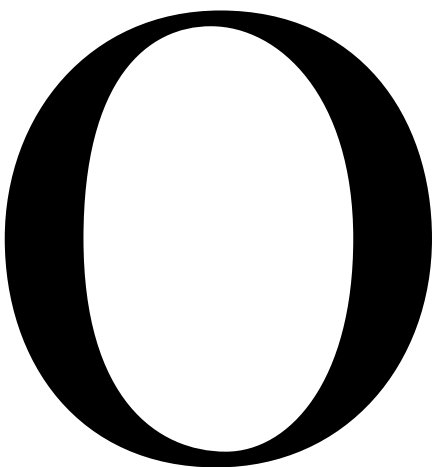


STRONG IN PRIDE AND FREE

1

Words: Colin Campbell, co-author of the EA Mackintosh biography *Can't shoot a man with a cold*



One hundred years ago, on 21 November 1917, the relatively little-known, but highly regarded, First World War poet, EA Mackintosh, was shot dead outside the village of Cantaing-sur-Escaut in

northern France. He was 24 years old.

Although he has never achieved their levels of fame, Mackintosh's work has been compared favourably to that of Wilfred Owen and Rupert Brooke. Notably, lines from his poem *A Creed* take pride of place on the Scottish-American War Memorial in Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh.

Below a long frieze of civilians, gradually being transformed into soldiers, is the couplet:

*If it be life that waits I shall live forever
unconquered,*

*If death I shall die at last, strong in my
pride and free.'*

Ewart Alan Mackintosh was born in Brighton in 1893, though his family's roots were in Inverness-shire.

Educated by governesses until he was 12, he then attended Brighton College, St. Paul's School, Kensington and Christ

Church, Oxford, where he studied Greek and Latin language and literature.

His father Alexander had links with Teaninich House, Alness, and Alan, as he was known, holidayed in Ross and Cromarty. His pre-war poems reveal that he had travelled to Mallaig and had seen the Summer Isles.

RARE ATTRIBUTES

Mackintosh made an impression at university. His tutor, John Murray of Christ Church, contributing to Mackintosh's posthumous anthology *War the Liberator* (The Bodley Head, 1918), wrote that "he learned to play the pipes and to speak Gaelic", which were rare attributes in pre-1914 Oxford. The nascent poet showed a keen interest in the Celtic Revival and wrote *The Remembered Gods*, a play set in the west Highlands.

During his time in Oxford, Mackintosh became friendly with Andrew Knowles Fraser who came from Leckmelm, on the shores of Loch Broom in Ross and Cromarty.

His pre-war poetry reflected an obsession with an unrequited and unnamed love, whom he had met in 1912. The war shook him out of his introspection. Though bad eyesight denied him an immediate commission, he persisted and became a second lieutenant in the 5th (Sutherland and Caithness) Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders. Mackintosh joined his company briefly at Bedford in January 1915 before being sent to Golspie to complete his training.

The onset of war saw his poetry become more outward-looking, and romance died in his verse as he experienced the harsh realities of the conflict.

In August 1915, Mackintosh joined the 5th Seaforths, part of the 51st (Highland) Division, on the Somme front. Living on the frontline close to the enemy he continued writing. He completed *Miserere* at La Boisselle, where the participants' first-line trenches were sometimes within grenade-throwing distance and where mining and counter-mining were endemic.

HIGHLAND KNOWLEDGE

Many of his poems reveal an intimate knowledge of Highland poems and airs. *Anns a' ghleann 'san robh mi òg, In the glen where I was young*, is a reflection on his childhood Highland holidays, seen from adulthood. MacCrimmon's Lament was his inspiration in '*Cha Till MacCruimein, Departure of the 4th Camerons*' (from Bedford). His repetition of "MacCrimmon comes no

more" in each verse presaged the fate of the battalion, which was so reduced by the end of 1915 that it was merged with the 1st Camerons.

The Undying Race recognised the linguistic and cultural bonds linking the men of the Highland Division with the Breton battalions relieved by the Scots on the Somme front in 1915:

'Breton and Gael stand side by side

Against the ancient foe.'
(*'The Saxon hordes'*)

Despite the horrors he and his comrades were experiencing, they found time to dwell on the lighter side of life. Behind the front line, entertainment was homespun. Even though there was a divisional concert party, the Balmorals, companies made their own entertainment. For his part, Mackintosh wrote parodies, which were performed in the chateau at Henancourt.

In time he was appointed bombing officer or hand-grenade expert, charged with leading patrols in No Man's Land. Among other ventures, he led a 50-man raid on the German trenches near Roclincourt, at the southern end of Vimy Ridge, which won him a Military Cross, but cost him four dead.

Using the Gaelic coronach or dirge style, Mackintosh wrote his best known poem, *In Memoriam. To Private David Sutherland, killed in the German Trench, 16th May 1916, and the others who died*. He is unique among recognised Great War poets as the only one to dedicate his poems to named individuals.

