



## NEWSLETTER

### Saltire Society Edinburgh Branch

Dear Members,

We hope you are all keeping safe and well during these unprecedented and difficult times. Never in a million years we would have expected to have to cancel all our Branch events at such a short notice and for such a long time. But this is the reality at the moment and it is amazing to notice that, after a while, one can get used to practically everything, even lockdowns! This is an extra issue of the Branch newsletter to keep in touch with you all and to let you know what has been happening during these months of inactivity. On our front page you will find two messages, one from our Convenor, John Yellowlees followed by one from Saltire Director Sarah Mason where she tells us how HQ is working during the pandemic. Plus, some of our usual features. The **Poetry Corner**, on page 4, is this time devoted to a special poem written during the pandemic and which has become very popular on social media in the last few months. The **Branch News**, also on page 4, list the events already planned for our 2020/21 season pending the lifting of the lockdown. Finally, we are asking our members to help us **start a Conversation on the future of the Branch** by sending us your views and comments on how we should continue after the lockdown is lifted. We hope many of you will respond to this and send in your ideas. You will find all necessary details on page 4.

I'm grateful to John Yellowlees for sending me a number of interesting items for inclusion in this special issue. We hope you will enjoy reading it and until we can meet again, please keep safe.

Laura Scott  
Editor

#### News from Saltire Society HQ

**a) Saltire Pamphlets** - Recalling the pamphlets issued by the Saltire Society during the darkest days of the Second World War, writer and author Kenny Kemp told The Times readers on 2 April that these had helped create a blueprint for Scotland after the war ended. In them James Bowie had urged the need for reconstruction to defeat the conditions that had produced totalitarianism, and Prof James Mackintosh prefaced the birth of the NHS and welfare state, while Stanley Cursiter called for the application of art to industry. Kenny believes that we would all benefit from a similar set of independently-minded pamphlets which could form part of the discussion around Scotland's future and a possible second independence referendum. Responding to this by referring to pamphlets produced in recent years, including those by Allan Massie and the late William McIlvanney in 2014, Director Sarah Mason replied that this kind of platform was needed now more than ever before, with our theatres, concert halls, cafes and bars closed and people isolated. The good news is that the Society is planning to digitise and make available on line the 13 pamphlets of the most recent *Saltire Series* to stimulate the debate and to commission new ones on current issues facing arts and culture and making them available for free digital download on the Society's website.

**b) Future events** -As it may not be possible to arrange physical events until later on in the year, the Society will concentrate on online productions, like a re-launching of the **ScotLitFest**, already successfully run in 2016 and 2017 entirely on social media platforms, while the **Saltire Summer Festival** programme may now be moved forward to become a **Winter Festival**. All details will be announced when available.

#### Message from our Branch Convenor

Welcome to this extra newsletter, which is reaching you around the time when we would have held our Branch AGM. We are living through extraordinary times, in which nations the world over are united in battle against a common but unseen enemy. New terms - self-isolating, social distancing, personal protective equipment and furlough - have permeated our vocabulary, and we are experiencing lifestyles that even a short time ago would have been thought impossible at least in peacetime.

My sympathies go to any of you who have lost loved ones to COVID-19. I believe we can be proud that by obeying government guidelines we have played our part in stemming the spread of the coronavirus and thus protecting the National Health Service.

The world will emerge from this crisis poorer in wealth but richer in spirit, as the good deeds of thousands of volunteers have demonstrated. It is to be hoped that the recognition given to frontline workers in the NHS, postal services and elsewhere gains continuance when normality returns. The Saltire Society hopes to be back up and running after the summer, and meanwhile we hope that this newsletter will help fill the gap left by the necessary cancellation of spring/summer Branch activities.

John Yellowlees

#### Message from Sarah Mason, Saltire Society Director

We hope you are well and managing in these difficult times.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 (coronavirus) situation and the new government guidelines the Saltire Society Headquarters will be closed for all events and meetings for three weeks.

