

Culture and Communities Committee

2.00pm, Tuesday, 20 March 2018

Makars' Court: Proposed Additional Inscription

Item number	8.10
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	11 – City Centre
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Executive Summary

Makers' Court at the Writers' Museum celebrates the achievements of Scottish writers.

The Makars' Court Committee of the Saltire Society now recommends that a further application be approved, to commemorate **W.S. Graham (1918-1986) – poet.**

Makar's Court: Proposed Additional Inscription

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Committee approves the addition of the proposed new inscription to Makars' Court.

2. Background

- 2.1 Makars' Court at the Writers' Museum celebrates the achievements of Scottish writers. This ongoing project to create a Scottish equivalent of Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey was the initiative of the former Culture and Leisure Department, in association with the Saltire Society and Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Ltd, as it was then known.
- 2.2 Makars' Court was officially inaugurated by the late Iain Crichton Smith in August 1998. The Saltire Society selected 12 writers, ranging in date from John Barbour, who lived in the 14th century, to Sorley MacLean, who died in 1996. Each writer was commemorated by a quotation selected from his or her work which was inscribed in stone and set in the paving which leads from the Mound and the Lawnmarket approaches to the door of the Writers' Museum.
- 2.3 Between October 2000 and May 2017, 28 other inscribed stones were added.

3. Main report

- 3.1 It was always the intention that Makars' Court would grow and develop into a Scottish national literary monument as more writers were commemorated. At its meeting on 10 March 1997 the then Recreation Committee established that the method of selecting writers for commemoration would involve the Writers' Museum forwarding sponsorship requests for commemorating writers to the Saltire Society, who would in turn make a recommendation to the Council.
- 3.2 The Makars' Court Committee of the Saltire Society now recommends that a further application be approved, to commemorate **W.S. Graham (1918-1986) – poet.**
W.S. Graham
- 3.3 William Sydney Graham was born to a working-class family in Greenock in 1918 and educated at Greenock High School. He left school at fourteen and was apprenticed as a draughtsman to a Glasgow engineering firm, and for two years he

attended part-time classes in structural engineering at Stow College, Glasgow. While serving as an apprentice he took up evening classes at Glasgow University to study Art appreciation and Literature.

- 3.4 In 1938, he was awarded a union bursary that allowed him to attend the Workers' Education Association college at Newbattle Abbey, near Edinburgh, where he studied, among other subjects, literature, philosophy, and drama.
- 3.5 Graham was lucky to make important literary contacts early. He met Edwin Morgan in 1937 and first encountered the Scottish modernist firebrand Hugh MacDiarmid in Glasgow during the early years of WWII. He developed a special rapport with Dylan Thomas, who not only influenced his early work, but also helped to champion it.
- 3.6 Graham's poetry made its first appearance in *Poetry* magazine, in March 1947 and he taught at New York University during 1947–8.
- 3.7 In 1948, T.S. Eliot accepted Graham's fourth collection, *The White Threshold*, for publication, and Faber and Faber remained his primary publisher. In 1951 Graham read his work in the US on a tour with David Gascoyne and Kathleen Raine, organized by John Malcolm Brinnin.
- 3.8 In 1954 he married Agnes (Nessie) Dunsmuir.
- 3.9 Graham's work investigates language and community and asks key philosophical questions in an engaging, energetic and often humorous way.
- 3.10 Graham is unusual in that he might be thought of as a poet among painters. He spent most of his adult life in west Cornwall where a growing colony of experimental artists came to respect the determination and acute self-criticism with which he pursued his poetry. He became close friends with Roger Hilton, Peter Lanyon, and Bryan Wynter, for whom he wrote elegies which are among his best-loved poems. He also became friends with Wilhelmina Barns-Graham, Robert Brennan, Terry Frost, Patrick Heron, and Karl Weschke, among others.
- 3.11 This circle of friends impacted significantly on the development of his work. His background in engineering gave him a keen sense of structure and use of space, this applying as much to poetry as to engineering, or to painting. New poems from this period — including "Hilton Abstract" (published in the *New Statesman and Nation*, January 1957) and "The Constructed Space" (*Poetry*, October 1958) - show his work becoming more overtly concerned with the abstract and the difficulty of communication between individuals, including writer and reader - themes which would become obsessive in the poetry of what might be called his late style.
- 3.12 *The Nightfishing* was published in 1955, his poetry undergoing a startling change of idiom before he published his next book, *Malcolm Mooney's Land*, in 1970. That collection and his last, *Implements in Their Places* (1977), were for many readers his greatest achievement. Both received PBS recommendations.
- 3.13 He died at home in Madron on 9th January 1986 and is now widely viewed as one of the key UK poets of the late twentieth century.

3.14 The sponsor, the Estate of W.S. Graham, states the reason for their choice as follows:

3.14.1 'W.S. Graham started out as an apprentice draughtsman for a Glasgow engineering firm and eventually became one of the most greatly admired Scottish poets of the twentieth century. He spent most of his adult life in west Cornwall where a growing colony of experimental artists came to respect the determination and acute self-criticism with which he pursued his poetry. Despite being overlooked in his lifetime among his contemporaries in the literary world, Graham's work has aged well, and a generation of young, emerging poets are finding themselves galvanized by his example. His influence on today's writers and readers, of all ages, and from across the spectrum of poetic appreciation, is strong.

This commemoration of his life and work through the placing of a stone in the Makars' Court is also a symbolic homecoming for the author, one which significantly contributes towards preserving and promoting his legacy for future generations.'

3.15 The proposed inscription, and source of the quotation, are as follows:

W.S. Graham (1918-1986)

What is the language Using Us For?

(from the collection: Implements in Their Places, published by Faber and Faber 1977 page 199, line 1).

4. Measures of success

4.1 The installation of an additional inscribed stones in Makars' Court.

5. Financial impact

5.1 All costs involved in designing, carving and laying the stones will be met by the sponsor.

5.2 Costs associated with the official unveiling of the stones can be contained within the 2018/19 revenue budget held by Culture.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

6.1 None identified

7. Equalities impact

7.1 None identified

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 The additional stone will add to the amenity of the immediate area. No negative impact is anticipated.

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Liaison with the sponsor and the Saltire Society has taken place.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 [Inscriptions at Makar's Court, The Writer's Museum](#), 29 July 2003
- 10.2 [Makar's Court: Proposed additional inscription](#), 6 December 2005
- 10.3 [Makar's Court: Proposed additional inscriptions](#), 6 June 2006
- 10.4 [Makar's Court: Proposed Additional inscription](#), 22 June 2010
- 10.5 [Makar's Court: Proposed Additional inscriptions](#), 26 April 2011
- 10.6 [Makar's Court: Proposed Additional inscription](#), 20 August 2013
- 10.7 [Makar's Court: Proposed Additional inscription](#), 22 October 2013
- 10.8 [Makar's Court: Proposed Additional inscription](#), 11 March 2014
- 10.9 [Makar's Court: Proposed Additional inscriptions](#), 20 March 2017

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11. Appendices

None.