The late Richard Holmes, a First World War historian, described *In Memoriam* as "one of the most moving First World War poems".* The author Trevor Royle said, "of the Scots who wrote poetry based on their experience of the war, Charles Hamilton Sorley and Ewart Alan Mackintosh are perhaps the best known and remembered".**



3

ANTHOLOGY

Mackintosh was invalided home from the Battle of the Somme



2

1
Newly commissioned,
1st January 1915

2
Mackintosh, with
pipe, at Golspie.

3
Winter clothing,
Molliens-au-Bois,
near Amiens,
January 1916

in August 1916 and compiled his first anthology, *A Highland Regiment* (The Bodley Head, 1917). He was subsequently posted as a bombing instructor to No.2 Officer Cadet School at Cambridge University. In the early months of 1917 he fell in love with Elizabeth Sylvia Marsh, a Quaker, who was a Volunteer Aid Detachment nurse at Earls Colne, Essex. The couple made plans to marry and settle in New Zealand after the war. However, fate intervened.

The loss of many friends, guilt at his survival, now recognised as a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, permeated most of the poems Mackintosh wrote at Cambridge, where he contrasted his soft life with the hardships of his comrades in the trenches.

That guilt prompted him to volunteer once more. Leaving behind his secure job and Sylvia, he returned to France in September 1917. It may not have been a decision that was universally welcomed. In *To Sylvia*, a poem he wrote in France on 20 October 1917, the line 'but you'll forgive me yet, dear lass' suggests a less than happy parting.

Mackintosh was posted to the 4th (Ross-shire) Battalion of the Seaforth's, where he met up with his friend from Oxford, Andrew

NORTHERN CONNECTIONS

Mackintosh's connections to northern Scotland remained strong throughout his life. In 1912, he inscribed 'Verses to Two Children' on the flyleaf of Lear's *Nonsense Rhymes*. The children celebrated were Ivy and Edward Forsyth, who lived with their widowed mother in Brora. Ivy recalled Mackintosh visiting the town when he was stationed at Golspie in 1915. The inscribed volume was subsequently gifted to the National Library of Scotland.



Continues overleaf

From previous page>

Fraser - neither man would see the end of the war. Fraser was killed on the first day of the tank-led Battle of Cambrai on 20 November 1917. The following day, a company of 4th Seaforths was held up by enemy fire outside Cantaining-sur-Escaut. Alan Mackintosh raised his head to observe the enemy and was killed.

He is buried at Orival Wood Cemetery, Flesquieres and his words were chosen when the Scottish-American War Memorial was installed in Edinburgh in 1927.

*Richard Holmes. Page 578 Tommy. Harper Collins 2004

**Trevor Royle. Page 292 The Flowers of the Forest. Birlinn 2006

FROM THE COLLECTIONS



E A Mackintosh died at the Battle of Cambrai in 1917 so very little of his work was ever published. However, of the work that was, we hold the following in the Library archives...

A Highland regiment.
Published in 1917.

War, the liberator and other pieces.
Published in 1918.

Miserere: from A Highland regiment.
Published in 1919. Pictured above.

Can't shoot a man with a cold: Lt. E. Alan Mackintosh MC 1893-1917: poet of the Highland Division, by Colin Campbell and Rosalind Green.
Published in 2004.

IN MEMORIAM

Private D. Sutherland killed in action in the German trench, May 16, 1916, and the others who died

So you were David's father,
And he was your only son,
And the new-cut peats are rotting
And the work is left undone,
Because of an old man weeping,
Just an old man in pain,
For David, his son David,
That will not come again.

Oh, the letters he wrote you,
And I can see them still,
Not a word of the fighting,
But just the sheep on the hill
And how you should get the crops in
Ere the year get stormier,
And the Bosches have got his body,
And I was his officer.

You were only David's father,
But I had fifty sons
When we went up in the evening
Under the arch of the guns,
And we came back at twilight -
O God! I heard them call
To me for help and pity
That could not help at all.

Oh, never will I forget you,
My men that trusted me,
More my sons than your fathers',
For they could only see
The little helpless babies
And the young men in their pride.
They could not see you dying,
And hold you while you died.

Happy and young and gallant,
They saw their first-born go,
But not the strong limbs broken
And the beautiful men brought low,
The piteous writhing bodies,
The screamed 'Don't leave me, Sir',
For they were only your fathers
But I was your officer.

