

A CITY OF STORIES

CELEBRATING
900 YEARS
OF EDINBURGH



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EDINBURGH 900

Edinburgh 900 is a landmark celebration marking 900 years since Edinburgh was first officially recorded as a royal burgh in 1125. Throughout 2025, the city will come alive with a diverse and inclusive programme of events, exhibitions, and community-led projects that honour its rich heritage, vibrant present, and hopeful future.

From storytelling and art installations to heritage trails and workshops, Edinburgh 900 invites residents and visitors alike to explore the city's history, celebrate its people, and imagine what the next 900 years could hold.



EDINBURGH
900

CELEBRATING 900 YEARS THROUGH COMMUNITY, ART AND STORIES

This project brings people together to celebrate Edinburgh's 900-year history through storytelling and collaborative art. Inspired by local literary greats like Robbie Burns, Sir Walter Scott, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Sir Ian Rankin, participants will create artworks using reused materials in sessions guided by artist Isabell Buenz. These individual pieces will be assembled into a large-scale, handmade pop-up book—a colourful, community-made tribute to what makes Edinburgh special, to be displayed across local venues.

Thank You

This project would not have been possible without the generous support of the City of Edinburgh Council through the Edinburgh 900 programme.

Heartfelt thanks to our wonderful storytellers—Olga Wojtas, Dionne Lackey, Jonathan Falla, and Sadie Maskery—for sharing their voices and imagination, and to our brilliant artist, Isabell Buenz, whose creativity and guidance brought every session to life.

And of course, sincere thanks to the authors themselves—Robbie Burns, Sir Walter Scott, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Sir Ian Rankin—whose stories continue to inspire and connect us across time.



ZENTANGLE WORKSHOP

SIR ARTHUR
CONAN DOYLE

SHERLOCK
HOLMES

THE ADVENTURE OF THE NORWOOD BUILDER

Jonathan Falla

Sherlock Holmes is bored, depressed, and probably wondering where to obtain some opium. It's 1903, and London is desperately short of good villains. Holmes has already (in *The Final Problem*) drowned Professor Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls. He has also (in *The Adventure of the Empty House*) dealt with Colonel Moran, 'the second most dangerous man in London' after Moriarty. Agatha Christie has yet to open Bertram's Hotel. So who or what is left worth detecting? One shares Sherlock's relief when a desperate young man hammers on the door at 221b Baker Street crying out for help. A ghastly murder has been committed; the stakes are the highest possible: a conviction will mean the gallows. Young John McFarlane is surely doomed...

As so often with Sherlock Holmes, we track the progress of the case by his mood: his delight at the new challenge; his frowning perplexity followed by dismay when the facts appear to go against him; the twinkle of exaltation in his eye when he spots the giveaway; his merriment at the denouement.

This arc of mood follows the classical structure of the story, which is a model of three-act drama. In Act One, the team at Baker Street is ready to respond. The problem arrives (McFarlane the murder suspect) and the key question is posed: can Holmes save an innocent man? In Act Two, a series of obstacles is confronted and overcome, but still that overriding challenge remains: can young McFarlane be spared the noose? Only after Holmes makes a crucial realisation do we tip into Act Three and the climactic confrontation, followed by a resolution in which all is explained. It is a textbook structure - which is no doubt why the story has been filmed twice and recorded as a radio drama half a dozen times.

There are other readily recognisable elements. The villain is a familiar character: miserly, devious, jealous, and much concerned to appear to be someone else. The police are well-meaning but inept (Inspector Lestrade is wrong again). Peculiar aspects of a house and its fittings are important, as in previous Holmes stories: in *The Speckled Band* there was a bed screwed in a particular position to the floor, with a small ventilation grille above; in *The Retired Colourman* it was the odour of rooms being repainted; in *The Empty House* the wicked Colonel Moran was trapped attempting to use derelict premises to murder Holmes himself. In the house of The Norwood Builder there is a discrepancy in the building's internal measurements. The dramatic climax is an indoor fire...

