

SPL Director's Report AGM 2023

During the financial year to March 2023, the poetry library received core funding support from Creative Scotland and City of Edinburgh Council, and a much-needed award from the Covid Recovery Fund. We were also grateful for the support of Bòrd na Gàidhlig to recruit a part-time Gaelic schools poetry co-ordinator,

Engaging equalities communities to widen access and participation remained a strategic priority. We partnered with Capability Scotland on a showcase event in Edinburgh in May 2022 to present the work and impact of sensory poetry activity delivered by storyteller Daniel Serridge and poet Leyla Josephine at Stanmore House School in Lanark. MSPs, funders, strategic partners and Capability Scotland's service users attended the event.

We commissioned poet Victoria McNulty to design and run creative workshops in communities that experience multiple deprivation. We also commissioned poet Julie McNeil to produce poetry learning resources designed for young people with Dyslexia. The project advisory group included Cathy Magee, Chief Executive of Dyslexia Scotland.

We commissioned a Scottish Gaelic and British Sign Language film-poem, *Bogaidh*, with artist Evie Waddell. The film-poem presented Evie's reflection and protest at the generational impact of Climate Change.

We paired five young people from across Scotland with poet mentors Michael Pedersen, Tom Murray, Janette Ayachi, Aoife Lyall and Niall O'Gallagher. The pairings participated in three online and in-person meetings. Their work was showcased in person at the Dandelion festival in Inverness in September 2022, and online at the StAnza festival in St Andrews in March 2023. The first cohort of mentees were Elissa Hunter-Dorans, Lydia McMillan, Rhys Pearce, Mattea Gernentz and Caitlin Sherret.

We were successful in a partnership bid to Inspiring Scotland with the Universities of Edinburgh and Stirling for the development of a poetry toolkit and film resources for social workers. The sharing of poetry helped with self-reflection, self-care and rejuvenation for adult social work and social care staff. Poetry workshops were facilitated by John Glenday and Marjorie Lotfi.

We partnered with the Edinburgh Fringe Society and the Scottish Government to produce a celebration of Scottish culture at Scotland House in London in May 2022. The invited guests included producers and organisations linked to the Fringe, which celebrated its 75th year.

We worked with film-poem pioneer Alastair Cook to digitally archive 60 works from his collection. This included a selection of Alastair's top-10 works. In July 2022, Cook curated a showcase film-poem event at the library with poets John Glenday and Vicki Feaver.

The fourth edition of *Tools of the Trade: Poems for New Doctors* was published in May 2022, and distributed to medical colleges across Scotland for gifting to graduating students.

With the support of the Scottish Government office in Dublin, we managed a schools' exchange project with pupils from Leith Academy in Edinburgh and Trinity School in Ballymun in Dublin, Ireland. Creative writing and performance workshops were facilitated by poets Kevin Gilday and cat Hepburn. The pupils from both schools presented their individual and collaborative work at a special Burns Night event in Dublin in January 2023.

We supported the participation of poet Iona Lee at the Tranpoesie festival in Brussels in September 2022. The Director chaired an activity with Iona and poets from Wales and Northern Ireland.

Our international focus on Ireland also saw the SPL co-curate the programme of Scottish writers for Museum of Literature Ireland's *Literary Cities* season. Participating poets included Donald S Murray, Leyla Josephine, Victoria McNulty and Kathleen Jamie. We also hosted Irish writer Liz Houchen for a residency in March 2023. The residency was sponsored by Arts Council Ireland and Poetry Ireland. Liz delivered poetry workshops for Royal Mile Primary School.

We continued to provide administrative and marketing support to the national Makar. Kathleen Jamie's second year in the role involved readings at StAnza and the Soutar Festival in Perth. Her poem, *Lochnagar*, commemorating the life of Queen Elizabeth II was broadcast by BBC News. Kathleen also recorded poems for our Scots language school lesson plans.

In August 2022, we hosted a Momentum delegation of festival directors and publishers from countries including Poland, Kenya, Somalia, Bahrain, Malaysia and Ghana. The programme included readings by poets Aoife Lyall, Jim Carruth and Cynthia Miller. Momentum is sponsored by the British Council and Creative Scotland.