E. Alan Mackintosh
from *A Highland Regiment*
(John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1917)

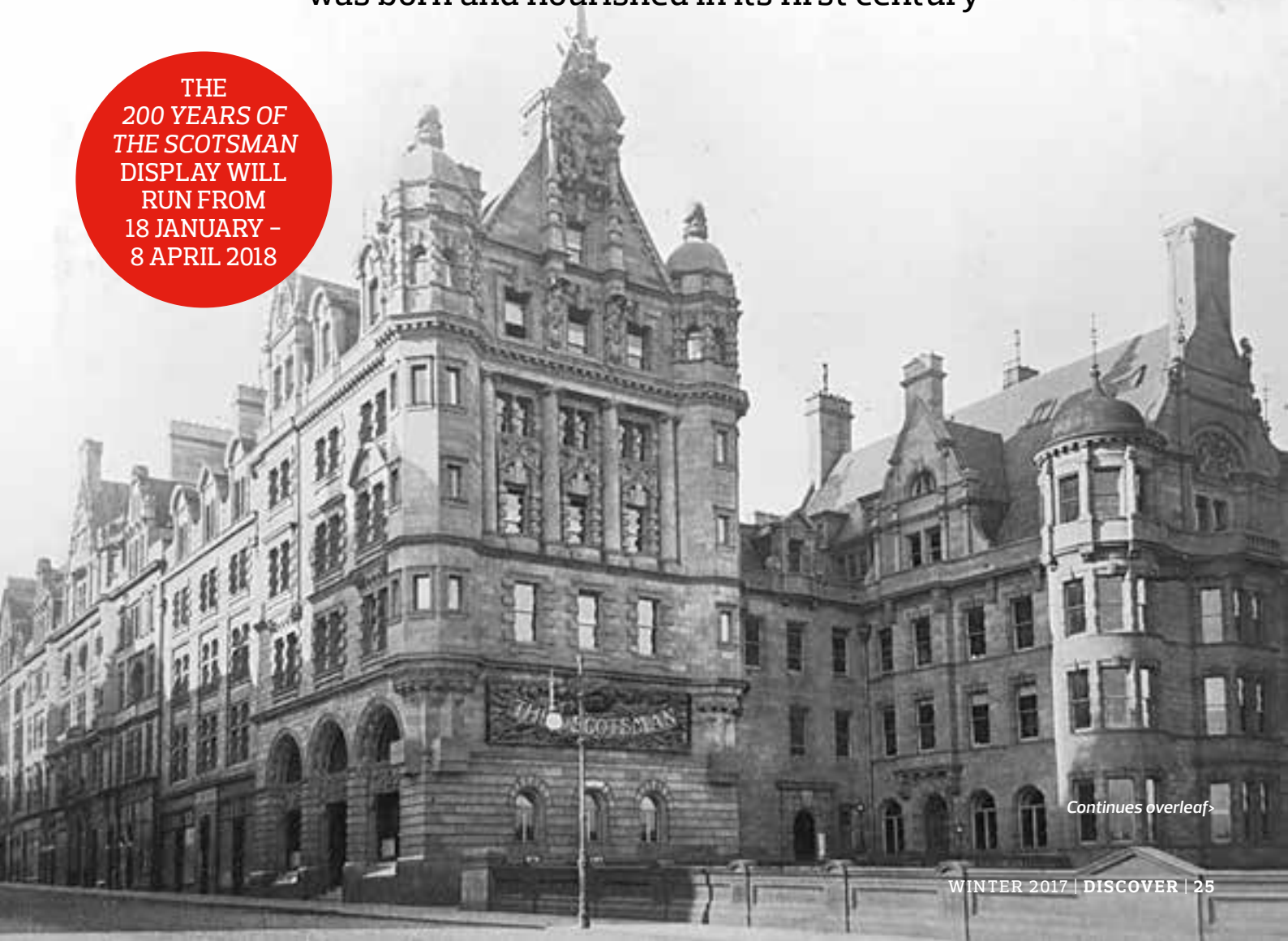
RIGHT: Private D. Sutherland



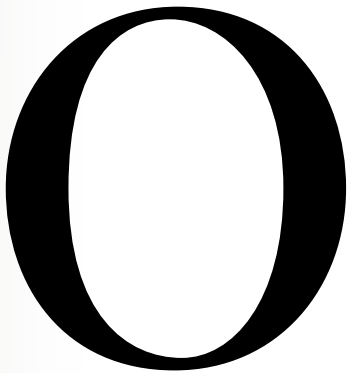
Built on pledge of free speech in the new age

As the *Scotsman* celebrates its 200th anniversary, Modern Collections curator Ian Scott looks at how the newspaper was born and flourished in its first century

THE
200 YEARS OF
THE SCOTSMAN
DISPLAY WILL
RUN FROM
18 JANUARY -
8 APRIL 2018



Continues overleaf >



On 25 January 2017 the *Scotsman* newspaper celebrated 200 years of existence. The National Library of Scotland has every issue of the *Scotsman* in its collections, starting in 1817. We also have numerous items relating to the newspaper, such as the programme for the 150th anniversary dinner held in 1967 and attended by Princess Alexandra; memoirs and histories written by editors and contributors; crossword collections from 1949 onwards, as well as a brief guide to the best places to have afternoon tea in Scotland as suggested by readers of the women's page in 1973.

In September 1917 the Advocates' Library, which was Scotland's national deposit library until 1925, received a fine leather-bound book *The centenary of "The Scotsman" 1817-1917* with the compliments of the proprietors of the newspaper. This book reprints in a more durable format the contents of the centenary number of the newspaper. We thought we would take a look back at how the *Scotsman* covered its first 100 years in this publication, and also reproduce a few of the many illustrations in the book.

The book covers the *Scotsman's* origins as a modest independent weekly in 1817, less than two years after the Battle of Waterloo, and details a century of change,



The imposing marble main staircase in the Scotsman's North Bridge building, which, when it opened in 1904, was a marvel of the age

growth and innovation for the newspaper and also for its place of publication in Edinburgh. The paper was founded by William Ritchie, a solicitor, and Charles Maclaren, a customs official, who were both frustrated at the lack of an outlet for reforming opinions in Edinburgh. Ritchie wanted to write a piece about his concerns over mismanagement in the building of the new Royal Infirmary but no one would print it. The answer was to launch the *Scotsman*, and the first issue appeared on Saturday 25 January 1817, fittingly also the birthday of another Scottish champion of free speech, Robert Burns. The first masthead featured the thistle as an emblem, a symbol of Scottish pride that still adorns the paper today.