Norwood (in Croydon, south London) is the perfect location, a Victorian suburban landscape of canal and railway and new brick housing, which had grown rapidly in the later 19th century and which was dominated by a brickworks exploiting the local yellow clay. New building was everywhere; that is how Jonas Oldacre the Norwood builder had made his stash. Conan Doyle himself lived in Norwood from 1891-94 and was very familiar with street after street, terrace after terrace of new homes in pale brick.

Again, as so often with Holmes, there is an element that shows his singular expertise; this, after all, is the man who wrote a monograph on the differences between 140 varieties of cigar ash. The genius of Sherlock Holmes is his ability to see significant patterns where none had been perceived before. At Norwood, the new science of fingerprinting is key. Fingerprinting is the quintessential Sherlock evidence: pettifoggingly minute (and calling for a magnifying glass), a matter of classification, cross referencing and comparison, but with a certain drama in the language of patterns it identifies – the tented arch, the loop, the whorl and ridge. It was not exactly a new study: efforts to identify the unique character of fingerprints go back to ancient Babylon. An anatomist in 17th century Bologna, Marcello Malpighi, had attempted a systematic description. But only in the late 1900s did it become established in criminal detection, just in time for Sherlock and The Norwood Builder.

As ever, it was a practical-minded Scot who saw the significance of fingerprinting; Henry Faulds was employed as a surgeon in Tokyo. But, as ever, Scotland was denied due credit: when in 1886 Faulds tried to offer Scotland Yard his technique, the Met turned him down – and it was an Argentinian detective who in 1892 first solved a murder case using fingerprint evidence, a bloodied thumbprint on a door. Scotland Yard started using fingerprinting in 1901, just two years before Conan Doyle wrote our story. As we all know, the character of Sherlock Holmes was based on an Edinburgh physician – Dr Joseph Bell, of the Royal Infirmary – but the sorry truth is that the first police fingerprinting department in Scotland was not created until 1931, and then in Glasgow, not Edinburgh. Could it have been Conan Doyle's justified pique that led him to put a devious twist on the Norwood fingerprint, so that it is not the solid evidence it seems at first to be? Patterns always reveal something – but it may not be what you expect.



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930)

was a Scottish author and physician best known for creating Sherlock Holmes, the iconic detective famed for his logical reasoning and forensic skills. Doyle's stories transformed crime fiction and introduced enduring characters like Dr. Watson and Professor Moriarty. Though Holmes brought him fame, Doyle also wrote historical novels, science fiction, and campaigned on spiritualism. His influence on detective literature and popular culture is profound and enduring.

THE STORYTELLER



Jonathan Falla

Jamaican-born Jonathan Falla is a dramatist, novelist and historian who worked for aid agencies in various tropical countries. His work includes the play *Topokana Martyrs Day*, the BBC film *The Hummingbird Tree*, the novels *Blue Poppies* and *Poor Mercy*, and the ethnographic study *True Love and Bartholomew: Rebels on the Burmese Border*. A Fellow of the Royal Literary Fund, he taught humanities for the Open University, and was director of the St Andrews University creative writing summer schools. He lives and writes in Fife.

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DOLLS AND BOXES

SIR IAN RANKIN REBUS

THE FALLS

Dionne Lackey

Imagine any other city in the world set against the backdrop of an ancient, extinct volcanic hill. Arthur's Seat is the reflection in the mirror of the ancient volcanic eruptions, tropical storms and seas and large glacial ice streams that have shaped our city. It is the stuff of legend and mystery. Our mystery is real and then imagined. It's 1836, a collection of strange miniature coffins are found in a little cave on the side of the hill that towers over the Old Town. The coffins are just a few inches long and contain tiny wooden dolls, all dressed differently. Who or what are they? Why were they hidden? One theory is they were made by a shoemaker acquaintance of grisly Burke and Hare. It's been a thriller to solve for nearly 200 years.

There are always stories to tell about unsolved mysteries like this. Edinburgh's best-known contemporary crime fiction writer Sir Ian Rankin used the find as inspiration for one of his books, *The Falls*. Past and present collide in the novel. Inspector Rebus (made famous by the TV series) believes the city's bloody past is casting its shadow of a case he is trying to solve. Maverick DI John Rebus has two leads to go on. A small coffin with a wooden doll found on the edge of the city at the Falls, which are near the home village of a missing art history student. The student is the daughter of a wealthy banker. The other lead is an internet role-playing game.

