

NEWS RELEASE Sunday 23rd August 2009

Culture Minister to present Robin Jenkins Award

As those shortlisted for the Robin Jenkins Literary Award, the UK's first environmental book prize, ready themselves for the event, it has been confirmed that Culture Minister Michael Russell will attend and present the award. The award prize of £5,000 is sponsored by Forestry Commission Scotland in commemoration of Jenkins' employment with the Forestry Commission during the Second World War. That experience influenced much of his writing, in particular *The Cone Gatherers* and *So Gaily Sings the Lark*. Forestry Commission Scotland recognises that Scotland's landscape and forests continue to be a valuable source of inspiration to many, including the many writers who have entered for the award and those shortlisted, all of whom have the environment, trees and forestry in Scotland as a key theme or setting for their works.

Michael Russell commented, "The links between Scotland's natural heritage and our culture are intrinsic and I am always eager to see them celebrated. Our landscapes and natural environment have long provided inspiration for our creators, as the writers in this fine shortlist demonstrate. The Robin Jenkins Award has an important place in our cultural life, marking the achievements of Jenkins and recognising our impressive contemporary writers that continue to highlight the role of nature in shaping our culture."

"The Culture Minister has long been a Jenkins enthusiast," said Russell Bruce, chair of Cowalfest, the Argyll walking and arts festival. "Michael Russell delivered the first Robin Jenkins memorial lecture at Cowalfest in 2005 when he referred to the author as 'a chronicler of changing Scotland', a description which seems eminently appropriate in Scotland's year of Homecoming when we welcome home many whose descendants left a country very different from what it is today. This is a year when we are all chroniclers of a changing Scotland, showing through hundreds of extremely varied events, what a culturally vibrant country Scotland has become. Some of these events have taken place within the National Forest Estate whose function has also changed, developing into the provision of an increasing range of economic, environmental, outdoor activity and social benefits."

The Awards shortlist in alphabetical order by author is

Myrtle and Philip Ashmole : The Carrifran Wildwood Story

Linda Cracknell : Doubling Back: Ten Paths Trodden in Memory

Louisa Gairn : Ecology in Modern Scottish Literature

Mandy Haggith : The Last Bear

Linda Gillard : Star Gazing

Gregory Norminton : Serious Things

The Award winner will be announced by Michael Russell at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in the Studio Theatre on 24th August at the end of the event starting at 5p.m.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

1. The Robin Jenkins Literary Award was launched at the National Library of Scotland on 29th of May 2008 by Michael Russell MSP, at that time, Minister for Environment. The deadline for submissions was 31st March 2009.

2. Robin Jenkins (1912-2005) was born in Lanarkshire. He worked as a teacher, first in Glasgow and later in Afghanistan, Barcelona and Sabah returning to teach at Dunoon Grammar School in 1968. During WW2 he worked in forestry in Argyll. Retiring from teaching he spent the last 32 years of his life at Toward in Cowal. Between 1950 and 2004 thirty three of his books were published and another posthumously in 2007. He was awarded an OBE in 1999 and a Saltire Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003.

3. THE JUDGES

Brian Morton grew up in Dunoon, where Robin Jenkins was one of his English teachers. He is a former academic, journalist, and broadcaster who nowadays combines writing with small farming and garden design. After thirty years away, he once again lives in Cowal, close to Jenkins' last home.

Alan Taylor is Associate Editor of the Sunday Herald and Editor of The Scottish Review of Books. He was formerly Managing Editor of Scotsman Publications, Deputy Editor of The Scotsman and Features and Literary Editor of Scotland on Sunday.

Isobel Murray is retired from teaching English (and Scottish) literature at Aberdeen University, where she pioneered the Writers in Residence scheme. She is now an Honorary Research Professor in modern Scottish literature. She reviewed new fiction for The Financial Times for fourteen years and has written widely on Scottish fiction, especially Jessie Kesson, Naomi Mitchison and Robin Jenkins.

Katie Wood is a journalist and travel writer and holds a fellowship from the Royal Geographical Society. A former Travel Editor of three national newspapers she is the author of 39 travel guides. She lives in Perthshire.

4.. The Robin Jenkins Literary Award is organised by Cowalfest,- The Cowal Walking Festival Association www.robinjenkinsaward.org

5. The Robin Jenkins Literary Award was winner in the ForArgyll.com 2008 Awards for Best Arts Website

6. Cowalfest is a Cowal wide organisation of community and business organisations promoting tourism development in Cowal with an expanding event management portfolio. It also organises Cowalfest the annual autumn walking and arts festival in the Cowal Peninsula, now in its seventh year. It is managing and presenting Gathering Around a programme of events, supported

by
Homecoming Scotland 2009, to enhance and extend the Cowal Highland
Gathering
Experience and is currently planning an event this September, supported by
VisitScotland, Tourism is Everyone's Business at Ardkinglas
House. www.cowalfest.org

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