That first weekly issue had eight pages and was priced at 10 pence, four pence of which went to the



The centenary of "The Scotsman" 1817-1917

The proprietors published a special leather-bound book chronicling the newspaper's first 100 years

Government as stamp duty. The price was fixed high "from a belief that its opinions would prevent it receiving many advertisements and it must therefore be made to pay by its circulation". The only advertisements in the first issue were for the second edition of Sir Walter Scott's *Tales of My Landlord* series of novels, then still published under a pseudonym, and a new edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The initial circulation was only about 300 copies but this quickly grew and a Wednesday edition was launched. The leader for the first issue was written by Maclaren and entitled "A survey of the workings of the spirit of liberty abroad, from the era of Rousseau and the revolt of the American colonies," demonstrating the new paper's liberal outlook. Among the causes it would champion in its early decades were Catholic

emancipation, free trade and parliamentary reform. The abolition of stamp duty on newspapers and newspaper advertising in 1855 meant the now daily paper could be sold for a penny. The front pages were now filled with classified advertising and circulation rose to 6,000 copies rising to 17,000 in 1865.

The *Scotsman* was born into a quite different Edinburgh. The initial issues were produced by the printing presses of Abernethy & Walker, Old Bank Close, just off the Lawnmarket section of the High Street. The High Street, then the Fleet Street of Edinburgh, was a more oppressive place in the early 19th century. George IV Bridge, Cockburn Street and St Giles Street had yet to be built and the only exits for most of the length of the street were via narrow wynds and closes. The paper's original office was at 347 High Street. In 1826 it moved to 257 High Street, now the site of Edinburgh City Chambers, and then in 1862 to purpose-built premises just round the corner at 30 Cockburn Street. A journalism-themed café, the Edinburgh Press Club, now occupies the ground floor of the building which still carries the *Scotsman* masthead on its façade. These were state-of-the-art premises, the equal of any newspaper offices in Britain. The *Scotsman* continued to grow.

In 1860 the *Weekly Scotsman* was launched to great success both in Scotland and with expat Scots in London and abroad, and it was followed in 1886 with publication of the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*. The need for new premises was pressing and when it was decided to widen the nearby North Bridge, the paper seized the opportunity to buy a prestigious site on the resulting wide thoroughfare. This part of Edinburgh was home to meat markets, inns, oyster shops, clubs and coffee houses and these were cleared away for building to start in 1899.

The new building designed by Dunn & Findlay was opened in 1904 at a cost of £500,000 which, adjusted for inflation, would be around £55 million today. Visible from much of Edinburgh it was a marvel of the age, probably the largest-ever private investment in the city to that date and a grand statement of purpose and intent. The *Scotsman* now probably had the most magnificent premises of any newspaper in the world. The upper floors, where management had their offices, were adorned with marbled pillars, walnut panelling and chandeliers and looked like a cross between a luxury hotel and a cruise liner. Further down the building, things became plainer and noisier in the



ABOVE:
From 1864 to 1904, the *Scotsman* was based in its first purpose-built premises in Cockburn Street

working spaces of journalists and printers. There were the most modern printing presses and a foundry where the printing plates were cast, all powered by electricity and linked by wire services to the wider world. The finished paper was sent out from Market Street by fleets of vehicles and transported the short distance to Waverley Station for distribution through the train network.

The success of the *Scotsman* was achieved through quality journalism and endless innovation in production and distribution. In 1868 it was the first newspaper based outside London to open an office in Fleet Street. In March 1872 it started to run a special train to Glasgow.

This was a non-stop express where the papers would be sorted on board, with bundles being thrown out at stations along the way, ensuring it would be with readers by breakfast time. In 1898, an additional newspaper express began to run to Hawick. In a century the *Scotsman* had gone from an eight-page weekly to one of the world's outstanding newspapers while retaining the liberal, independent outlook of its founders Maclaren and Ritchie.



Part of the North Bridge press room, renowned for innovative production processes

POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS



THERE'S BEEN A MURDER... AND ANOTHER...AND ANOTHER...

The Tartan Noir literary genre, however, is alive and well. The winner of the 2017 McIlvanney Prize provides irresistible evidence

Words: Stewart McRobert

The Library usually shies away from promoting crime and murder, but recently it made an exception.

In September, it sponsored the award of the prestigious McIlvanney Prize for Scotland's crime book of the year. The recipient, announced at the Bloody Scotland crime writing festival, was *The Long Drop* written by Denise Mina.

The increasing popularity of Bloody Scotland – this year's opening ceremony was a sell-out – is a sign that the literary genre Tartan Noir is in great health. Tartan Noir has been described as "a form of crime fiction peculiar to Scotland or Scottish writers" and the award commemorates author William McIlvanney (1936 - 2015) who holds an important place in its story.

His first crime novel, *Laidlaw*, published

exactly 40 years ago, has been described as the original Tartan Noir publication. In its creation McIlvanney developed a style that followed the lead of American writers such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler; a flawed protagonist is involved in a story where there's a focus on darkness and nuance.