Producer Douglas Eadie granted the SPL the right to share his documentary, *Fishing for Poetry* with Billy Connolly, Andrew Greig and Aly Bain. The film follows the three artists on a trek to Norman MacCaig's Loch of the Green Corrie. *Fishing for Poetry* received over 6,500 views on the SPL's Youtube channel between June 2022 and September 2023.

Our events programme included readings by Martin MacIntyre, Ceitidh Campbell, Rody Gorman, Babs MacGregor, Morag Anderson, Janette Ayachi, Susi Briggs, Imogen Stirling, Tom Murray, Martin Malone, Sheila Blackhall, Bashabi Fraser, Traci O'Dea, Alan Spence, Carl Philips, Kevin P Gilday, Shara McCallum, Ifor Ap Glyn, Dylis Rose, David Kinloch, Donny O'Rourke, Stephen Watts, Harry Man, William Hershaw, David Bleiman, Ellen Pennie, George Watt, Christine De Luca, Marcas Mac An Tuairneir, Alan Gillis, A. Jak, Catherine Marshall, W N Herbert, Jim Carruth, Laura Fyfe and Niall O'Gallagher. We received a grant from Bòrd na Gàidhlig to produce a programme with Scottish Gaelic writers and musicians, entitled *Sruth*.

We celebrated and hosted St Brigid's Day with the Irish Consul, Nan Shepherd's 130th Birthday, the 50th anniversary of Scots language magazine Lallans, the first performance of James Hogg's *Royal Jubilee*, and the Gaelic bard John Roy Stuart.

Our exhibition programme included *Bho Bheul an eion/ From the Bird's Mouth* by artist Derek Robertson and Gaelic writer Ruairidh MacDonnchaidh. The exhibition offered insights into Gaelic naming processes by focusing on creating Gaelic names for new wildlife species that have appeared in Scotland because of Climate Change.

For National Poetry Day in October 2022, we commissioned filmed readings by our ambassadors and city makers on the theme of the natural world and the environment. We also commissioned poet Ken Cockburn to produce a lesson plan on writing circle poems.

A C Jacobs, Carol McKay, David Bleiman, Garry MacKenzie, Helen Boden and Mark Russell were added to our Online Guide of Scottish poets following a public call for nominations.

Our online anthology of Best Scottish Poems (2021) was selected by guest editors Hugh McMillan for poems in English, Sheena Blackhall for writing in Scots and Martin MacIntyre for Scottish Gaelic poems.

We hosted a pamphlet fair in November 2022, which was attended by 16 independent publishers and small presses from across Scotland. As a result of the success of the event, we have partnered with Creative Scotland to manage a new poetry pamphlet grant.

We continued to support self-organised poetry group activity including The School of Poets, two University of the Third Age monthly gatherings, a teachers' poetry group and a mothers' writing group.

Our monthly online Nothing But the Poem reading group remained popular throughout the year. This activity often complemented our podcast series, which focused on the works of Will Harris, Hannah Hodgson, Daniel Sluman, Jay Whittaker, Sakutaro Hagiwara and Roddy Lumsden. We also launched a new Gaelic podcast series, *Hai-àidh!* The first programme in the series featured Peter Mackay and Martin MacIntyre.

Through the year, we hosted research academic Norman Angus, Professor of Literature and Translation at Kyoto Tachibana University, Japan. We also hosted three-month work placements from University of Strathclyde – Antonietta Colasante and Chaeli Brown. Both Antonietta and Chaeli decided to volunteer with the poetry library after they completed their placements. We also hosted a two-month internship from the University of Bonn and a five-day research placement from the University of Oxford.

We would like to thank the following volunteers for their support and contributions in this reporting year: Mhairi Addison, Gabriela Arroyo, Ishbelle Bee, Annie Forbes, Cameron Fraser, Mattea Gernentz, Aimee Gibson, Iona Mackenzie, Bob McPherson, Beata Migut, Matías Muñoz, Ellie Parsons, Moyra Pearston, Patrycja Respondek, Marcus Smith, Stephanie Straub, Marieke van Asselt and Dave Wylie.