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Electric Scotland's Weekly Newsletter for July 14th, 2023

Electric Scotland News

Americans Help National Trust for Scotland Acquire Treshnish Isles

July 10, Boston – American friends of Scotland's largest conservation charity have enabled the acquisition of the Treshnish Isles, an archipelago of eight uninhabited islands located in the Inner Hebrides, securing the future of this distinctive seascape.

The Treshnish Isles are internationally significant as a nesting site for many seabird species, including puffins, guillemots, and kittiwakes. Twenty percent of the entire British population of storm petrels nest on the islands. The waters surrounding the isles are home to Atlantic seals, basking sharks, and minke whales.

Now uninhabited, the Treshnish Isles have a long human history that dates from the Iron Age. They were in the possession of King Haakon of Norway until 1249. The islands feature the ruins of two medieval castles and have strong historical links with the Scottish clans MacDougal, MacDonald, and Maclean.

The National Trust for Scotland assumed care of the Treshnish Isles earlier this month. The Trust is responsible for the protection of some of Scotland's most special places, including the Hebridean islands of Staffa, Iona, and Canna, as well as Fair Isle and the dual world heritage site of St Kilda.

In America, The National Trust for Scotland Foundation USA (NTSUSA) raises visibility and financial support for the Trust's conservation priorities. There has been a strong tradition of American support for conservation in the Hebrides. The islands of Staffa, Pabbay, Berneray, and Mingulay were all gifted to the Trust through bequests from the US, and NTSUSA recently has made significant contributions to preservation initiatives on Canna and Iona.

Kirstin Bridier, executive director of NTSUSA, noted, "We are delighted to fund the acquisition of the Treshnish Isles. With more than 20 million Americans claiming Scottish ancestry, NTSUSA is committed to garnering international support to protect Scotland's heritage and natural beauty now and for future generations."

The acquisition of the Treshnish Isles comes as the National Trust for Scotland is investing significantly in the region. With more than 50,000 visitors per year expected on the Treshnish Isles, the Trust will work with local boat operators to ensure that rats and mice cannot reach the island and feed upon vulnerable seabird chicks. The Trust also will have a ranger on-site to help monitor and educate visitors about the islands' wildlife. An archaeological survey will ensure all data from historical ruins is captured and will inform development of a preservation plan.

The acquisition caps a year in which NTSUSA granted over \$530,000 in funding for projects at nearly twenty National Trust for Scotland properties. This included \$208,000 to support the digitization of 18th-century manuscripts in poet Robert Burns's hand held in the collection of the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum in Alloway, Ayrshire. The result will be a website accessible to Burns scholars and fans across the globe.

Heard from Beth last night in a phone call. She has not been well at all. Suffered from sleep deprivation to an extreme degree evidently. Tom's surgery has been a success. He sounded strong when I called this morning. He will send you an email. Evidently he didn't have the email address so I forwarded it to him.

Beth says she is better.

Martha

Due to reading our story for this week I found a few books which I've added to our web site. You can get to them at: <https://electricScotland.com/kids/stories/index.htm>

They include old favourites such as: "Little Women" by Louisa M. Alcott, "The Hobbit" by J. R. R. Tolkien, "Heidi" by Johanna Spyri, "The Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Anderson" and "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll.

Scottish News from this weeks newspapers

I am partly doing this to build an archive of modern news from and about Scotland and world news stories that can affect Scotland and as all the newsletters are archived and also indexed on Google and other search engines it becomes a good resource. I might also add that in a number of newspapers you will find many comments which can be just as interesting as the news story itself and of course you can also add your own comments if you wish which I do myself from time to time. Here is what caught my eye this week...

10 old fashioned Scottish dishes you will remember eating as a kid
The Daily Record has put together a list of 10 traditional Scottish dishes that, if you grew up in the country, are sure to bring back a few childhood memories.

