

# The Robert Henryson Society

## June Newsletter

Greetings to all existing members of the Robert Henryson Society and welcome to those who are just beginning the relationship with us. We would like to see a number of changes taking place in 2010 which will enable us to expand and develop into the future.

On Saturday 15 May, an appreciative audience in Abbey Church Hall heard a variety of speakers celebrating Dunfermline's medieval maker, and were treated to a number of innovative methods of bringing the medieval world into the present day.

Paul Scott, doyen of Scottish cultural, literary and historical affairs, opened the conference by talking about 'Robert Henryson Today' – why study of a medieval writer in Middle Scots is relevant and essential to our understanding of ourselves.

John Craig McDonald, of King College, Tennessee, USA, described the research he had undertaken to produce the fascinating novel *Among His Personal Effects*, an imaginative reconstruction of Robert Henryson's last days as he remembers his life among the sacred and secular powers in 15<sup>th</sup> century Dunfermline, the novel structured around the poet's own words from the poems.

The morning session concluded with Tom Hubbard, Fife poet, novelist and playwright, and editor of the new magazine celebrating Fife writing – *The Pathhead Review* – giving an insight into the life of the 12<sup>th</sup> century polymath Michael Scot from his fictionalised account in the form of a Faustian pact with the devil.

After lunch, we were delighted to present the Henryson Tassie to Dr Klaus Janda, formerly of The Gordon Schools in Huntly, for *Ane Gude*



*Moralitie*, a magisterial commentary on all of Henryson's *Moral Fables* and the *Testament of Cresseid*. Pictured below left is Dr Janda following the presentation of the Tassie by Society Chair Colin Donati.

Elizabeth Elliott of Edinburgh University told the audience how she had been involved in the Edinburgh International Festival performance of the *Testament of Cresseid*, the David Levin production starring Jimmy Yuill as Henryson. Elizabeth gave us an insight into the challenges of producing a version of the work which would appeal to an international audience while remaining true to the word and spirit of the original.



Pictured left are the speakers from the 'academic' part of the conference – Paul Scott, Elizabeth Elliott, John Craig McDonald and Tom Hubbard.

The final event of the day was a rehearsed reading of 'Vycys o the Abbey Waas', a play featuring Robert Henryson among other notable former inhabitants of 'the auld grey town'. The playwright, William Hershaw, is also a well-known poet and folk-singer, with many celebrated publications both in print and on CD to his name. The small company of readers, Louise Timney, Willie Hershaw, Alan Sleater and Colin Donati, is pictured overleaf.

In this year of celebrating Fife, when Robert Henryson has been chosen as one of Fife's Local Heroes, it is gratifying to be able to bring together such a group of enthusiasts to present such an

The Robert Henryson Society  
Founded in Dunfermline 5 November 1993

### Membership application/renewal for the year 2010-11

To join the society, or to renew, please complete this form and return to the secretary at the address below.

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

.....

Post code/Zip code: .....

Telephone: .....

Email: .....

(please note that email is the preferred means of communication on cost grounds)

Cheques/postal orders for the annual subscription of £7.00 should be made payable to The Robert Henryson Society. Overseas members are requested to pay by International Money Order in sterling/euros. Multiple years memberships can be accepted if this is easier for overseas members.

Please send membership applications to:  
RHS Secretary, 2 Meadowend, Crossford,  
Dunfermline, Fife KY12 8YF, Scotland  
Enquiries to [mornaflaming@talk21.com](mailto:mornaflaming@talk21.com)

electrifying programme on a lovely May day. The Robert Henryson Society hopes that the event will be the springboard for further events and publications celebrating the poet in the course of the year.



At the AGM, the existing officebearers were re-elected (you don't get rid of us that easily!) with the exception of Ronnie Watt, who will be moving to the Borders soon. We shall miss his local knowledge and links with other heritage groups in the city.

As you will have realised from the attached membership renewal, it is that time of year again, when subscriptions are due. A number of people paid their memberships when they attended the conference, but that is not practical for the majority. Once again the subscription has been left at £7 for the year, and it is hoped that this year you will see rather more newsletters and information than was the case last year.

We had hoped that as Henryson was named as one of the Local Heroes for the year of Celebrating Fife 2010, there would be lots to tell you about Henryson-themed events and resources, but unfortunately that is not the case. His name does not even appear in the 'Dunfermline's Diamonds' exhibition in the Carnegie Dunfermline Library (a point which has been forcibly made by your secretary). However, outrage at this omission has provoked some reaction in the library, and there is a plan for a revival of the Henryson

Collection, and an information leaflet about the poetry and criticism held will be produced.

Perhaps the best means of bringing the poet to the notice of an apparently uncaring Dunfermline public would be to secure funding to mount a production of Willie Hershaw's play. The conference audience certainly enjoyed hearing of the different personalities and types whose voices were imagined lingering around the town, and if this could be done with the involvement of the local community, it would be more likely to attract funding. It would be good to see the Edinburgh Festival production of the *Testament* replayed, but we suspect that would be rather more difficult to achieve.

At the conference, people were asked what they wanted to see the society doing, and what suggestions they had for further publicity and development. A number of common features, such as an up-to-date online presence (which we are working on – honest!); productions of Willie's and Tom Hubbard's plays, possibly in the Abbey; stocks of Craig McDonald's books in all the local bookshops, libraries, schools and tourist outlets; drama work in schools and in the community. We would very much like to hear your ideas, and any offers of work to help the society, as we are a very small committee. Please feel free to email me with your thoughts and ideas.