Rankin discovered the find during a visit to the National Museum of Scotland where the real-life remaining eight coffins are on display in the collection. He said: "As soon as I saw them, I knew they would make a great story, especially as no one had come up with an incontrovertible interpretation of their meaning. In other words, there was a story to tell about them..."

The atmospheric heart of Edinburgh broods over the characters in the book adding to the mystery and intrigue. Rankin is a master at evoking a sense of place in his novels. The city is as much a character as Rebus. Iconic landmarks in the novel ground it in its photogenic majesty. But the book also burrows into darker, subterranean spaces. The detective is ambivalent towards Edinburgh and sees the city as a state of mind: 'Hidden fears and dangers lurk in the alleyways just a stone's throw from the smart shops and Georgian facades'. Beneath the beauty, Rebus sees Edinburgh as a 'crime scene waiting to happen'.

The title of the novel is also a slow, haunting, mystical song called *The Falls* from the album *Rain, Steam and Speed* by The Mutton Birds. The refrain is: "There must be a story behind all that ..."

Imagine creating your collection of 'primitive' fabric dolls to display in an origami box. What materials, fabrics, textures and colours would you use?

Ian Rankin has gripped his readers for over 30 years with his Rebus stories. The books have been translated into thirty-six languages and have won the author many awards and international acclaim. Rankin lists Muriel Spark as one of the most influential authors on his career. He would love to meet Robert Louis Stevenson to ask him what was in the original manuscript of *Jekyll and Hyde*? What author would you most like to meet?



Sir Ian Rankin (b. 1960) is one of Britain's most acclaimed crime writers, best known for his Inspector Rebus novels set in Edinburgh. Blending gritty realism with sharp social commentary, Rankin's work explores the complexities of justice, morality, and urban life. His books have sold millions worldwide and shaped modern Scottish noir. Beyond fiction, Rankin is a passionate supporter of the arts and has received numerous literary and civic honours, including a knighthood in 2022.