Read more at:

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/scotland-now/gallery/10-old-fashioned-scottish-dishes-30403840>

Planet Holyrood

This week the panel discuss - Does the Monarchy still have a place in Scotland and SNP tensions within Westminster

You can view this at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uNYM24bpLI>

NHS is in crisis - but are we being sold poor health?

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have used devolved powers to diverge from England, and in many ways to protect services from a series of upheavals in the way England's health service has been managed. Yet many of the indicators and challenges are very similar.

Read more at:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-66142350>

Britain is the last liberal nation in Europe

Europe is being swallowed up by the right. Only Brexit Britain stands alone against the tide.

Read more at:

<https://www.newstatesman.com/comment/2023/07/britain-liberal-nation-europe>

Meerkats to be housed at Edinburgh children's hospital

A group of meerkats will move into a children's hospital to give patients the chance to connect with nature.

Read more at:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-66163669>

Brutal emigrant voyage of 250 years ago remembered

In July 1773, almost 200 Scots left for Canada on a journey hit by fatal illness.

Read more at:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-66153169>

The Anthropocene: Canadian lake mud symbolic of human changes to Earth

Crawford Lake, a small body of water in Ontario, Canada, is being put forward as the location that best records humanity's impacts on Earth.

Read more at:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-66132769>

Insights into why Europe ended up at war again and more...

Europe's Leadership Famine: Portraits of defiance and decay 1950-2022 by Tom Gallagher

Read more at:

<https://thinkscotland.org/2023/07/insights-into-why-europe-ended-up-at-war-again-and-more/>

How Barbara Cartland was a better politician than Mhairi Black

Ms Cartland reports three of her campaigns. The first aimed to help old people who were being treated then in much the same way as the SNP treated care home residents during the Covid years, only without the Scottish government's lying, brutality and incidental homicide. Another battle the Pink Queen fought was to get prayers said in state schools. There she was successful too.

Read more at:

<https://thinkscotland.org/2023/07/how-barbara-cartland-was-a-better-politician-than-mhairi-black/>

Is Prof. Mearsheimer being proven right about nuclear deterrence?

Ukraine inherited 1,600 strategic nuclear bombs on its territory, as well as a large number of tactical nuclear devices. But a year later, in 1994, Ukraine agreed to hand them all back to Russia in return for a guarantee from Britain and the United States that Moscow would respect its independence and borders for all time coming.

Read more at:

<https://thinkscotland.org/2023/07/is-mearsheimer-being-proven-right-about-nuclear-deterrence/>

Scottish Port Sets Record For Cruise Ship Arrivals

The Scottish port of Stornoway is enjoying a record-breaking cruise season, with the start of July reaching over 8,000 passengers

Read more at:

<https://www.cruisehive.com/scottish-port-sets-record-for-cruise-ship-arrivals/106181>

Hundreds of golden retrievers gather in Highlands

Hundreds of golden retrievers, and their owners, have gathered at the Highland ancestral home of the breed.

The first golden retriever puppies were born at Guisachan House in Glen Affric 155 years ago.

Read more at:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-65954415>

Ban cross-sex pronouns in schools

A damaging ideology has been allowed to capture the most vulnerable in society children. Not only are they being taught as fact that we all have an inner gender identity, they are being set on a path to potential life-long health complications by being allowed to change pronouns. No school should permit this.

Read more at:

<https://capx.co/ban-cross-sex-pronouns-in-schools>

The countries the UK sends £13billion a year of aid to MAPPED

Despite cuts to the aid budget from a public finances squeeze post-pandemic, the UK remains the third-largest donor in the world.

Read more at:

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1790654/countries-uk-foreign-aid-map-spt>

Hunt unveils Brexit masterstroke to outsmart EU and hand City major win in £2.4tn market

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt said Brexit gives the UK "autonomy" to rely on its own regulators, allowing the UK to become a leader in the "industries of the future".