The author published two other crime novels – *The Papers of Tony Veitch*, and *Strange Loyalties* – and in doing

CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS



© Paul Reich

so inspired a plethora of other Scottish writers. These included Ian Rankin whose own renowned character, the detective John Rebus, made his first appearance in the novel *Knots and Crosses* 30 years ago.

INSUBORDINATION

Rebus shares Laidlaw's insubordination and readiness to battle the system. It has been argued that disrespect for authority is a part of the nation's identity and a distinctive aspect of Tartan Noir. Certainly, it is a trait common to main characters in the genre.

It seems that crime sparks Scottish writers' imagination more than any other topic. As well as Rankin and Mina, those operating in the sphere include Christopher Brookmyre, Val McDermid, Stuart MacBride, Quintin Jardine, Peter May, Craig Russell, Louise Welsh and many, many more.

To mark its sponsorship of the Bloody Scotland Festival, the Library created a display in its George IV Bridge site in Edinburgh. This featured William McIlvanney's works, several important Tartan Noir novels and the history of Scottish crime fiction, including the original serialisation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Development Officer Non Jones said: "This was the first time the Library

● To mark its sponsorship of the Bloody Scotland Festival, the Library created a display in its George IV Bridge site in Edinburgh ●

has sponsored the Bloody Scotland Festival. It is part of our effort to support literary activity in Scotland, and our

determination to champion literature across all genres."

Meantime, in awarding this year's prize to Mina, chair of the judges Lee Randall, said: "*The Long Drop* transports us back to dark, grimy Glasgow, telling the social history of a particular strata of society via the grubby, smokey pubs favoured by crooks and chancers.

"Full of astute psychological observations, this novel's not only about what happened in the 1950s, but about storytelling itself. It shows how legends grow wings, and how memories shape-shift and mark us.

"For my money this is one of the books of 2017 – in any genre."

Denise Mina's McIlvanney Prize-winning novel, *The Long Drop*, has been described as "one of the books of 2017 – in any genre"



CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS
POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

Great Library resources...

Based in two cities and with a collection of more than 26 million printed items, two million maps, 32,000 films, three miles of manuscripts, and thousands of photographs, getting around the Library's sites requires a little navigation

LIBRARY LOCATIONS

FILM AND DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

Kelvin Hall
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Glasgow G3 8AW

Tel: 0845 366 4600

E: kelvinhall@nls.uk
Mon-Fri 9am-5pm

OTHER COLLECTIONS

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

MAPS

Causewayside Building
159 Causewayside
Edinburgh EH9 1PH
Tel: 0131 623 4660

E: maps@nls.uk

Due to building works the public entrance will be moved, please follow signs.

HOW TO JOIN

To use the Library's Edinburgh reading rooms and order items from the collections, you need to hold a Library card. This can be obtained by completing the online form at <https://auth.nls.uk/registration>

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. You will need proof of identity and confirmation of your address. Examples of acceptable ID and address

confirmation are at www.nls.uk/using-the-library/library-cards/evidence-of-identity

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. Requests can be made in person, by telephone on 0131 623 3820 or 3821, or by email to enquiries@nls.uk. If you have a Library card, books can be ordered in advance via the online catalogue on our website. For information about pre-ordering, see www.nls.uk/using-the-library/reading-rooms/general/preorders

ONLINE

The Library has a vast range of electronic resources, including digital versions of reference works, massive full-text facsimiles and business databases. Many of these resources are available on the internet to users resident in Scotland, although additional conditions may apply in line with our licence agreements.

Your first port of call to access the Library's



licensed digital collections is <https://auth.nls.uk/ldc>

Additionally, recent legislation has given the Library and the other five legal-deposit libraries in the UK the legal right to collect, store and preserve the nation's memory in the digital age. There is a mixture of electronic content available, including websites in the UK domain web archive, and articles/chapters from e-books and e-journals. This material can be viewed on Library computers within the reading rooms if you are a registered user.

VISITOR CENTRE

The Visitor Centre at the George IV Bridge building in Edinburgh has an exhibition space, a shop selling books, stationery and gifts, a café and PCs with access to Library catalogues and other digital facilities.



IN FOCUS

Discover your history

The Library has an impressive range of genealogical resources if you want to research your family history.

The best way to start your research is to work backwards from what you already know. Collecting family memorabilia such as birth, death and marriage certificates, diaries, newspaper cuttings, letters and photographs can also provide you with further information.

Also, remember to write down any information that you find and where you found it. Be methodical and follow every clue. This will enable you to create a fuller picture of your family and its history.

 To get started, visit www.nls.uk/family-history





Students can now explore exam papers dating back to 1889

Past marks in examinations

Extensive collection of old Scottish test papers an education in itself

Exam papers that terrified Scots schoolchildren down the decades are now available on the Library's website.

You can test your knowledge on everything from higher dynamics and navigations skills to practical tests in needlework and laundry work!

The papers now available are for the School Leaving Certificate 1889–1895; 1909–1961 and the Scottish Certificate of Education 1962–63.

The very earliest papers, 1889–1895, are extremely interesting as they include reports by Professor J Eggeling and Mr Henry Craik. These reports list names of schools taking the certificate, as well as some

basic statistics on how many candidates sat the exams, number of papers taken and passes gained.

