



Press Release: 26 June 2015

For immediate release

Peatlands poetry with George Gunn

Author and poet, George Gunn, led a well-attended creative writing workshop on 13 June 2015. This free event was hosted by Dunbeath Heritage Centre with financial support from Flows to the Future, a Heritage Lottery Funded project to promote the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland.

Within the first hour, George had skilfully enabled his students to compose their own beautiful poem by opening their eyes to new ways of seeing. For some, the workshop represented their first introduction to poetry. George explained that the original poet played an important role in the local tribe, running ahead of the others and returning to describe what had been seen.

The workshop was very much about the place and a distillation of the senses. A concentration on 'locus and focus' as George put it - looking at the peatlands and spontaneously painting a picture with words.

The group took inspiration from a selection of archived images representing life in the Flow Country. These images were enriched by the experiences and memories of the group, many of whom remembered how 'the peats' shaped a way of life. Creativity flowed as the group discussed their reactions and memories, interspersed with fun

and laughter when it was said that “you never know a man till you share a peat stack with him”, which may well be true, and it was also clear that ‘flow’ in this sense never rhymed with ‘snow’.

George Gunn said "It was a good, positive day, a creative day. The participants worked hard and that, as a tutor, is what you want".

“The secret to it, I think, is being in such a place as Dunbeath. With the spirit of Neil Gunn all around, the Dunbeath Heritage Centre is the natural place to discuss poetry, writing and creativity in general. I would like to see the facility in Dunbeath being a centre for writing, attracting people from all over Scotland, the Celtic diaspora - the world.”

Christine Gunn, responsible for Community Engagement for Dunbeath Preservation Trust, said “There’s a special connection for Dunbeath Heritage Centre with the Caithness peatlands, and we were proud to be part of the current ‘Flows to the Future’ programme.

“Neil M. Gunn was born in Dunbeath, and the landscape right up the strath fired his imagination throughout his entire life. Having another Gunn to carry on the Caithness writing tradition is significant, and the fact that George has such an interest in passing on some of his hard-won writing know-how is good for folk in our community who want to try writing. From the feedback, I think everybody who came was surprised at what they were able to produce in such a short time, and it was lovely having a complete mix of ages in the group.”

The new poems and images from this event will be on display in the Education Room at Caithness Horizons on 27 July 2015 (11am until 3pm), as part of a larger exhibition from the Flows to the Future Project in celebration of International Bog Day.

ENDS

The Flows to the Future project gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Heritage Lottery Fund



PHOTOGRAPHS

- 1) George Gunn. Photo to be credited to Dunbeath Preservation Trust**
- 2) The group . Photo to be credited to Dunbeath Preservation Trust**
- 3) The group and GG standing up (2649)**
- 4) Hard at work (2655)**

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Peatlands Partnership includes Scottish Natural Heritage, Forestry Commission (Scotland), Highland Council, RSPB Scotland, Plantlife Scotland, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, The Highland Third Sector Interface, The Flow Country Rivers Trust, The Northern Deer Management Group and The Environmental Research Institute. It liaises with local community groups, , the Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate and the North Sutherland Community Forest Trust. It is independently chaired by John Henderson of Scrabster Farm, Caithness.

RSPB Scotland is the lead partner in The Flows to the Future project, a Peatlands Partnership project, which gratefully acknowledges funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and from the following funders and supporters; Environmental Research Institute, European Regional Development Fund, Forestry Commission (Scotland), Peatland Action, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, The Highland Council, RSPB, WREN, Scotland Rural Development Programme, Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage and The Tubney Trust.

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