Read more at:

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/1789971/Britain-Brexit-EU-london-finance-regulation>

Electric Canadian

The House

A Manual of Rural Architecture or How to build Country Houses and Out-Buildings by D. H. Jacques (1866) (pdf)

You can read this book at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/pioneering/beard/housemanualofrur00jacq.pdf>

Songs of a Sourdough

By Robert W. Service (1910) (pdf)

You can read these at:

https://electricscotland.com/poetry/songsofsourdough00serv_20.pdf

Thoughts on a Sunday Morning - the 9th day of July 2023 - Manners

By the Rev. Nola Crewe

You can view this at:

<http://www.electricscotland.org/forum/communities/rev-nola-crewe/26372-thoughts-on-a-sunday-morning-the-9th-day-of-july-2023-manners>

Travels through the Canadas

Containing a description of the picturesque scenery on some of the rivers and lakes; with an account of the

productions, commerce, and inhabitants of those provinces. To which is subjoined a comparative view of the manners and customs of several of the Indian nations of North and South America by George Herriot (1807) (pdf)

You can read this book at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/lifestyle/travelsthroughca00inheri.pdf>

The Eskimo Book of Knowledge

By George Binney, B.A. Oxon., Hudson's Bay Company, London, Rendered into the Labrador Dialect by The Reverend W. W. Perrett, for many years Superintendent of the Moravian Mission in Labrador with the assistance of Dr. S. K. Hutton, M.D., Secretary Moravian Missions, London. (1931) (pdf)

You can read this book at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/first/inuit/eskimo-book-knowledge.pdf>

Electric Scotland

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

By Lewis Carroll (1919) (pdf)

You can read this book at:

https://electricscotland.com/kids/stories/alicesadventures00carr_24.pdf

The Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Andersen

With upwards of four hundred illustrations by Helen Stratton (1899) (pdf)

You can read this book at:

<https://electricscotland.com/kids/stories/fairytalesofhans00ande.pdf>

Heidi

By Johanna Spyri, Translated by Elizabeth P. Stork (1919) (pdf)

You can read this book at:

<https://electricscotland.com/kids/stories/heidi.pdf>

Scottish Society of Louisville

Got in their July 2023 newsletter which you can read at:

<https://electricscotland.com/familytree/newsletters/Louisville/index.htm>

Extracts from the Journal of a Scotch Medical Student of the Eighteenth Century

Edited by L. M. A. Liggett (pdf)

You can read this article at:

<https://electricscotland.com/history/medical/medlibhistj00014-0024.pdf>

Ladies from Hell

By R. Douglas Pinkerton (1918) (pdf). The London Scottish

A most interesting book which you can read at:

<https://electricscotland.com/history/scotreg/ladiesfromhell00pinkiala.pdf>

Historical Memorials of the Stewarts of Forthergill, Perthshire
And their Male Descendants With an Appendix containing Title-Deeds and various Documents of Interest in the
History of the Family, edited by Charles Poyntz Stewart (1879) (pdf)

You can read this book at:

<https://electricscotland.com/webclans/stoz/historicmemoria00stew.pdf>

Scottish Society of Indianapolis

Got in their June/July 2023 Newsletter which you can read at:

<https://electricscotland.com/familytree/newsletters/indianapolis/index.htm>

A Golden Way

Being Notes and Impressions on a Journey through Ireland, Scotland and England by Albert LeRoy Bartlett
(1901) (pdf)

You can read this book at:

<https://electricscotland.com/lifestyle/goldenwaybeingno00bart.pdf>

George Herriot & Family

Author, Artist (pdf) contains some interesting information on the family in Canada and America and also India.

You can read this book at:

<https://electricscotland.com/history/other/georgeheriotauth00heriuoft.pdf>

Story

Why adults should read children's books

By Katherine Rundell writing in the BBC

This article can also be read on the BBC at:

<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20230711-why-adults-should-read-childrens-books>

The best children's fiction "helps us refind things we may not even know we have lost", writes the author Katherine Rundell, with many books proving subversive, emboldening – and awe-inspiring.

