

SCOTTISH POETRY LIBRARY
By leaves we live

GIFTED

The Edinburgh
Book Sculptures

WHERE TO
FIND THE
EDINBURGH
BOOK
SCULPTURES

In 2011 ten exquisite sculptures made from books mysteriously appeared at libraries and cultural institutions across Edinburgh. The first and last were found at the Scottish Poetry Library, and also a final gift at the end of 2012. The sculptures came with a message: 'in support of books, libraries, words, ideas'. To this day, no one knows how they arrived, and the identity of the sculptor remains anonymous, but the story has travelled all over the world. Here is a guide to locating each of the sculptures across the city: you can walk between each, but allow a couple of hours in total.

In making sculptures from books I saw a pale shadow of the wonder that is reading, where black marks can become scientific theories, romantic poems... gruesome stories. This raises the question 'does a book on being read remain a book?' And so I chose to transform the books into other things...

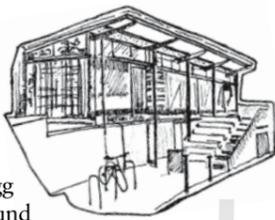
—the anonymous artist

1 Poetree

Scottish Poetry Library, gifted March 2011

www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk @byleaveswelive

It was early spring in Edinburgh when this tiny tree made of book pages appeared on a table in the Scottish Poetry Library. The egg shell beside it is painted in gold leaf, and minute birds can be found in the tree. A string of miniature bunting, made of lines from Edwin Morgan's poem 'A Trace of Wings' for the poet Basil Bunting, threads a special kind of birdsong into the story. No one knew how it had arrived—or exactly when. There was only the gift tag, which reads 'It started with your name @byleaveswelive and became a tree... ..we know that a library is so much more than a building full of books... a book is so much more than pages full of words... This is for you in support of books, libraries, words, ideas...' The anonymous giver was obviously on Twitter, and familiar with the Poetry Library, home to Edwin Morgan's archive. Beyond that, it smelled distinctly like the beginning of a good old-fashioned mystery.



2 Coffin and gramophone

National Library of Scotland, gifted June 2011

www.nls.uk @natlibscot

Three months later, this two-part sculpture appeared in the National Library, at a time when library cuts were the subject of heated public debate across the UK. The tag, which reads '...& against their exit' weighs in on the discussion. A pair of visual puns, the gramophone is constructed from Ian Rankin's *Exit Music* (2007), last of the Detective Rebus novels, while the casket is made from a nineteenth-century edition of *The Casquet of Literature*. The sculpture seems to respond physically to the 'sound' from the gramophone, its pages blown back. Every detail counts—look closely into the horn and you'll be able to make out the words 'towards dark'; is this a reference to the direction the coffin is headed, or perhaps the music and words are what keeps darkness at bay?



3 Cinema

Edinburgh Filmhouse, gifted June 2011

www.filmhousecinema.com @Filmhouse

The theatre comes alive in this sculpture, gifted to the Filmhouse, home to the Edinburgh International Film Festival since 1979. This time it was a member of the public who discovered and handed in the work, surreptitiously left by the artist. The 'magic' of its arrival is echoed in Francis Ford Coppola's quote, characterising early filmmakers as 'magicians', and in the work's allusions to cinematic transformation, from seventeenth-century 'magic lantern' projection technology to contemporary 3D films. Books, including Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862), are foundational here—both literally, and as conceptual platforms from which screen adaptations and live performance often spring. Look closely and you'll be able to spot Ian Rankin in the audience—a tiny bottle of his favourite Deuchars ale in hand.



4 Dragon's nest

Scottish Storytelling Centre, gifted July 2011

www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk @scotstorycentre

This freshly hatched dragon may have slipped into the Scottish Storytelling Centre through a chink in time, straight from a medieval tale of knights and princesses. A youthful dragon, he seems a benign creature so far, and was found nestled on a window ledge with pigeons nesting just outside. There's a link back to Edwin Morgan's translation of the dragon-laden Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, and to the SSC's work with storytellers in the oral tradition. The tag reads: 'Once upon a time there was a book and in the book was a nest and in the nest was an egg and in the egg was a dragon and in the dragon was a story...' The book is Rankin's, *Knots & Crosses* (1987), which contains the lines: 'And in Edinburgh of all places. I mean, you never think of that sort of thing happening in Edinburgh, do you...?'

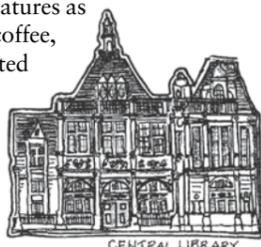
5 Tea, cake and a book

Edinburgh International Book Festival, gifted August 2011

www.edbookfest.co.uk @edbookfest

(This sculpture can be found at the Edinburgh Central Library)

One of two sculptures found on the same day, the poised tea cup and cake on its tea-stained tray appeared on a signing table during the Edinburgh International Book Festival. The event is the largest of its kind; since 1985 it has been bringing together readers and writers (and tea drinkers and cake eaters) from all over the world. The tea bag's tag reads 'by leaves we live', a quote from Patrick Geddes, Scottish town planner, ecologist and educator, which features as the Scottish Poetry Library's strapline. Advocating for festivals, tea, coffee, cake and good books, the work immediately won the hearts of its excited audience, and by the afternoon photos of the new arrival were online, the news flying between booklovers around the world.



