a leading member of the prominent community of German artists there. He specialised in showing exterior views from the interior: scenes through ruined arches, from inside windows, from the dark to the light. Particularly attractive is his portrait of the Prussian architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel at an open window in Naples. Catel's precise, bright Italian landscapes were much collected, and he is today well represented in German galleries.

The subject of Bernini's vast colonnade of St Peter's Piazza, with a sentry of the Swiss Guard nodding at his post and the moonlight shining on the twin fountains in the square, is one of Catel's most effective compositions. The lighting and the applied gouache soften the hardness of the etched lines. How many copies of the print were produced is not known; others naturally must and do exist, for example in the Danish national gallery and in the Bavarian state graphic collection in Munich. But I haven't encountered another in a British collection, and can find no record of there being copies in the British Museum or the Ashmolean in Oxford.

I remain entranced by the image after all these years. It is somehow deeply satisfying to be able at last to give an identity to the etching's maker. And a holiday in Copenhagen has something more cerebral to show for it beyond a bigger waistline due to all those delicious pastries and *smørrebrød*.

# Just three questions

There is a lot to learn about NLS, but we're getting there – one question at a time

1

## What's the most unexpected item you've found in the Rare Books Collection?

My most unexpected item is the earliest printed work in the National Library's collections: a very long Buddhist prayer scroll (63 centimetres by 13) printed in Japan no later than 770 AD (shelfmark: Sa.7).

This scroll was one of a million commissioned by the Empress Shotoku (718–770) after she suppressed a rebellion in 764 AD. Each individual scroll was housed within a miniature wooden pagoda. The texts –



incantations called 'dharani' – were believed to have magical powers for the preservation of good. These scrolls are the earliest known examples of textual printing on paper, although the exact printing process is a mystery.

The completed scrolls were distributed among the 10 great Buddhist temples in Japan, and a substantial number of them still survive today in libraries around the world. The National Library's copy was presented in 1959, one of several donations by Mr William Lyon Wood. **James Mitchell, Curator, Rare Books Collections**



2

## As far as you know, what is the oldest item held in NLS' Music Collections?

The earliest music items that we hold go back as far as the 16th century. An interesting early printed music item held in the NLS Music Collections is Claude Le Jeune's *Les pseumes de David, mis en musique a quatre & cinq parties*. Geneva: pour Jean de Tournes, 1627 (NLS shelfmark: Ing.300).

These four and five-part psalm settings appear not in score (all parts printed underneath each other) but in part books similar to today's chorus parts. The printing is a typical example of Attaignant style single



**Claude Le Jeune's part book published in 1627**

impression printing from type. The staff lines are not continuous as with engraved music but slightly broken up.

**Almut Boehme, Head of Music**

3

## How do you determine how much you are willing to spend on an item when purchasing it for the Library?

Many factors are weighed up in valuing manuscript material, and no two items, or sets of circumstances, are ever the same. But the following questions are nearly always considerations, whether we are valuing a single letter or an entire publishing archive.

What is the significance of the item on offer?

Does it sit well with our existing collections and collecting policies? How much can we afford?

Is there a possibility of raising funds from outside NLS? Who else might want to buy it? Is this a one-off purchase or part of an ongoing relationship with the vendor? What have we paid recently for comparable items? What are dealers or auction houses asking for comparable items? Ultimately, what would be a fair price?

The offer then made is subject to negotiation, and, generally speaking, agreement is reached amicably and

to everyone's satisfaction.

**Sally Harrower, Manuscripts Curator**



# Beautiful books

Within its collections, NLS holds a number of artists' books, typically collaborations between Scottish artists and writers. These visually arresting books are thought-provoking and works of art in their own right

**HIRTA (2000)**  
by **Bill Duncan**  
(poet) and **Susan**  
**Wilson** (artist)

FB.1.884

The *Hirta* portfolio commemorates the culture and evacuation of the island of St Kilda and was produced in an edition of 36, exactly the number of islanders evacuated in 1930. The Fife-born writer was inspired by the time he spent with an archaeological dig on the island.