I've been writing children's fiction for more than 10 years now, and still I would hesitate to define it. But I do know, with more certainty than I usually feel about anything, what it is not: it's not exclusively for children. When I write, I write for two people: myself, age 12, and myself, now, and the book must satisfy two distinct but connected appetites. My 12-year-old self wanted autonomy, peril, justice, food, and above all a kind of density of atmosphere into which I could step and be engulfed. My adult self wants all those things, and also: acknowledgements of fear, love, failure; of the rat that lives within the human heart. So what I try for when I write – failing often, but trying – is to put down in as few words as I can the things that I most urgently and desperately want children to know and adults to remember. Those who write for children are trying to arm them for the life ahead with everything we can find that is true. And perhaps, also, secretly, to arm adults against those necessary compromises and necessary heartbreaks that life involves: to remind them that there are and always will be great, sustaining truths to which we can return.

There is, though, a sense among most adults that we should only read in one direction, because to do otherwise would be to regress or retreat: to de-mature. You pass Spot the Dog, battle past that two-headed monster Peter and Jane; through Narnia, on to The Catcher in the Rye or Patrick Ness, and from there to adult

fiction, where you remain, triumphant, never glancing back, because to glance back would be to lose ground.

But the human heart is not a linear train ride. That isn't how people actually read; at least, it's not how I've ever read. I learned to read fairly late, with much strain and agonising until, at last and quite suddenly, the hieroglyphs took shape and meaning: and then I read with the same omnivorous un-scrupulosity I showed at mealtimes. I read Matilda alongside Jane Austen, Narnia and Agatha Christie; I took Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle* with me to university, clutched tight to my chest like a life raft. I still read Paddington when I need to believe, as Michael Bond does, that the world's miracles are more powerful than its chaos. For reading not to become something that we do for anxious self-optimisation – for it not to be akin to buying high-spec trainers and a gym membership each January – all texts must be open, to all people.

The difficulties with the rule of readerly progression are many: one is that, if one follows the same pattern into adulthood, turning always to books of obvious increasing complexity, you're left ultimately with nothing but *Finnegans Wake* and the complete works of the French deconstructionist theorist Jacques Derrida to cheer your deathbed.

The other difficulty with the rule is that it supposes that children's fiction can safely be discarded. I would say we do so at our peril, for we discard in adulthood a casket of wonders which, read with an adult eye, have a different kind of alchemy in them.

WH Auden wrote "There are good books which are only for adults, because their comprehension presupposes adult experiences, but there are no good books which are only for children."

I am absolutely not suggesting adults read only, or even primarily, children's fiction. Just that there are times in life when it might be the only thing that will do.

What is it like to read as a child? Is there something in it – the headlong, hungry, immersive quality of it – that we can get back to? When I was young I read with a rage to understand. Adult memories of how we once read are often de-spiked by nostalgia, but my need for books as a child was sharp and urgent and furious if thwarted. My family was large, and reading offered privacy from the raucous, mildly unhinged panopticon that is living with three siblings: I could be sitting alongside them in the car, but, in fact, it was the only time when nobody in the world knew where I was. Crawling through dark tunnels in the company of hobbits, standing in front of oncoming trains waving a red flag torn from a petticoat: to read alone is to step into an infinite space where none can follow.

How children's fiction came to be

The first children's books in English were instruction manuals for good behaviour. My favourite, and the sternest in tone, is *The Babees' Book*, which dates in manuscript from around 1475: "O Babees young," writes the author, "My Book only is made for your learning." The text is a monumental list of instructions in verse form: "Youre nose, your teethe, your naylles, from pykyng/Kepe at your mete, for so techis the wyse."

