

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) (pocket-
books/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.