Staff will continue to work remotely from home, planning for our programme of Awards and events to go forward later in the year/early next year. These plans are evolving with the help of our Panels, Trustees and Committees to ensure we are following government guidance and good practice while maintaining a successful programme for the Society, its members and audiences. The team are contactable via our usual emails and phone number. Physical post that has been sent in the last 10 days will take longer than normal to respond. We have arranged for the Royal Mail to hold our post until we can collect it, which will not happen in these 3 weeks of essential only movement.

As always, my priority is for the health and safety of our team, members, committees and volunteers and I will work hard to ensure the Society continues to do its important work as best it can in these challenging times.

Please do contact me if you have any queries.

We look forward to working with and seeing everyone later in the year but for now, keep safe and look after yourselves.

#### Inside this issue

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**Branch events from the Spring**  
(John Yellowlees, Secretary)



Acting chief executive Tom Brock told us at our **March lunch** that **Keep Scotland Beautiful** is the charity that campaigns, acts and educates on a range of local, national and global issues to change behaviour and improve the quality of people's lives and the places they care for.

KSB is leading the way on improving Scotland's environment, tackling a wide range of environmental issues, from reducing the amount of litter on our streets to cutting the carbon emissions that threaten our planet. Having been part of the environmental landscape for over 50 years, KSB draws together government, local authorities, businesses, community groups and individuals in this common cause. With a presence in every village, town, and city in Scotland, its activities are estimated to make a difference to 1 in 5 people living in Scotland. KSB provides environmental campaigns, services and practical initiatives that help Scotland with its environmental ambitions and problems. Its unique spectrum of activities focuses on four main areas: Sustainable Development, Education, Local Environmental Quality, Sustainability and Climate Change, and Environmental Services. KSB campaigns, acts and educates towards environmental improvements in all of Scotland's 32 local authority areas. Activities range from awards and accreditations to local environmental quality monitoring; from campaigning to training and audits; from clean-ups to celebrating environmental achievement; and from environmental education in schools to supporting public sector action on climate change. KSB provides education initiatives for children, young people and educators which focus on environmental issues so that we can improve understanding and encourage positive action in the areas of Eco-Schools, Food and the Environment, Learning for Sustainability Projects and Energy, Enterprise and Environment. On local environmental quality, KSB provides advice and support to help create and maintain cleaner, safer and healthier local environments where people and communities can thrive. Campaigning activities include Clean Up Scotland, Beautiful Scotland, It's Your Neighbourhood and the Green Flag and Beach Awards. It's Your Neighbourhood is of particular note, being a community environmental improvement initiative which KSB manages in partnership with the Royal Horticultural Society under the Britain in Bloom campaign, running alongside Beautiful Scotland but is non-competitive and is based on the three pillars of community participation, environmental responsibility and gardening achievement. On sustainability and climate change, KSB works with organisations and communities to help people to reduce carbon emissions, improve local areas and adapt to the impacts of climate change through a Climate Challenge Fund and Climate Literacy programme. KSB also provides bespoke environmental services such as audits, surveys and training to help businesses, public bodies and communities groups to meet their environmental commitments and responsibilities.

The sense of community that KSB seeks to engender will be of even greater relevance as Scotland emerges from the Coronavirus pandemic.

*We were very sorry, back in April, to have to cancel our last lunch of the season and the talk by Dr Anne Pia due to the current pandemic and lockdown. Anne has been kind enough to send us a summary of what she has intended to speak to us about on the day. We hope there will another opportunity to welcome her back to the Branch once life returns to normal.*

**The Italian Story**

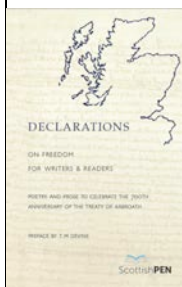
What do immigrants bring with them? How much of the 'old country' did Italian immigrants bring? How much have they left behind? And what has been their impact on Scottish society? In order to understand the Italian community in Scotland and the challenges that they faced and continue to face, it is important to remember that the community here in Scotland is not homogeneous. We know of ethnic and cultural differences between say, the West and East coast of Scotland but because of history and the late Unification of Italy, the Risorgimento, in 1871, the differences between each region of Italy are as great almost, as between the countries that make up Western Europe. Every region has its distinctive language, every hamlet and town has its own dialect representing very different philosophies and ways of seeing the world. A Tuscan is not a Milanese and each is very different to a Napoletano. The great gulf between North and South, economic activity, political persuasion and living standards are more real than ever. The impact and influence of centuries of foreign rule...of France and Germany in Lombardy and other regions and Spain and the East in Campania, Sicily and other southern areas have made of Italy one of the most diverse but culturally rich countries of Europe. Another difference still today, is that between rural communities and city Italians. This is the minority community of Scotland that was engulfed by World War Two, and that emerged strong from the margins, devastation and losses of that time to regain its foothold and status in Scotland. Can we draw any conclusions at all about Italian life and characteristics that saw us through those years and well into the '70s even? What is the enduring imprint of that community on Scottish life?