**THE POMEGRANATE POEMS(2001)**

by **Tom Pow (poet) and Hugh Bryden (artist)** FB.m.619

Five sonnets by Tom Pow are illustrated by Dumfries-based artist and publisher Hugh Bryden. Twenty-five copies were published, each one enclosed in a handmade wooden box.



I  
In the shadow world, a pineapple  
sits four square; invites you to walk round it  
as you walk round your lover where she sits  
straddling a chair, turning a pineapple  
over, squeezing it gently, in her hands.  
She examines each tiny dark hair  
from each hexagonal carapace; stares  
till the fruit that fits so well her hands  
becomes a closed shell of gleaming shields;  
lip and then lip of them, lapping in waves.  
O what's the honest answer she craves  
of this fruit? I wait while the sun dried fields  
send heat outwith and my salty fear  
craves the salt of her who breathes so near.

**GIFT HORSE (1999)**

by **Richard Price (poet) and Ronald King (artist)**

FB.m.471(24)

A limited edition of 50 copies, each one numbered and signed by the artist and the poet, who was raised in Renfrewshire. The book depicts a series of images of a horse, which when viewed one after the other (rather like a flip book) creates the illusion of movement.



**Voices**

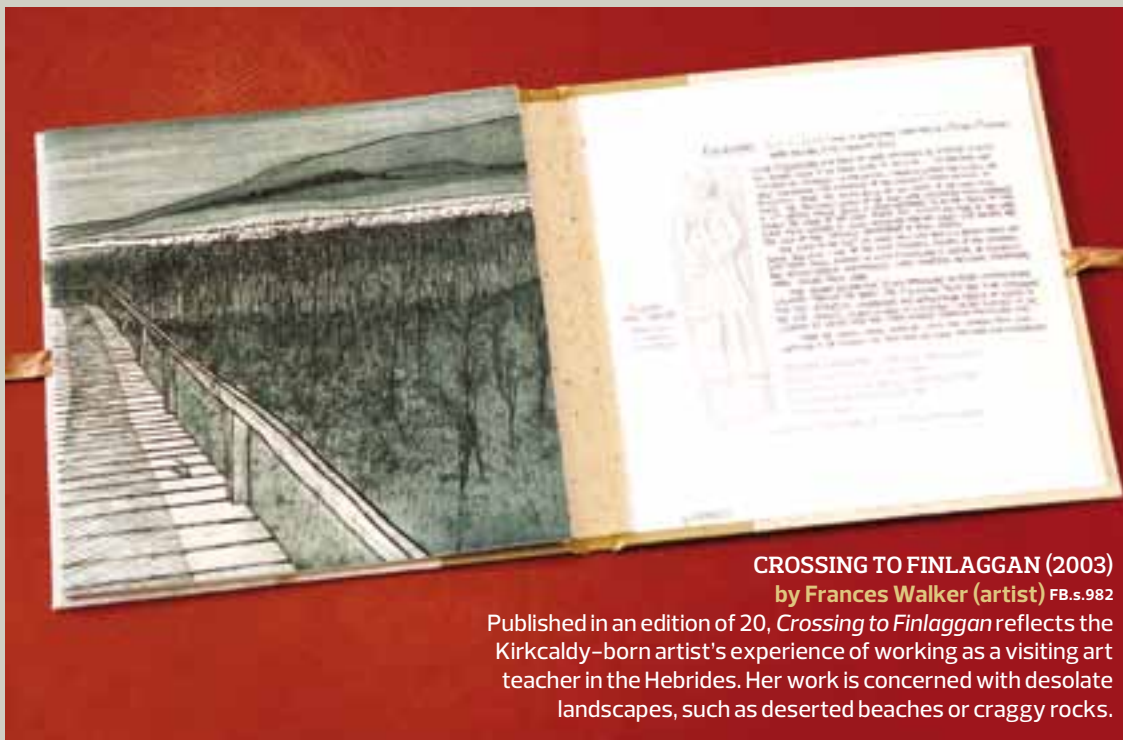


**VOICES FROM GLENTROOL & MERRICK (2008)**  
by **Mary Smith (poet) and Silvana McLean (artist)**

FB.I.395

*Glentool & Merrick* was a public art project in the form of a portfolio of etchings and poems based on stories and memories from this

area of Galloway. The poems are printed on clear sheets so that the etchings can be seen through them.