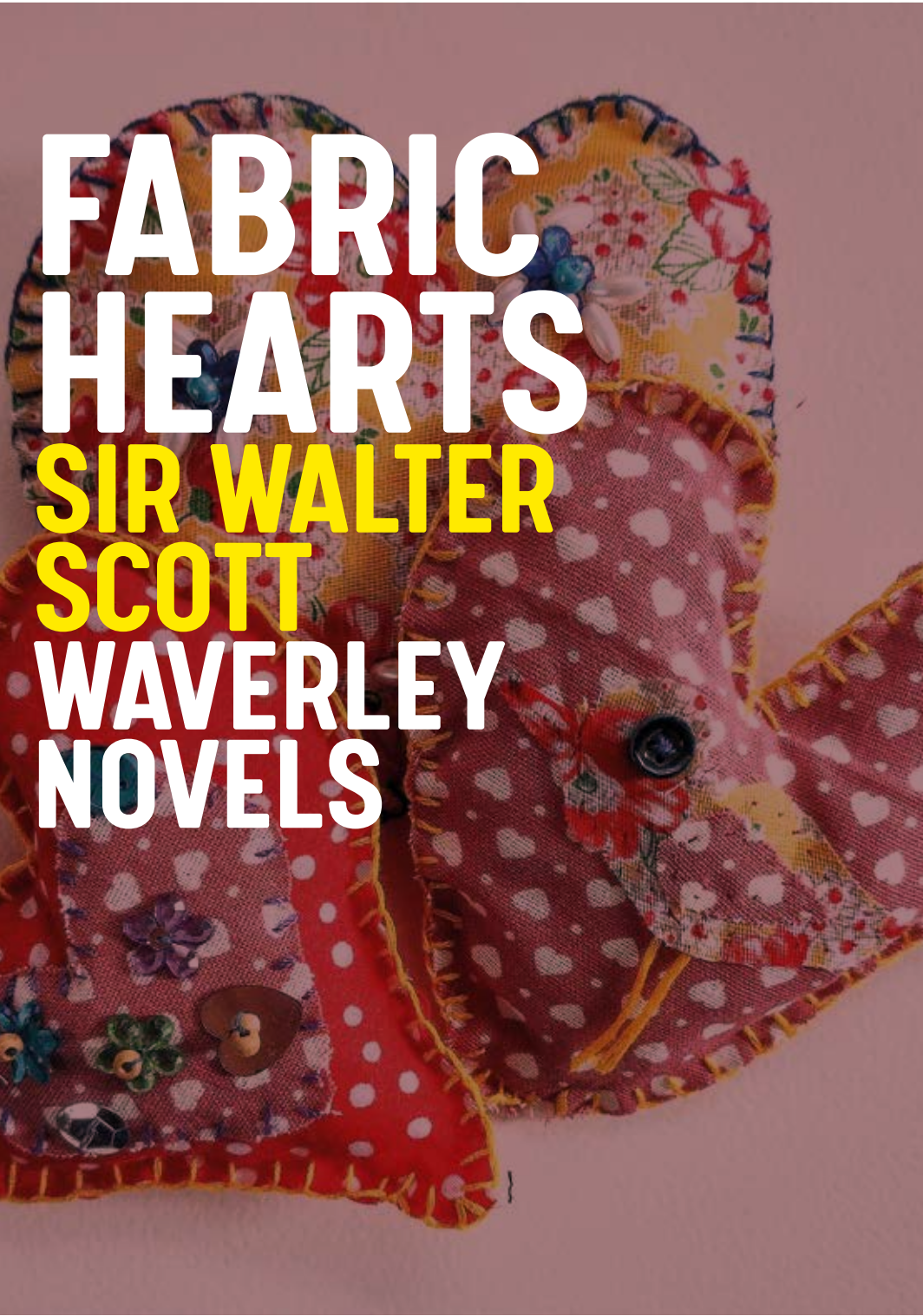
THE STORYTELLER



Dionne Lackey

Dionne Lackey helped set up vivienstudio.blog to make art and culture in Edinburgh and beyond accessible to all. She is also a writer, author and poet and is working on a novel *Uneven Times*.

vivienstudio.blog



FABRIC HEARTS SIR WALTER SCOTT WAVERLEY NOVELS

THE HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN

Olga Wotjas

I'd never been in Edinburgh before and like most people, I wanted to take a souvenir back with me. I'd bought all the usual throwaway trinkets for friends, but I wanted something a bit more lasting for myself.

I was in the Royal Mile, just at the Heart of Midlothian, and I thought that would be the perfect reminder. And I was in exactly the right place for tourist shops. At least, I thought I was, but when I asked for a Heart of Midlothian, they were all useless. I was offered a book by Sir Walter Scott, a Christmas tree decoration, a sterling silver necklace, and a football shirt. That last one made no sense at all – I think the assistant didn't understand my accent.

I trudged down in the direction of the Palace of Holyroodhouse. I knew there was a gift shop there, and had reconciled myself to getting a piece of royal memorabilia instead, maybe a tartan umbrella or a milk jug.

But just before I reached the bottom, I noticed a narrow wooden door, painted moss green, slightly recessed into the stonework. Its brass handle was worn smooth, and a small sign hung overhead: The Unexpected Item.

I pushed open the door and the scent hit me first: a blend of lavender, old paper, and something faintly metallic, like coins or stormy air. The lighting was softly golden, and came from mismatched lamps tucked into corners. Strings of fairy lights looped lazily from the ceiling. Dark wooden shelves bowed slightly under the weight of their contents, which had no clear order but were just clusters of oddities: a wire birdcage, a wind-up gramophone, several snuffboxes, a miniature hot air balloon, giant tarot cards.

As I gazed around, a young man emerged from the back of the shop. He certainly wasn't classically handsome: his nose was a bit crooked, and his hair looked as though he'd tried to tidy it and then given up halfway. But he had lovely warm amber-brown eyes.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

"I hope so," I said. "Do you by any chance have a Heart of Midlothian?"

He smiled. "I do," he said. "I'm from Midlothian and I have a heart."

I was footsore, I was disappointed, but I managed to produce an answering smile for the joke.

"You can have it if you like, but I'll let you see it before you decide," he said.

He turned away from me, pulled up his t-shirt, and started fumbling at his left-hand side.

