

A Tale Gathering

Once upon a time – before the days of television, radio, computers, mobile phones, X-boxes, Gameboys, Playstations, and mp3 players – people used to gather round the fire in the evening to entertain each other. They would sing, tell jokes, ask riddles, play music, recite poems, dance – and tell stories. Some of the stories would be fresh from the previous day's experiences. Others might be local legends about haunted places, tales of ancient battles, comic fools, and ill-fated courtships, or perhaps explanations of how outstanding features in the landscape came by their names. Yet others would belong to an ancient international body of oral literature, stories of kings and princesses, heroes and supernatural creatures, and magical transformations, some of the stories taking several nights in the telling.

The Highlands and Islands of Scotland is the place, among all areas of Britain, where the storyteller is still remembered, particularly by the peat hearth and by the Travellers' campfire. Over the past couple of decades a renewal of interest in storytelling as a live art form has led to the establishment of the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh, to festivals like the annual Tales at Martinmas in Ross-shire, to storywalks and to storytelling events in schools, libraries, castles, museums, ancient sites, inns and private houses, from the Borders to Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides.

This project will focus on diverse communities throughout the mainland Highlands, exploring the storytelling traditions of those communities, and finding ways in which, through marrying storytelling with other art forms, members of the communities can reclaim this important part of their heritage and experience it fresh and relevant to the 21st century.

Throughout the different stages of the project, I anticipate that my role will include:

1. researching the stories and legends of the different places in which the project is based, and encouraging the communities in these places to do their own research, including the recording of events which still exist in living memory.
2. helping to organise events that will raise awareness of local stories and of the art of storytelling.
3. training groups within the communities to use recording equipment to gather stories and begin to create archives.
4. teaching locally-gathered stories to school children, and, where appropriate, to adults within the communities; and arranging visits by tradition-bearers - including Travellers - to schools and community venues.
5. considering and discussing ways in which individual stories can be explored and re-envisioned by collaboration between community members and the artists involved in the project, and using my own skills as a storyteller, songwriter and musician to help in the process.
6. liaising with the individual artists who will be working on the project.
7. acting as an intermediary between the communities and the artists.
8. exploring possibilities for forging links between the groups engaged in the project, so that the materials gathered can be shared: a travelling exhibition, get-togethers, mutual storywalks, the

physical transportation of materials by carrier pigeon, pack-horse, boat, shanks' pony, as well as the Post Office, mp3, CD, video and old fashioned tape cassette.

Bob Pegg