**CROSSING TO FINLAGGAN (2003)**  
by Frances Walker (artist) FB.s.982

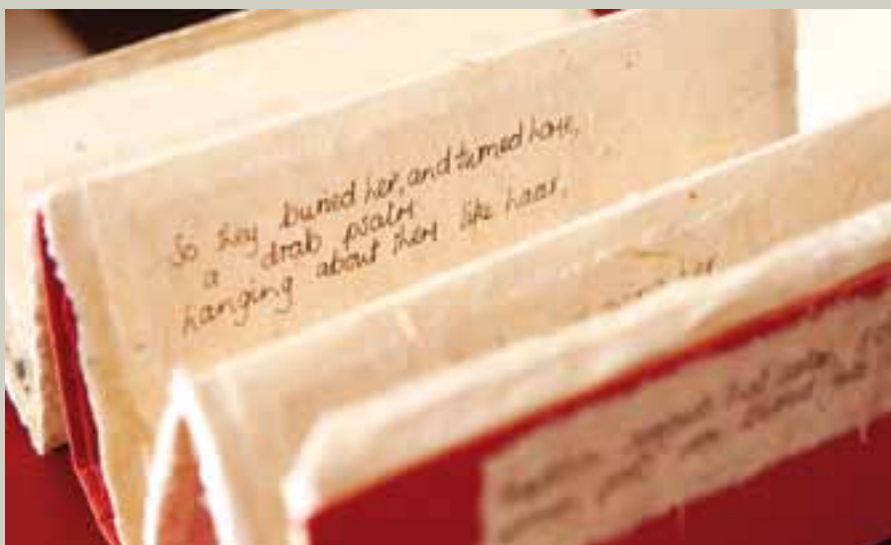
Published in an edition of 20, *Crossing to Finlaggan* reflects the Kirkcaldy-born artist's experience of working as a visiting art teacher in the Hebrides. Her work is concerned with desolate landscapes, such as deserted beaches or craggy rocks.

**MEADOWSWEET (2000)**

by Jean Johnstone (artist) and Kathleen Jamie (poet)

FB.m.606

Limited to a run of just nine signed copies, the Library holds the first copy of this version of Jamie's poem. Fife artist Johnstone is a keen exponent of the genre and NLS holds copies of her other collaborations.



**FORMAX (1988)**  
by Adrian Wiszniewski (artist)  
FB.m.491

This book consists of 26 prints and had a print run of only 100 copies. Adrian Wiszniewski is one of Scotland's leading artists. *For Max* recounts the story of a man who discovers a strange object and sets out to discover what it is for.