Henry Craik played a dominant part in the moulding of education policy in Scotland, most notably the development of secondary education.

He introduced, in 1886, a regular system of inspections of secondary schools by HM Inspectors and followed this with the introduction of the Leaving Certification examination.

The choice of subjects that you could study in the very early papers were firmly focused on languages – English, Latin, Greek, French, German, Spanish and Gaelic as well as Mathematics,

Bookkeeping and Commercial Arithmetic.

1961 saw the introduction of the Scottish Certificate of Education for Ordinary Grade (O-Grade) and Higher Grade (Higher) which became the basic entry qualifications for university study.

The next step for the Library is to share this digital content with University College London (UCL) as part of a much larger partnership project. UCL is particularly interested in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects as they are developing a database which will allow integration and comparisons to be made of both the English

and Scottish papers for further research in this area.

The Library's Skills for the Future trainees are digitising the remaining exam papers collection, up to 2006.

**MORE
INFORMATION**

To view the exam papers, visit <https://digital.nls.uk/scottish-school-certificate-papers-1889-1963/>

P.B.F.A.

BOOK FAIRS

IN SCOTLAND 2017/2018

DECEMBER '17

Sat 2
EDINBURGH
Radisson Blu Hotel, 80 High Street, Royal Mile, Edinburgh EH1 1TH
10am-5pm. £1

MARCH '18

Fri 23 and Sat 24
EDINBURGH
Radisson Blu Hotel, 80 High Street, Royal Mile, Edinburgh EH1 1TH
Fri 12noon-7pm, Sat 10am-5pm. Free

MAY '18

Sat 26
SCOTTISH BORDERS
The Corn Exchange, Market Square, Melrose TD6 9PM
10am-4.30pm. £1

JUNE '18

Sat 16
EDINBURGH
Radisson Blu Hotel, 80 High Street, Royal Mile, Edinburgh EH1 1TH
10.30am-5pm. £1

AUGUST '18

Sat 4
GLAMIS
Bridge View House, Glamis, Forfar DD8 1QU
10am-5pm. £1

Sun 5

BALLATER
Victoria Hall, Station Square, Ballater AB35 5QB
10am-5pm. £1

SEPTEMBER '18

Thurs 6, Fri 7 and Sat 8
SKYE
Aros Cultural Centre, Viewfield Road, Portree IV51 9EU
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For more information on P.B.F.A. bookfairs, please visit the website or contact us using the details below.



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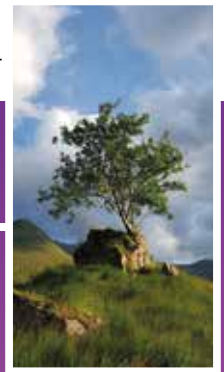
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Photograph: David Vallis Photography



A Kist o Skinklan Things

AN ANTHOLOGY OF SCOTS
POETRY FROM THE FIRST
AND SECOND WAVES
OF THE SCOTTISH
RENAISSANCE

Compiled and annotated by
J. Derrick McClure

ISBN 978-1-906841-29-4 MAY 2017
256 PAGES HARDBACK £14.95

The twentieth-century Scottish Renaissance saw a sudden and dramatic change in Scotland's literary landscape. Beginning in the 1920s, Scottish writers increasingly engaged with contemporary social and political issues, and with questions of national identity. An integral part of this development was the radically new literary status accorded to the Scots language.

MacDiarmid's immediate predecessors had introduced modern themes and linguistic experimentation to Scots poetry; and though MacDiarmid is the unquestioned central figure in the great poetic revival, he rode a rising tide. He and the poets who paved the way for him represent the first wave of the Scottish Renaissance. The second wave contains the extraordinary company of poets who wrote under his direct inspiration. *A Kist o Skinklan Things* contains a selection of the best work from this great period.



Published by the Association for Scottish Literary Studies
www.asls.org.uk



The National Library's resources were pivotal in Laura Cumming's research for her book about a Velázquez painting

Art, passion and home

Laura Cumming, art critic at the *Observer*, was awarded the James Tait Black Biography Prize in 2017 for her publication *The Vanishing Man: In Pursuit of Velázquez*. It includes the fascinating story of John Snare, a bookseller and passionate lover of Velázquez's art. Edinburgh-born Laura's uncovering of this tale is a compelling piece of detective work in itself...and the Library plays a starring role

The National Library has long played a very important part in my life. I grew up in Edinburgh initially going to Leith Library every week throughout my childhood.

When I began to study for O-Grade and Higher exams someone told me about a very beautiful place where even someone my age could go to sit and read among scholars. I duly applied for a day pass at the National Library and went along, feeling a little intimidated.

When I entered, I remember thinking: "This is wonderful." There was low lighting, huge desks, a peaceful environment, and

● **The Library made you feel elevated, as if you were joining a band of very intellectual people** ●

LAURA CUMMING

an atmosphere of intense scholarship. From then on I regularly took the No 23 bus up to George IV Bridge.

The Library made you feel elevated, as if you were joining a band of very intellectual people. As a school student, that evoked a strong feeling of excitement.

I went to university in England but, returning home during the holidays, I continued to visit the Library... and years later it was pivotal when undertaking research for my book on Velázquez.

