

Gathering at the Well

The following is an extract from the Laureate keynote address at the SFS Gathering at Oundle School in Spring 2011.

**Storytelling - Preserves the past
Reveals the present
Creates the future**

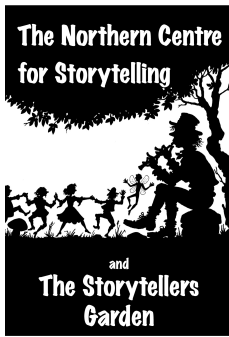
The stories we choose to tell and the stories we choose to listen to are a statement of who we are, in fact, of our cultural identity.

My goal as the first Laureate for Storytelling is to leave behind stories and storytellers. To this effect I would like to present the following metaphor: there is a Well that contains all of the stories that exist in the world. That Well also contains all of the skills needed to tell them. There are as many ways to tell a story as there are stories and storytellers. All storytellers gather at that Well. However, such is the value of traditional narratives, their content, structures and motifs, that exponents of many other art-forms and professions also gather at that same Well.

All teachers are there, after all as children we knew the best teachers were those who told us tales and taught us in that way. Many fine and successful authors and poets are there. One of the first, of course, was Chaucer. Thomas Hardy definitely paid a visit, alongside Shakespeare, Tolkien, the Romantic Poets, Charles Dickens, Tolstoy, Steinbeck, Mervyn Peake, Beatrix Potter and more recently J.K. Rowling and Michael Morpurgo. So many have visited and so many will.

As storytelling is also a visual art, albeit a virtual one, I would expect to see painters there; the Breughels, Michelangelo, Blake, Chagall, and so many more. Even Beryl Cooke and illustrators like Arthur Rackham, and textile artist Paddy Killer, who crafted Taffy's Tale Coat, would be there. Notable political figures will be there. Those who have made use of anecdote or narrative to good effect in their speeches include Winston Churchill, Tony Benn, Michael Foot, George Washington and Martin Luther King.

Many composers and musicians dip into the Story Well; Prokofiev, Britten, and not forgetting all of the narrative to be found in folk music. More recently exponents of more modern media have discovered this rich Well; Peter Jackson, Nick Park, and, of course, Steven Spielberg. I also hope during this first Laureateship many fresh faces will have made it to the Well for discovery of this precious art, and many old hands will have called by for refreshment, my main role, for this time, being to tend the Well.



HIGHLIGHTS OF LAUREATESHIP 2010 - 2012

With a brief including the task of raising the profile of Storytelling, Taffy began with a brilliant interview with James Naughtie on Radio 4. This grabbed media attention, and throughout the 2 years there were articles in Times Educational Supplement, Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, plus interviews on BBC Radios York, Lancashire, Somerset and Cumbria, and articles in local press all around the U.K.

Also, throughout the 2 years, Taffy undertook :-

- launch events at the British Library London, Seven Stories Newcastle on Tyne, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery
- a special performance for the Duchess of Cornwall and the children of Canon Burrows school in Tameside.
- a commission to research and record stories for Rosslyn Chapel, Edinburgh.
- a presentation of awards at a Gypsy Roma Traveller story-telling competition in Leeds
- judging of the Koestler Foundation Art in Prisons awards (storytelling competition).
- a keynote speech for National Association of Teachers of Drama at Oriel College ,Oxford.
- performances at Oxford Story Museum's conference.
- guest performances at Israel International Storytelling Festival, Tel Aviv.
- 2 week tour as guest of Japan Association of Storytellers, Tellabration Festival, Tokyo University, Matsumoto Performing Arts Centre, and Kiryu.
- 4 keynote speeches for education conferences at Liverpool, Cheshire, Dudley and Halton.
- Stratford upon Avon Literature Festival.
- Lichfield Literature Festival.
- a "Weekend with the Laureate" training weekend, with Deputy Laureate Shonaleigh, Halsway Manor (National Centre for the Folk Arts).
- Festival at the Edge, Shropshire.
- performances at the Scottish Storytelling Centre, Edinburgh.
- Wales Millennium Centre, Glanfa Stage, Cardiff.
- guest speaker, Wordsworth Trust Arts & Books Festival, Lake District.
- performances and judging, Twickenham schools storytelling competition.

Taffy's term ended with the completion of a commission to produce "Folktales of Cumbria" for the History Press, bringing the work full-circle, as the Laureateship had begun with the publishing of "Taffy's Coat Tales", by Aston Hill Editorial.

There were many other performances, and also the production of a wonderful film short, "Library in My Mind" by Jamie Hamer of Northern Media, about Taffy's role as Laureate. All this would not have been possible without the organisational support of the small team at the Northern Centre for Storytelling. Thankyou also to Shonaleigh for continued support as Deputy Laureate.