6 Lost in a good book...

Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust, gifted August 2011

www.cityofliterature.com @EdinCityofLit

(This sculpture can be found at the Edinburgh Central Library)

Knees clasped and eyes closed, a raven at her shoulder, the girl in the sculpture is physically immersed in the world of the book. It's a dense forest of imagination, constructed from James Hogg's gothic psychological thriller, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Since 2004, part of Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust's work has been making access to books and the pleasures of reading—guilty or justified—open to everyone, through education and visibility campaigns. The tag's quote is from Welsh social reformer Robert Owen, and aligns with UNESCO's broader programme of aid and education for children: 'No infant has the power of deciding... by what circumstances [they] shall be surrounded'; the child's imagination and wellbeing need protecting.

7 Magnifying glass

Edinburgh Central Library, gifted August 2011

www.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/5079/central_library @talesofonecity

This magnifying glass and vivid blue book sat undetected for some time before it was discovered on a shelf at the Central Library. The work borrows the detective's signature instrument, zooming in on a quote from the last poem in Edwin Morgan's *Collected Poems* (1990). 'Seven Decades' looks back across the poet's life, declaring an undying curiosity for what is ahead: 'I want it bright / I want to catch whatever is there / in full sight.' The inquisitive mind, and elation in discovery are themes which run throughout the sculptures. 'Libraries are expANSive' reads the tag. For over 120 years the Central Library has been open to the public, a place dedicated to the mind's widest horizons, to intrigue and learning.

8 Cap and gloves

Scottish Poetry Library, gifted November 2011

www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk @byleaveswelive

23 November: a note was noticed in the Library's guestbook, directing the staff to the women's anthologies section... and there was another sculpture, which seemed to have landed as softly and silently as only something winged—or 'gloves of bee's fur, cap of the wren's wings'—might. The piece is based on Norman MacCaig's poem 'Gifts', from which these lines come. Look closely: a fairy-scale bee has alighted on one of the gloves. 'It feels as soft as it looks', one of the very few people to touch the delicate sculpture tells us. The lining of the cap is likely to be from Jules Verne's *In Search of the Castaways* (1867–1868). 10/10 reads the tag, in the style of a printmaker's notation—but this was only the eighth work to be found—were there still two 'castaways' to be discovered?

9 Dinosaur

National Museum of Scotland, gifted November 2011

www.nms.ac.uk @NimMuseumsScot

The Tyrannosaurus Rex was found the next day by a Museum guide, beneath the skeleton of a stag. The Museum was at that time celebrating its millionth visitor since reopening in July 2011; here was another guest—diminutive, furiously blood-thirsty, ancient—unannounced. The dinosaur erupts from the covers of *The Lost World* (1912), leaving ragged pages and tiny helmeted men rebounding in his wake. *The Lost World* is thought to be the inspiration for the 1993 film *Jurassic Park*, and closer to home, was the City of Literature's citywide read in 2009, while the book's Edinburgh-born author, Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, brings yet another detective into the picture. The sculpture has since been accessioned into the Museum library's collection, a book for the intrepid reader.



10 Street scene

Edinburgh Writers' Museum, gifted November 2011

www.edinburghmuseums.org.uk/Venues/The-Writers--Museum @CuratorEMG

All clues pointed to the Edinburgh Writers' Museum, which celebrates the lives of three Scottish literary greats, Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson, as the location of the final sculpture. It was found sitting on top of the donations box in the R. L. Stevenson room, aptly crafted from a copy of Ian Rankin's *Hide & Seek* (1991). Rankin's fascination with Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) is evident in the book, from which the line 'The stories are in the stones' is taken. The work is a gothic Victorian street scene straight from Edinburgh's Old Town, complete with crows, lamplight and long shadows, and above it all, a paper moon.



11 A child's garden

Scottish Poetry Library, gifted November 2012

www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk @byleaveswelive

A whole year after the last discovery, a fine looking cardboard box arrived at the Scottish Poetry Library. NOT TO BE OPENED UNTIL 7 DECEMBER read the hand-lettering on its lid. For a week it was as if time stood still, before the opening revealed a sculpture made from Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885). A small girl sits reading, wearing a paper crown and Mary Janes, and with flowers in her hair. On her page is a line from Stevenson's poem 'To Willie and Henrietta': 'And all the thousand things that children are', while among the tree's leaves, running down its trunk and onto the girl's crown are the two preceding lines from that verse. Like the *Poetree*, in this work a cotton thread of bunting includes the final lines from the poem: 'But time which none can bind, / While flowing fast away, leaves love behind.' 'For the love of books', reads the accompanying tag, 'every ending marks a new beginning...'

A large print version of this text is available for download from the SPL website:

www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk

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