In 1715, Isaac Watts published his fantastically uncheerful *Divine and Moral Songs for Children*. I find this book fascinating because its author's preface shows that by the 18th Century, the idea that it was intellectually degrading to write for children was strong: Watts writes, "I well know that some of my particular friends imagine my time is employed in too mean a service while I write for babes... But I content myself with this thought, that nothing is too mean for a servant of Christ to engage in, if he can thereby most effectually promote the kingdom of his blessed Master." The book itself fits into the category, popular at the time, of "upliftingly lugubrious"; it is largely made up of briskly invigorating rhymes about the inevitability of death:

Then I'll not be proud of my youth or my beauty,
Since both of them wither and fade;

But gain a good name by well doing my duty:
This will scent like a rose when I'm dead.

In 1744 came what's often called the first work of published children's literature, John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book, Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly. With Two Letters from Jack the Giant-Killer; as also a Ball and Pincushion; The Use of which will infallibly make Tommy a good Boy, and.*

Newbery's text is actually wittier than it sounds, shot through with a vein of irony, but its ancestry was clear: it came from a history of pedagogical texts and situated itself among them. Newbery's text set a pattern: children's books would be instructive first and entertaining second.

Subversive tales

Alongside the morally uplifting accounts of Sunday schools and rigorously unpicked noses, though, there was another kind of story evolving, of a more unruly and subversive kind: the fairy tale.

Fairy tales were never just for children. They are determinedly, pugnaciously, for everyone – old and young, men and women, of every nation. Esteemed fairy tale expert Marina Warner argues that fairy tales are the closest thing we have to a cultural Esperanto: whether German, Persian, American, we tell the same fairy tales, because the stories have migrated across borders as freely as birds.

All fairy tales, by and large, have the same core ingredients: there will be the archetypal characters – stepmothers, powerful kings, talking animals. There will be injustice or conflict, often gory and extravagant, told in a matter-of-fact tone that does nothing to shield children or adults from its blunt bloodiness. But there will also usually be something – a fairy godmother, a spell, a magic tree – which brings the miracle of hope into the story. "Fairy tales," Warner writes, "evoke every kind of violence, injustice and mischance, but in order to declare it need not continue." Fairy tales conjure fear in order to tell us that we need not be so afraid. Angela Carter saw the godmother as shorthand for what she calls "heroic optimism". Hope, in fairy tales, is sharper than teeth.

That spirit of heroic optimism – optimism blood-covered and gasping, but still optimism – is the life principle writ large. It speaks to us all: because fairy tales were always designed to be a way of talking to everyone at once. They provide us with a model for how certain kinds of stories – by dealing in archetypes and bassnote human desires, and in metaphors with bite – can yoke together people of every age and background, luring us all, witch-like, into the same imaginative space.

Fairy tales, myths, legends: these are the foundations of so much, and as adults we need to keep reading them and writing them, repossessing them as they possess us.

It was in the middle of the 19th Century, as paper became more affordable and childhood literacy rates soared, that children's fiction began to take the actual desires of children into account. The subversive hunger of fairy tales, unleashed into the newly booming printing press, made its way into children's novels. Stories designed for children were unhitched from the schoolroom and the pulpit, and the First Golden Age of children's books was born. Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling, JM Barrie and E Nesbit killed the parents, or abandoned them, or left them when they fell or flew to Wonderland or Neverland, and in so doing they released the child from the imperatives of the adult world. It must have felt like dynamite. Orphaned and unsupervised children roamed through Storyland, wreaking the chaos necessary for an adventure to take place. Larger and wilder experiences were on offer: stories which pushed back at the edges of what was possible.

It was here that the idea that children were sweet or gentle or necessarily more simple or likeable than other kinds of humans was jettisoned, along with the idea that all logic must be adult logic. As a child, I had no

illusions that children were sweet: children, I knew from my own furious heart, were frequently nasty, brutish and short. In casting aside that idea, children's books began to play by their own rules and, in so doing, became works of art distinct in themselves, in their own tradition, not watered-down versions of some other, adult thing.