## WHAT ARE ARTISTS' BOOKS?

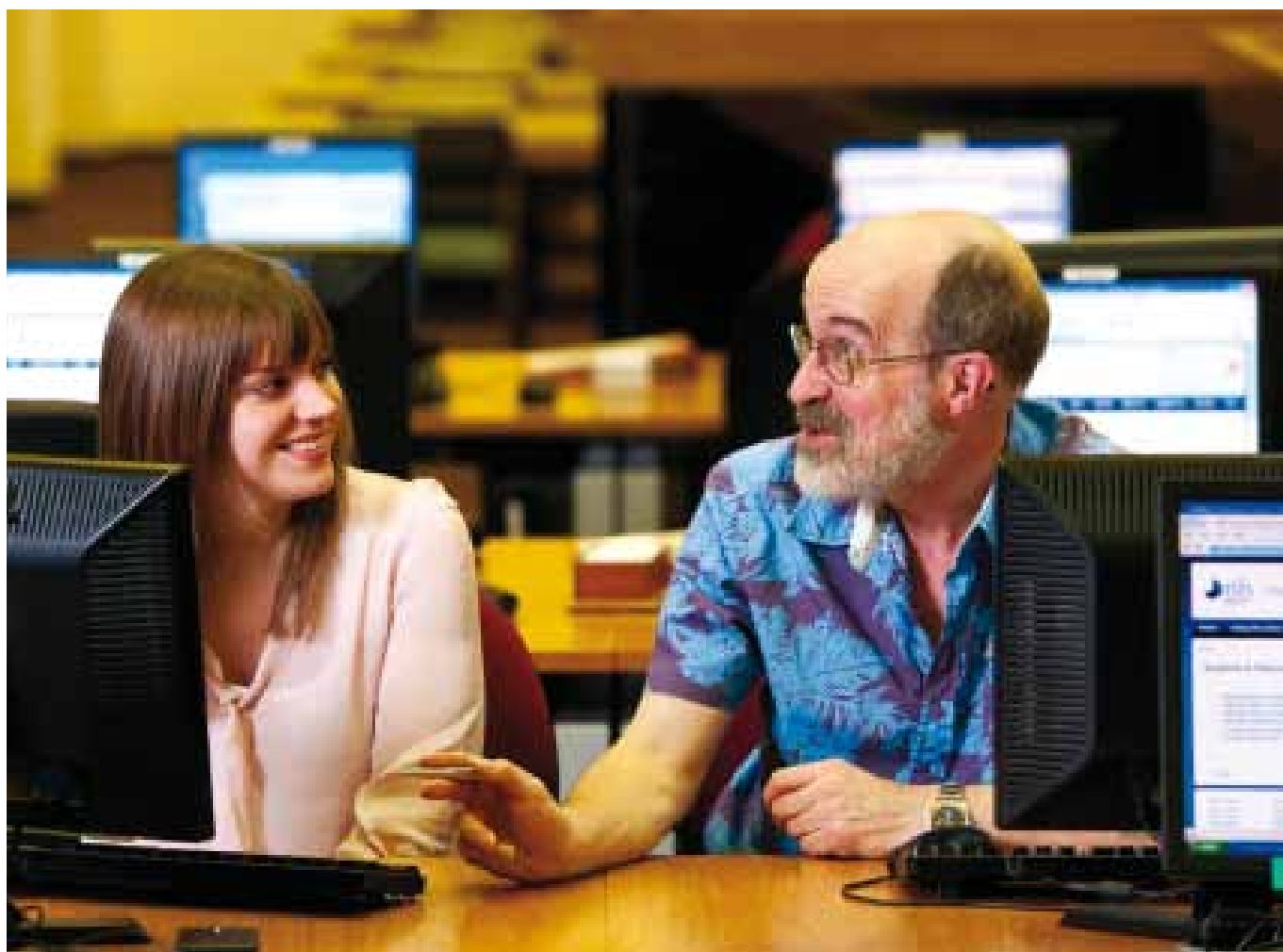
Most books are published with the aim of selling as many copies as possible. Although their design and physical appearance may have been very carefully considered, such aesthetic concerns are usually secondary to the actual content.

However, the book as an object has its own innate value, and this is something that has been recognised by many visual artists.

Artists' books (namely, pieces of art realised in book form) have been around for some time. William Blake is arguably a founding father of the genre, followed by the work of William Morris. However, artists' books perhaps first properly came to the fore during the 1950s and 1960s with the work of conceptual artists Dieter Roth and Ed Ruscha.

Many artists' books are self-published, or produced by small presses in limited numbers. They are often visually striking and all – in some form or other – play with our understanding of what books are, and what they can be.