I had come across a bookseller from Reading named John Snare, an obscure figure who loved art and had acquired a painting of Charles I that he thought might be a Velázquez. It was an intriguing story and I was astonished that it was relatively unknown.

Trying to find out more, I came across a reference online to a trial that took place in Edinburgh. I was very excited – not only was this my home city, but it indicated that Snare's Velázquez had been on show there.

Furthermore, on the Library's website

I found a handbill for the show in Princes Street where the painting had featured. I applied online and Library staff sent me a copy of the original document which, like a piece of Victorian junk mail, had been stuffed through New Town letter boxes.

Following the story up, four years ago I visited Edinburgh and made my way to the Library. To my joy among the papers was a faithful and beautifully recorded transcript of a High Court action taken in 1851 by the trustees of the estate of the Earl of Fife against John Snare. The trustees maintained that the painting had been stolen from the Earl's collection. Though Snare subsequently won the case, the protracted trial brought him to financial ruin.

The Library's papers were a treasure trove and the story of John Snare turned out to be the lynchpin of my book.

The fact that the trial took place in Edinburgh, revolved around a painter who mattered so much to me, and I found the details in a place that also meant a great deal was moving, poignant and exhilarating all at once.

I'll be coming home again soon. I'm currently writing a memoir of my mother's family. Of course, my father – Scottish painter James Cumming – will appear in the book and I plan to come to Edinburgh to carry out further research in the Library.

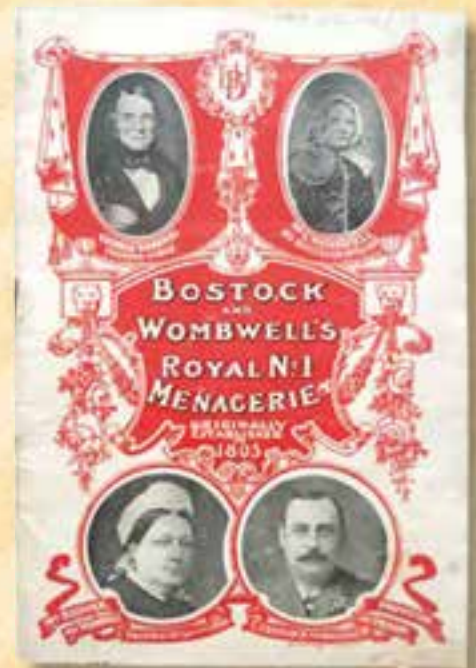
I have to say, though I've visited and worked in many libraries, there's no doubt that the National Library in George IV Bridge is the most elegant and serene.

The Vanishing Man: In Pursuit of Velázquez by Laura Cumming is published by Chatto & Windus



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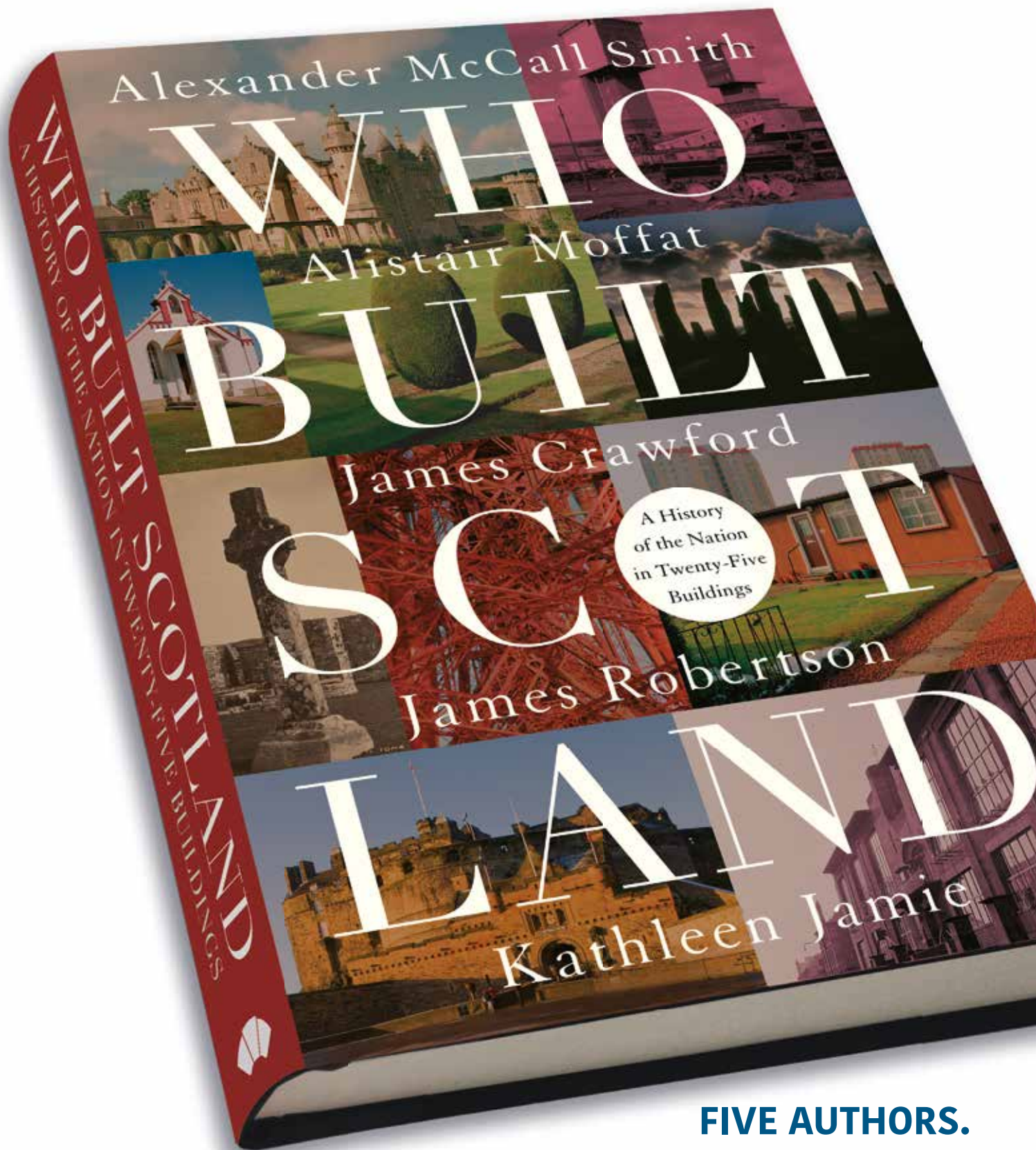