**Declaration of Arbroath**



The **700th anniversary on 6 April** went *uncelebrated* other than by one or two articles such as by Lesley Riddoch in The Scotsman. However the "Illustrated Declaration of Arbroath" by Andrew Redmond Barr from whom we heard at our November lunch has been joined by another book simply called "The Declaration of Arbroath" by Dr Tom Turpie, who sets it in the context of a world plagued by war and climate change.

The 700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary has also been the subject of an excellent three part series on BBC Radio Scotland on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of April produced and presented by author and broadcaster **Billy Kay**. The programme, under the title of **The Declaration**, has been available on the BBC IPlayer.



Lastly, **Scottish PEN**, the association of writers in Scotland, have also been inspired by this year anniversary of the Declaration of Arbroath. They conceived and produced an excellent collection of poetry and prose penned by leading writers from Scotland and overseas. The anthology, with the title **Declarations: On Freedom for Writers and Readers**, has a *Preface* by Professor Tom Devine and is published by Edinburgh based Scotland Street Press ([scotlandstreetpress.com](http://scotlandstreetpress.com)) at the price of £9.99. You can find more information about the project at [scottishpen.org](http://scottishpen.org)

## News Digest

### An appeal from the National Trust for Scotland (*pre pandemic*)



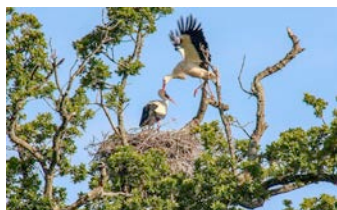
Back in February some of you may have spotted in the papers that the National Trust for Scotland announced they were planning to embark on a £1.4 million revamp of one of the oldest buildings in their care, **Gladstone's Land** on the Royal Mile, by adding a café and ice-cream parlour on the ground floor and turning an office space into a new holiday apartment. The heritage body also launched an appeal to the public to help them trace what was the building used for from the late 50s to the 70s as they apparently have no records for that particular period. Can you believe it?. How can they not be aware that the very building had been the headquarter of the Saltire Society until the Society moved to Atholl Crescent? So if any of you remember attending meetings and events there, do write to them and help put the records straight! Of course, all this was before the current prolonged lockdown and the serious financial difficulties in which the Trust currently finds itself due to massive loss of income. So the plans may now be put on hold or not go ahead at all and will the NTS indeed survive the current crisis? Only time will tell...

### Scotland's earliest railway line

The historic **East Lothian waggonway from Tranent to Cockenzie** is to be commemorated as it approaches its 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The railway is so old that a battle was fought over its tracks during the Jacobite rising. Opened in 1722 it was 4 km long connecting coal pits at Tranent with salt pans at Cockenzie and harbour at Port Seton. The tracks were wooden and the wagons drawn by horses. Archeological excavations have been recently progressing in the area to reveal more secrets and the industrial landmark is now to be honoured with the unveiling of a "Red Wheel" plaque by the National Transport Trust. This will be displayed on the outside wall of the museum run by the 1722 Waggonway Heritage Group Cockenzie as soon as the lockdown restrictions have been eased. A possible new destination, perhaps, for a future Branch Summer Outing?