## Most people who use the National Library of Scotland will engage with a member of Reference Services at some point or other. But as Reference Services Assistant Elaine Brown reveals, the team's role is far broader than you might expect



**T**he Issue Hall in the Library is busy, but despite all the comings and goings, the atmosphere is professional and calm. At the Enquiry Desk, readers are receiving help and advice. One reader is new to the Library and is getting guidance on how to locate material on a particular subject. Another is ordering digital images and receiving advice on copyright regulations. At the Collection and Returns Desk, duty staff are issuing and returning books, tracking down missing titles, issuing Wi-Fi passes and, in between, answering email enquiries.

So far, so predictable. This scene is much like any other library in the country. But there's more to the

work in Reference Services, the department responsible for running the General Reading Room and its services, than meets the eye.

### Reader Services

As well as staffing the public desks, we have to ensure the General Reading Room is a safe and pleasant environment for people to work in and that material from the collections, even the most modern material, is treated with care. The Library's dual purpose is the conservation of Scotland's national collections and making those collections accessible to the public. The staff take these aims very seriously and do their best to balance their duty of care with people's right to consult our material.

**Reference Services' Dougie Mathieson helps a reader with a digital resource**

We also select and maintain the printed reference works available in the General Reading Room, so that they remain relevant to the needs of users, and help evaluate the usefulness of the digital reference works the Library is considering adding to its licensed collections. In addition, we suggest new resources, both printed and digital, which readers bring to our attention, or which we come across in our work.

Reference Services has responsibility for maintaining registered readers' records and for managing remote access to our licensed digital collections for Scottish readers. With nearly 14,000 registered readers, and thousands worldwide joining or rejoining us every year, there is always scope for troubleshooting. Reference Services has to ensure that any remote registration difficulties are resolved promptly; this is becoming increasingly important as the Library's services to remote readers grow.

We also operate a highly regarded Document Supply service, sourcing material from other libraries both within and outwith the UK for our readers, and fulfilling requests for material from our collections for other libraries at home and abroad. There's also a busy reprographic service to manage, including accepting orders for paper and digital copies, ensuring they comply with current copyright and other relevant legislation and despatching the completed order to the enquirer.

### Enquiry Services

NLS is an institution that generates some extraordinary statistics. It has more than 16 million items in its various collections, a figure that is rising by about 6,000 items per week, which are held on roughly 124,000 miles of shelving, spread between two locations. Collection Support Services staff

## Not just for reference

**Reference Services Assistant Susan Bellany takes us through a typical day working at NLS**

**I start at 8.30am. The first thing I do is ensure we're ready for when the doors open to the public.**

**Like many in the team, I work on the Enquiry Desk. You never know what questions you'll be asked and that keeps you on your toes. The Library's Electronic Resources Search Service is a great tool, and it will often lead me to the information people are looking for.**

**We work day, evening and Saturday shifts, responding to people's enquiries. Of course, we're not just there to provide support to those who visit the Library in person. I also speak to people on the telephone – taking enquiries, or helping them to access our Licensed Digital Collections (see page 6**

**for more on this).**

**We also answer email enquiries on varied subjects from people around the world, so it's very important to keep our knowledge up to date.**

**Reference Services runs information sessions for members of the public and I am involved in the 'Getting started at NLS' workshop. This is where we give people an overview of the Library's collections, tell them how to register and take them on a tour.**

**I finish my day with some project work. At the moment I am writing an FAQ guide for our Licensed Digital Collections, which will appear on our website. All in all, Reference Services at NLS is a busy place to be.**



**Managing stock and looking for information in the General Reading Room**



A busy day at the Enquiry Desk

each routinely walk about seven to 10 miles a day while fetching material for readers.