And that tradition has held. You could draw a family tree from Peter Pan, who first appeared in 1902 ("and thus it will go on, so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless"); to Mary Poppins in 1934, with her stern and impenetrable enchantments ("Mary Poppins never explains anything"); to the anarchic and surreal logic of *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) and *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (1968), who "drank all the water in the tap". (And on to Roald Dahl and Frank Cottrell-Boyce and Lissa Evans and to someone whose name we do not yet know, writing somewhere a story that will shake us in our collective shoes.)

The family tree keeps growing. Children's fiction today is still shot through with exactly the same old furious thirst for justice that characterises fairy tales: the wicked stepmother is beheaded by a trunk, Mrs Coulter in Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass* (2000) falls eternally through a hole in the tissue of the Universe. And, too, knitted closely into the need for justice, there is a related stance, the happier cousin of protective retribution: that of wonder. In a world which prizes a pose of exhausted knowingness, children's fiction allows itself the unsophisticated stance of awe. Eva Ibbotson escaped Vienna in 1934, after her mother's writing was banned by Hitler; her work is full of an unabashed astonishment at the sheer fact of existence. *Journey to the River Sea* (2001) has a kind of wonder that other kinds of fiction might be too self-conscious to allow themselves. So it's to children's fiction that you turn if you want to feel awe and hunger and longing for justice: to make the old warhorse heart stamp again in its stall.

Children's books are specifically written to be read by a section of society without political or economic power. People who have no money, no vote, no control over capital or labour or the institutions of state; who navigate the world in their knowledge of their vulnerability. And, by the same measure, by people who are not yet preoccupied by the obligations of labour, not yet skilled in forcing their own prejudices on to other people and chewing at their own hearts. And because at so many times in life, despite what we tell ourselves, adults are powerless too, we as adults must hasten to children's books to be reminded of what we have left to us, whenever we need to start out all over again.

Children's fiction does something else too: it offers to help us refind things we may not even know we have lost. Adult life is full of forgetting; I have forgotten most of the people I have ever met; I've forgotten most of the books I've read, even the ones that changed me forever; I've forgotten most of my epiphanies. And I've forgotten, at various times in my life, how to read: how to lay aside scepticism and fashion and trust myself to a book. At the risk of sounding like a mad optimist: children's fiction can re-teach you how to read with an open heart.

When you read children's books, you are given the space to read again as a child: to find your way back, back to the time when new discoveries came daily and when the world was colossal, before your imagination was trimmed and neatened, as if it were an optional extra.

But imagination is not and never has been optional: it is at the heart of everything, the thing that allows us to experience the world from the perspectives of others: the condition precedent of love itself. It was Edmund Burke who first used the term moral imagination in 1790: the ability of ethical perception to step beyond the limits of the fleeting events of each moment and beyond the limits of private experience. For that we need books that are specifically written to feed the imagination, which give the heart and mind a galvanic kick: children's books. Children's books can teach us not just what we have forgotten, but what we have forgotten we have forgotten.

One last thing: I vastly prefer adulthood to childhood – I love voting, and drinking, and working. But there are times in adult life – at least, in mine – when the world has seemed blank and flat and without truth. John Donne wrote about something like it: "The general balm th'hydroptic earth hath drunk,/Whither, as to the bed's feet, life

is shrunk,/Dead and interred."

It's in those moments that children's books, for me, do that which nothing else can. Children's books today do still have the ghost of their educative beginnings, but what they are trying to teach us has changed. Children's novels, to me, spoke, and still speak, of hope. They say: look, this is what bravery looks like. This is what generosity looks like. They tell me, through the medium of wizards and lions and talking spiders, that this world we live in is a world of people who tell jokes and work and endure.

Children's books say: the world is huge. They say: hope counts for something. They say: bravery will matter, wit will matter, empathy will matter, love will matter. These things may or may not be true. I do not know. I hope they are. I think it is urgently necessary to hear them and to speak them.

END.

Weekend is almost here and hope it's a good one for you.

Alastair