### Did you know...?



**Wild white storks** have hatched in the British countryside for the first time in more than 600 years. Adult birds have been observed incubating eggs on an oak tree at the Knepp Estate in West Sussex and then starting to feed the chicks. The reintroduction scheme, which has been organised by a coalition of wildlife groups, is aiming at releasing up to 40 birds each year in an effort to restore the species and establishing a self-sustaining population in Sussex by 2030. While around 20 migrant white storks are spotted in Britain every year, **the last pair that were recorded successfully breeding in the wild nested on St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh in 1416!**

### Pandemic Picture of the Day



Haymarket Station cheerful tribute to NHS workers depicting a train spouting a rainbow of multicoloured love hearts, as created by ScotRail Customer Service team leader Samantha Hayden.

*(Courtesy of John Yellowlees)*

### Two Lockdown Limericks

Every day the leaders of science  
Demand our utter compliance  
But there's no lifestyle winners  
In Zoom and TV dinners  
So the time may yet come for defiance.

If you're feeling so trapped in your room  
Don't worry, you can always try Zoom  
But if you must risk it  
Virtual catering takes the biscuit  
And the babble makes it best to keep schtum

*(Courtesy of John Yellowlees)*



### **Branch News and future programmes**

Unfortunately the pandemic has prevented us from being entertained to the correspondence of Hugh MacDiarmid by Alan Riach and Doli MacLennan and hearing from speakers Anne Pia, Duncan Hendry and our very own Joe Goldblatt. Your committee will see whether it is possible to reschedule opportunities with at least some of these in addition to the 2020/21 programme, which is already in place as follows :

3 October : Ken Thomson on the Wallace Monument  
7 November : Arran Johnston on battlefields  
5 December : Sheila Szatkowski on Visitors to Edinburgh in late 18th and early 19th centuries  
9 January : Bruce Keith on Bridgescapes  
6 February : James Ogilvie on a brief history of the Forestry Commission 1919-2019  
6 March : Elspeth Turner on Tweed Dales  
3 April : Anne McClary on Scott's Minstrelsy of the Borders  
7 May Annual Dinner : Guest of Honour Professor Sally Mapstone, President of the Saltire Society

Of course, as things stand at the moment, we are not at all sure if we will be able to resume safely our activities in the Autumn and especially our lunches. Will we be allowed to congregate in a relative confined space? It all depends on when and how the lockdown will be eased and for which categories of the population. However, it might be possible to have a *socially-distanced* AGM sometimes before the end of the year, but more information about this and other future events will be given in the next Newsletter which will go out in early September. The world may be a very different place after the pandemic.

**With this in mind, the next AGM - whenever it will take place –could be a good opportunity for our members to let us know their views on how they see the future of the Branch developing in the years ahead.**

**In the meantime we would be happy to hear from you. If you would like to send us your ideas and comments please get in touch with Branch Convenor John Yellowlees at 7 Roseburn Cliff, Edinburgh EH12 6AL, email: [yellowlees@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:yellowlees@blueyonder.co.uk), Tel 0131 538 6866, Mob 07771 831252 or with myself (details at the end of the page).**

**LET'S START THE CONVERSATION NOW!**

### **Poetry Corner**

This poem has had an extraordinary journey and shows how interconnected we all are in these times of lockdown. A longer poem with the title "*And the people stayed at home*" was written by Irish poet, Kathleen O'Meara (in art Grace Ramsay) in 1869 after the famine in Ireland. We don't know if this inspired Kitty O'Meara (a descendant, perhaps?) from the USA to pen the current shorter version. A parallel, similar version in Italian circulated widely on social media. As it happens the English version was chosen as one of the readings during the "virtual" Easter service at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Edinburgh, where it caught the attention of member Morag MacCormick who eventually passed it on to me for possible inclusion in this special issue!

#### **In the time of pandemic**

*And the people stayed home.  
And read books, and listened, and rested,  
and exercised, and made art, and played games, and learned new ways  
of being, and were still. And listened more deeply.  
Some meditated, some prayed, some danced.  
Some met their shadows. And the people began to think differently.  
And the people healed. And, in the absence of people living in ignorant,  
dangerous, mindless, and heartless ways, the earth began to heal.  
And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again,  
they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new  
images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they  
had been healed.*

**Kitty O'Meara**

(Retired American teacher and chaplain)