Every year, Reference Services staff deals with approximately 60,000 enquiries from the public. Of these, slightly more than half are received from people who are on the Library premises. The remainder are delivered by telephone, email or via Ask-A-Librarian, which is an online service that you can use to submit a question to the Library. The spread of topics is enormous and not just the perennial 'I'm looking for a book'. Staff are asked everything from the number of bunion operations carried out by the NHS in England in 2009 (1,499), to the location of a particular long-demolished street in Glasgow. While many Reference Services staff have particular areas of interest, it's more important for them to be generalists who know a little about a lot, and crucially know a lot about sources of information, printed and digital.

#### Education Services

The third strand of Reference Services' remit is raising the Library's profile. NLS holdings are not solely reserved for the use of academics and scholars, but have a lot to offer the general public as well. The department runs three free workshops (Getting Started, Family History and Beyond Google – details at [www.nls.uk/events/readers-workshops](http://www.nls.uk/events/readers-workshops)) aimed at new and prospective users

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**Every year, Reference Services deals with approximately 60,000 enquiries from the public**

and is currently developing one about newspaper resources. They've proved to be very popular, encouraging many people to join who wouldn't otherwise have considered using the Library.

NLS also stages roadshows in public libraries throughout Scotland to promote its collections and services, which Reference Services staff help to run. They deliver talks on remote access to the Library, and family history resources specific to the area that the roadshow is visiting.

Finally, much effort goes into producing documentation for Library services; guides to using and ordering from the catalogues for instance, or databases of holdings in specific areas of interest so that readers can find relevant material easily. In the same spirit, since family history is now so popular, Reference Services has written, and maintains, a section of the Library's public website giving an overview of the various sources for genealogy research held by NLS ([www.nls.uk/family-history](http://www.nls.uk/family-history)).

So, work in Reference Services is always varied. The next time you visit the Library or browse the website, spare a thought for the wide range of work that goes on behind the scenes to make your NLS experience as enjoyable and productive as possible.

If you have an enquiry for the Reference Services team, email them at [enquiries@nls.uk](mailto:enquiries@nls.uk)

# A'body's Wullie

Everyone's favourite Scottish scamp has just turned 75. **Andrew Littlefield** investigates Oor Wullie's enduring appeal

**T**hanks to the timeless magic of the comic strip, Scotland's very own wee cheeky chappie Oor Wullie remains eternally youthful, even though 2011 actually marks his 75th birthday. NLS is well placed to join in the celebrations for this anniversary, as the Library recently completed its collection of Oor Wullie annuals by acquiring the rare first two editions at auction in the autumn of 2010.

The first ever Oor Wullie comic page, printed in *The Sunday Post* newspaper on 8 March 1936, opens with Wullie sat on his upturned bucket, lamenting 'Ah'm fed up! I never get ony fun here.' In search of entertainment, our hero strolls along the realistically depicted urban streets of Auchenshoogle, a hybrid of Glasgow and Dundee (the latter being the home town of Oor Wullie owner and publisher DC Thomson). Hands in the pockets of his dungarees, his spiky hair jauntily sticking up and his tackety boots shining, Wullie soon gets into mischief by literally engineering a crash between a tram and a steamroller, before, in the final panel, retiring once again to the solitary pursuit of bored bucket-squatting. This circular narrative pattern, frequently repeated ever since, immediately helped to establish the tone of the comic – a form of farcical Kitchen Sink realism, delivered in a unique brand of Scots dialect.

According to Morris Heggie, DC Thomson archivist and the current writer of Oor Wullie,



## Completing the set



The Library's entitlement to claim publications via Legal Deposit has long ensured that NLS holds nearly all of DC Thomson's output, including all of the Oor Wullie annuals published after the Second World War.

Yet for some unknown reason the Library was, until the autumn of 2010, missing the first two wartime books, published in 1940 and 1942 respectively. Modern Scottish Collections

Curator Andrew Martin tells us that 'You don't see very many of the early Wullie annuals – I've heard claims that there are less than ten in existence of the first one. They certainly don't come up for sale

very often, although in the summer of 2010 someone did find one at a car boot sale in pretty poor condition, which they got about a £1,000 for. Not bad for something that sold for 1/6 in October 1940.

