

# and other shores

Ian Stephen was born in the Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides of Scotland and has spent most of his life there. He began to share poems and stories, internationally, from his time at the University of Aberdeen. His first poetry collection was with Dangaroo Press, Denmark, 1983. *Adrift* was published by Periplum, Olomouc, 2007. Stephen represented Scotland in Canada as part of the Scottish Poetry Library's 2014 'Commonwealth Poets United' project, reading at Edmonton Poetry Festival. A new and selected poems 'Maritime' was published by Saraband in 2016. Recent poems in *Acumen*, *Magma*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Rialto*, *Stand*.

His film-poetry was included in 'Running Time' – Scottish Art Film, 2011, as well as being part of his work as first artist-in-residence at StAnza poetry festival and in the Czech Republic.

## ALSO BY IAN STEPHEN

### POETRY

*Maritime – new and selected poems* (Saraband, 2016)  
*St Kilda Lyrics* (Inventio-Musikverlag, Berlin, 2013)  
*Oxford Poets 2013* (group collection) (Carcanet, 2013)  
*Adrift* – new and selected poems in English & Czech (Periplum, 2007)  
*It's About This* – a voyage to StAnza (Daemon, 2004)  
*Varying States of Grace* (Polygon, 1989)  
*12 poems* (Poetry Australia, 1984)  
*Malin, Hebrides, Minches* (with Sam Maynard) (Dangaroo Press, 1983)  
(editor) *Siud an t-Eilean*, poems and photographs (Acair, 1993)

### FICTION

*A Book of Death and Fish*, a novel (Saraband, 2014)  
*Mackerel and Creamola* – short stories (pocketbooks/Polygon, 2001)

### NON FICTION

*Boatlines* – Scottish Craft of Sea, Coast and Canal (Birlinn, 2023)  
*Waypoints*, Seascapes & stories of Scotland's West Coast (Bloomsbury 2017)  
*Western Isles Folk Tales* (The History Press, 2014)  
*Green Waters* (with Ian Hamilton Finlay and Graham Rich) (pocketbooks/Polygon, 1998)

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## Positions



## Fix (*for Saki*)

So many tracks  
in pencil or pixels  
your own and the others.

Solid or dotted  
erased or saved  
screened or printed.

Foot treads  
wakes  
vapour trails –

it's the way  
two transits become  
one definite fix

if  
there's an angle.

*Tannara Mòr postage stamp project – Saki Satom*

Skylight (circa 1980)  
(*for BZ*)

I'm lying with you a mile inland  
under rain that drills the roof-sheets  
storms all chinks in the flashings.

The sealed window unit isn't.  
There happens to be a power-cut  
and there's a depth of singing height  
above the weather.

We're not moored to  
anything I've seen  
sink or rise on a tested line.  
We'll hold together tonight.

## Skylight (circa 2020)

These clouds look steady enough.  
Their sky anchors must be out  
though I can't see the traces  
of the cables  
but the plough is on the move,  
fair sweeping along.

You join up the dots  
to catch the action.  
The whole picture,  
even the one in one window,  
doesn't bother to wait.  
A system drives itself  
out of the skylight.

The constellation  
hasn't got away.  
The iron up there  
tight on aluminium.  
Polaris is further  
out of the frame.

## Lyrics for Sean and Rosie

Did you dwell here with me  
in this beehive of placed stones  
if only for summers  
when cattle were heavy?

Did our barley-rigs hold  
in deep-cleared furrows  
between acidic turf  
and the salted rock.

Did you bait lines for us  
at the head of this steep loch  
where Sròn Ulladale bears  
to winter whitefish?

Will we set a fire now,  
light it this ebb tide  
to send out a signal –  
heat smoke and hope.

Should we plant a rowan here?  
The seed of red berries  
for imagination  
to germinate when  
leaves mould, stars die?

A hawthorn for healing –  
spur and leaf balm.  
We should put a bit back  
for others to find  
at a possible later.

Rooting for ourselves  
and for us all.

*Adapted from lyrics in 'Malin Hebrides Minches' –  
with photos by Sam Maynard, Dangaroo Press, 1983*

## Field notes

*(Following William MacGillivray, naturalist and artist, 1796–1852)*

### 1 Barabhas

you can put your hand to  
this form in the rushes  
still warm though

the speed of cooling air  
snaps at your knuckles  
but the smoulder  
of this morning

will equalise temperatures  
and the fog will be gone  
like the hare

### 2 Gearrannan

treading the turf  
Gearrannan, Dhail Mhor  
looking to footfalls

wary of fleeing wolves  
carrying their own young  
on their eight legs

below us and them  
the underswell  
at Àird a' Ghobhann

which Smith  
was he?

3 On Todun

a parent plover wades  
deer-grass gold

a cuckoo in the scrub  
of birch and myrtle

a merlin cuts across the face  
of field-vole rock

so sharp  
we expect  
blood from stone

4 Pabaigh Mòr

a cistern in drystone  
wetted by flood  
now holds velvets

greens for the stab  
of crabbing heron

5 Eadar Dha Fhadhail,

stark caps  
small commons  
stern wind  
between two fords

## 6 Beinn Dhubh Losgaintir

Paul is a composer  
who identifies birds  
from their sounds  
as well as their shapes.

‘It could be in the modes or the key.  
I haven’t got perfect pitch.  
I’ve faith in frailty.’

He had a brother he never saw.  
Lost, over the grey brow  
of this very ridge.

That’s really  
why we’re here  
where sundews  
trap specks  
with no noise  
that we can detect.

A peregrine shadow  
traverses from  
moorland to foreshore.

A distinct wingline  
then  
a blur and shriek.

## Don't forget

*(For KC)*

Don't forget  
to send me a wave or two  
from the other side.

Just dip  
the pulse  
in your long fingers  
to the churn  
of Manhattan.

It won't be instant  
but of course I'll sense it  
arriving in  
at our own west side.