

Culture and Communities Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 7 December 2023

Makars' Court: Proposed Additional Inscription for Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir

Executive/routine
Wards

Routine
All

1. Recommendations

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

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

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Report

Makars' Court: Proposed Additional Inscription for Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides background to the development of Makars' Court as a national monument to Scottish writers and summarises information about the latest poet nominated for inclusion, Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir (1724-1812). Committee is asked to approve the application.

3. Background

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 By November 2022, another 31 inscribed stones had been added.

4. Main report

- 4.1 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.

- 4.2 The Makars' Court Committee of the Saltire Society now recommends that a further application be approved, to commemorate the poet **Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir (1724-1812)**.

Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir

- 4.3 Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir (Duncan Ban Macintyre) is one of the most famous and best-loved of all Gaelic poets. Although he was not literate, he had a kaleidoscopic vocabulary and extraordinary verbal dexterity.
- 4.4 His songs describe the natural environment of the Gàidhealtachd, especially the deer and other wildlife, in vivid and minute detail. His works also express dismay at the economic and social changes that came over the Gàidhealtachd in his time, as expressed in the song from which the proposed extract is taken, 'Cumha Coire a' Cheathaich' (Lament for Misty Corrie).
- 4.5 Born in Glen Orchy in Argyll, he served, somewhat reluctantly, on the Hanoverian side during the 1745 Jacobite rising but left in 1746 for employment as a gamekeeper on the Argyll-Perthshire border.
- 4.6 He relocated in 1766 to serve until 1793 in the Edinburgh City Guard, the city's police force. He is buried in Greyfriars Kirkyard, where he is commemorated by a fine sandstone obelisk.
- 4.7 The proposed inscription, and source of the quotation, are as follows:

Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir (Duncan Ban Macintyre)

1724-1812

**'S e mùthadh air an t-saoghal
An coire laghach gaolach
A dhol a-nis air faondradh**

(A change has come upon the world
That the fine, beloved corrie
Should now be desolate)

From *The Songs of Duncan Ban Macintyre* (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1952), pp. 176-77.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 On approval, the stonemason's designs for the inscription will be finalised and work will get underway to prepare Makars' Court for the installation of the new sandstone slabs.
- 5.2 An unveiling event will be arranged with the sponsor and is expected to take place in March 2024.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 All costs involved in designing, carving and laying the stone will be met by the sponsor.
- 6.2 Costs associated with the official unveiling of the stone can be contained within the 2023/ 24 revenue budget held by Culture and Wellbeing.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 Approval of the inscription will allow access for all Edinburgh residents to visit a key literary and heritage site but at this stage no immediate equalities and poverty factors have been identified that will need to be taken into account.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 No environmental impacts have been identified. It is anticipated that this recommendation, if implemented, will not result in a change in vulnerability for Edinburgh's people, places and biodiversity or a change in the effects of climate change on Edinburgh's people, places and biodiversity.

9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 9.1 Liaison with the sponsor and the Makars' Court Committee co-ordinated by the Saltire Society has taken place.
- 9.2 The additional stone will add to the amenity of the immediate area. No negative community impact is anticipated.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 Inscriptions at Makar's Court, The Writer's Museum, Executive, [29 July 2003](#).
- 10.2 Makars' Court: Proposed additional inscription, Executive, [6 December 2005](#).
- 10.3 Makars' Court: Proposed additional inscriptions, Executive, [6 June 2006](#).
- 10.4 Makars' Court: Proposed Additional inscription, Culture and Leisure Committee, [22 June 2010](#).
- 10.5 Makars' Court: Proposed Additional inscriptions, Culture and Leisure Committee, [26 April 2011](#).
- 10.6 Makars' Court: Proposed Additional inscription, Culture and Sport Committee, [20 August 2013](#).
- 10.7 Makars' Court: Proposed Additional inscription, Culture and Sport Committee, [22 October 2013](#).

- 10.8 Makars' Court: Proposed Additional inscription, Culture and Sport Committee [11 March 2014](#).
- 10.9 Makars' Court: Proposed Additional inscriptions, Culture and Sport Committee [20 March 2017](#).
- 10.10 Makars' Court: Proposed Additional inscription, Culture and Communities Committee, [20 March 2018](#).
- 10.11 Makars' Court: Proposed Additional Inscriptions, Culture and Communities Committee, [26 April 2022](#).

11. Appendices

- 11.1 None.