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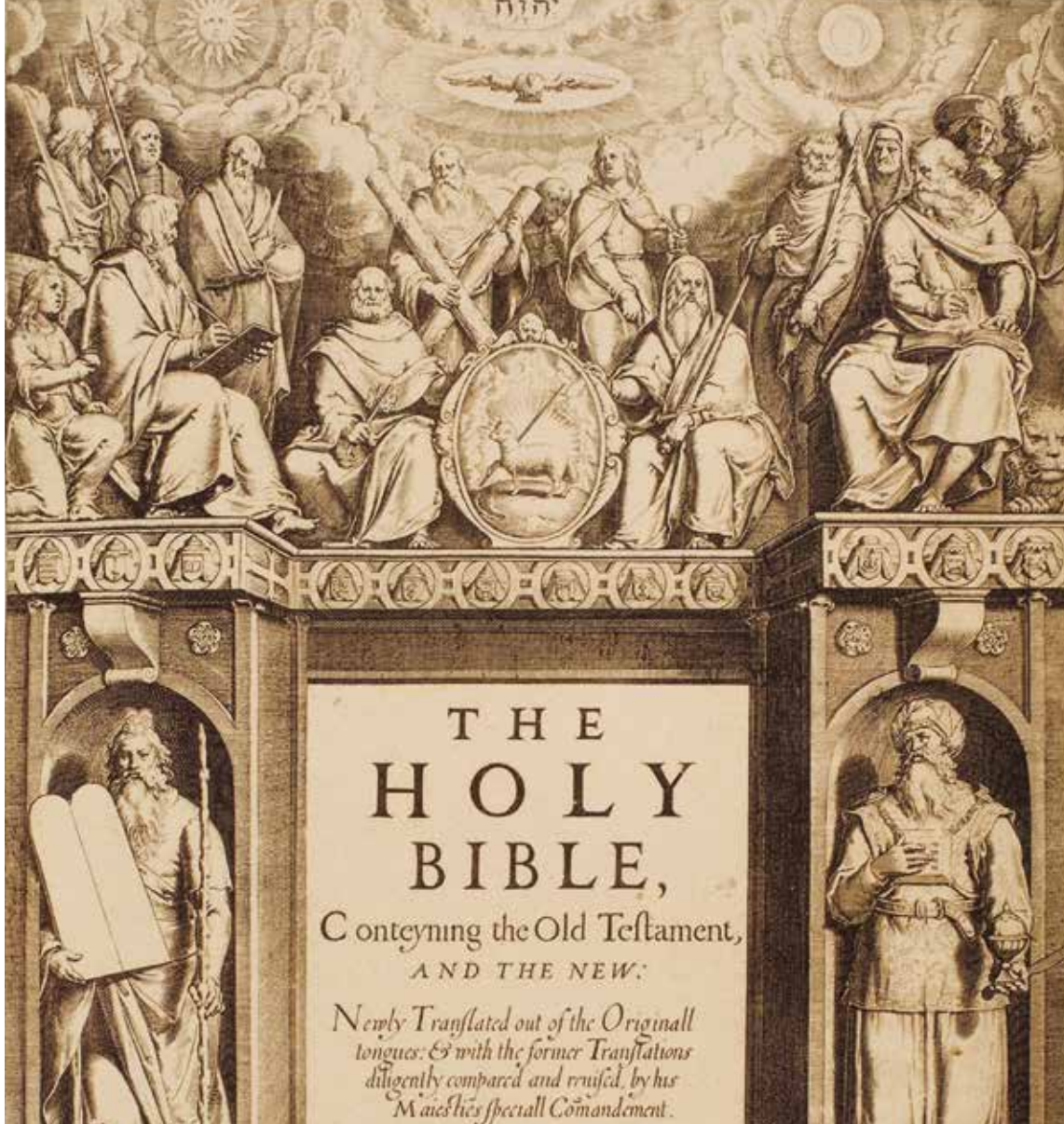
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