'The two annuals that we acquired at auction are in surprisingly good shape. The first one especially is in very good condition given its age and the fact that it's not a robust product to start with.'

MALCOLM COCHRANE, OOR WULLIE © THE SUNDAY POST DC THOMSON & CO LTD DUNDEE



The very first Oor Wullie annual, with a painted cover by Dudley D Watkins

Right: Panels from Wullie's debut in 1936  
Below: A recent Wullie strip, complete with new friend Primrose



the character's patter was based directly on the speech patterns of DC Thomson Managing Editor Robert Duncan Low, who created Wullie in collaboration with illustrator Dudley Dexter Watkins, a former student at the Glasgow School of Art. 'RD Low had a very broad Scottish accent, and he wrote as he spoke,' says Heggie. 'He spent a lot of time in the Angus glens and beyond. Often when I look at his old strips I can hear him speaking.'

Wullie was perhaps Thomson's earliest 'naughty kid' comics character, predating Dennis the Menace by almost exactly 15 years, and the Scottish readership, recognising something of their own character in Wullie's crafty, mischievous but essentially good-hearted nature, turned the young scamp into an immediate and long-lasting hit. Yet Morris Heggie reveals that 'It was always said to me here that Dudley Watkins didn't think the strip would last that long – he didn't think there was that much mileage in Wullie.'

Not that we should hold this against the great Watkins, whose status as Thomson's premier artist was confirmed by the fact he was allowed the rare privilege of signing his artwork. Not only was Watkins a master of caricature, line, composition and storytelling, conjuring up an entire, densely populated world with just a few pen strokes, he was also phenomenally productive. His workload typically included Oor Wullie and The Broons for *The Sunday Post*, weekly instalments of Desperate Dan and Lord Snooty for the *Dandy* and *Beano* comics, as well as adventure serials, spot illustrations, and a large quantity of religiously inspired art. Moreover, as Heggie puts it, 'He never cut a corner. I suspect he didn't know how to. Our present Wullie artist Peter Davidson was, as a child, friendly with Dudley's son Roger. Roger could remember watching Dudley at work, and he reckons he was very, very quick.'

In 1969 Watkins died suddenly at his drawing board, aged just 63, but every subsequent Oor Wullie artist has stayed faithful to his vision.

“  
**Oor Wullie means a lot to many people. He was always rooted in reality**

In many ways, very little has changed in Oor Wullie's universe over the course of 75 years. He continues to hang round with pals Fat Boab, Wee Eck and Soapy Soutar, although now he also has a female confidante, Primrose, who sometimes takes him off for a spot of retail therapy or gives him disastrous new hairstyles. Wullie still 'suffers from boredom', in Heggie's phrase, and his carefree spirit often puts him at odds with authority figures, such as local bobby PC Murdoch. The strip has not lost its archaic expressions like 'Jings', 'Crivvens' and 'Help Ma Boab' and even though Wullie now owns an X-Box, he is never too far away from his beloved bucket. There are no fantasy elements to Oor Wullie, just the low key comedy of everyday life in all its moments of triumph and disappointment.

Andrew Martin, NLS Curator of Modern Scottish Collections, draws attention to this emphasis on the real in connection with Wullie's enduring success. As he puts it, 'Oor Wullie means a lot to many people. He was always rooted in reality. Looking at the first Oor Wullie annual, published in October 1940, he very much inhabits the real Scottish world. There's a lot of details of what people are eating (there's a bit of an obsession with food), and it's clearly set in the late 1930s. It seems to me quite an accurate depiction of that period, which is perhaps not what you would expect in a comic.'

The strip's seemingly unchanging style gives Oor Wullie a multi-generational appeal, something that Morris Heggie is very conscious of whenever he sits down to write a new strip. 'The audience for Oor Wullie isn't just kids, it's for kids my age too. You know that the newspaper strip might well be handed to a son or a grandson to have a look at, so the kids can read it, but you know that granddad can have a laugh too.' Or, to use the catchphrase still proudly emblazoned on the cover of the 2011 annual, 'Oor Wullie! Your Wullie! A'boday's Wullie!'

Richard Beatty at the Library



# Hunting meaning in the Library

**Richard Beatty**, Edinburgh-based researcher for the Oxford English Dictionary, values the breadth of resources available at the Library



**There's no printed publication so obscure that my OED colleagues and I wouldn't want to order it one day**

**W**hen I decided to return to my native Edinburgh in 2009, one of the gratifying aspects of the move was that I would still be near a copyright library. When one's involved in researching for the world's biggest dictionary, an institution the size of NLS isn't a luxury, it's an essential tool of the trade.

I've been lucky enough to work for the OED twice in my life: in the 1980s, as an Oxford-based scientific lexicographer, and again in recent years as a freelance library researcher, first at the British Library in London and now here at NLS. The research is needed because of the OED's unique use of historical evidence, with every single definition being accompanied by a selection of quotations culled from real sources, illustrating the development of that particular term.

These days all my work relates to this quotation evidence. Sometimes there's a request to seek out the history of a term, and then there may be the thrill (or the frustration) of the chase. A lot of the daily round involves verifying individual

quotations, or tracing them back to the earliest edition of the work in which each appears. My core duty to the OED is to be 100 per cent accurate in transcribing quotations. Of course the world's written records are increasingly available on the internet, but online sources vary in quality, so you still need real researchers at the Library.

I have happy memories of my years at the British Library, but NLS definitely has the edge over its larger cousin, in various respects. Books are delivered till much later in the day, the offsite store is nearer, readers can keep books on reserve for twice as long, and there seem to be fewer delivery errors. Not to mention specific holdings of rare Scottish material that aren't accessible anywhere else.

I like to think there's no printed publication so obscure that my OED colleagues and I wouldn't want to order it one day. Recently, for example, I needed to compare several out-of-date editions of a book about meat hygiene, and the Library held them all. That's what makes copyright libraries like NLS such great places!

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Information about the history of the OED, and the current major project to update it, is freely available at [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com). NLS also provides access to the full online subscription service for all readers.



## 2011 marks the centenary of the birth of Gaelic poet **Sorley MacLean**, just one of the many hundreds of thousands of people represented in the Library's collections



Poets' Pub by Alexander Moffat. A vision of major Scottish poets and writers of the 20th century, including Sorley MacLean



Poet Sorley MacLean, master of the Gaelic language

Regarded by many as the greatest Gaelic poet of the 20th century, Sorley MacLean was born in 1911 on the island of Raasay, off the coast of the Isle of Skye. He studied English at Edinburgh University and although his early poems were written in English, after composing 'An Corra-Ghrìdheach' ('The Heron') in Gaelic in 1931, he concluded it was 'better than any of my English stuff, and because of that – but also for patriotic reasons – I stopped writing verse in English'.

He returned to Skye in 1934, becoming an English teacher at Portree High School. Over the next few years, events personal (his mother's long illness and the decline of his father's business) and political (the Spanish Civil War, his own service in the Second World War and concern for the future of Gaelic language and culture) would shape his worldview.

He combined writing with a demanding career as teacher and headteacher. His best known long poem, 'Hallaig', is an intense meditation on the Highland Clearances. Passion about his heritage and the wider political world shines through all his work. His admirers tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to win him the Nobel Prize for Literature. The distinctions he did gain include the Queen's Gold Award for Poetry in 1990.

Sorley MacLean's personal and literary papers are held by NLS and include drafts of poems and letters from other Scottish writers and Gaelic scholars.

### DISCOVER MORE

<http://digital.nls.uk/50years/1998.html>  
[www.sorleymaclean.org](http://www.sorleymaclean.org)