This was taking the joke too far. I was just about to say thank you and leave when he gave a bit of a gasp as though he'd done something with an effort, and turned round, holding the loveliest heart I'd ever seen. It was like a plump crimson pincushion in brushed velvet. It was exactly what I wanted.

"It's wonderful," I said. "How much is it?"

I was frankly prepared to pay whatever the price was, £20, £100.

But he said: "It's not for sale."

He saw my face fall and hastily went on: "I mean it's not part of our stock, so I can't sell it. But I'll be delighted to give it to you."

"Oh no," I said. "I couldn't just take it. I would want to give you something in exchange."

He smiled again. "That would be very kind. Perhaps you could give me your heart?"

I wasn't sure whether this time it was me not understanding his accent. He saw my confusion and said: "There's a zip just on your left hand side but very few people notice it. If you unzip it, it's quite easy to remove your heart."

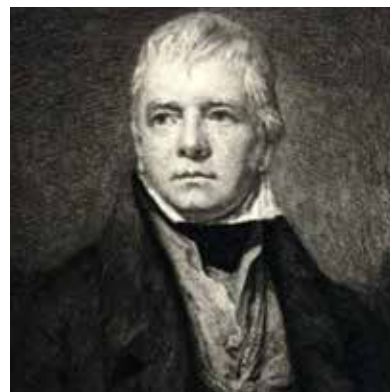
"But - don't I need it?" I heard myself say.

He was reassuring. "You'll have mine."

He showed me to a curtained changing room where I could take my top off in private and I discovered he was absolutely right: there was a small zip on my left hand side. I unzipped it, and felt inside. I had to tug a bit, but there was my heart, petite and delicate, like scarlet silk, pulsing gently.

I emerged, and in a moment of gentle solemnity, we nodded to one another and exchanged hearts.

And then I was back in the changing room, his heart was mine, and I was zipped up once more. His heart had a steady, calm, reassuring beat. So this is what it's like, I thought: this is what it's like, to have a Heart of Midlothian.



Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) was a pioneering Scottish novelist, poet, and historian, widely regarded as the father of the historical novel. His best-known works, including *Waverley*, *Rob Roy*, and *Ivanhoe*, blended romance, adventure, and history, shaping how the world viewed Scotland. Scott celebrated Scottish heritage and played a key role in reviving national pride. His influence extended beyond literature to politics and tourism, and his legacy remains visible across Scotland today.

THE STORYTELLER



Olga Wojtas

Olga Wojtas is Edinburgh born and bred, a proud Southsider who started out in Marchmont, moved to Blackford, then Morningside and now Bruntsfield. She writes the *Miss Blaine's Prefect* comedy crime series, featuring Shona McMonagle, a time-travelling librarian from Morningside. She also writes a series of e-novellas set in the Cotswolds, under the name Helena Marchmont.

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PAPER ROSES

ROBERT
BURNS

A SELECTION
OF SCOTS
SONGS

A RED RED ROSE

Sadie Maskery

Burns not only wrote poetry but collected traditional Scottish folk songs. Some of his most famous poems are set to old tunes, and *Red Red Rose* is one of these. It has been sung to other music, but the best known version is that set to *Low Down in the Broom*, which was composed in 1760 or perhaps earlier.

Red roses were sacred to the Greek and Roman goddesses of love, Aphrodite and Venus, and have been a symbol of devotion in poetry and song throughout the world. Roses are in many Scottish love songs that Robbie Burns would have heard and written down.

Love isn't just about what you see, you love everything about a person - how they feel, how they move, even their scent. A rose embraces all the senses, which is what makes it such a powerful symbol. Imagine Burns' rose, "*newly sprung in June*", a time when all your feelings are at their height because it is spring and everywhere is buzzing with warmth and life. It is blossoming in the sunshine. It sways in a breeze or bends under the kiss of raindrops. It perfumes the air, so you sense it even before you see it. Press a flower to your face and you feel the velvet coolness of the crushed petals then sweet nectar dew upon your lips. Clutch too tightly and risk pain, for there may be thorns. A rose brings so much joy. It is a precious gift for someone you desire. Even pressed between the pages of a book and rediscovered after decades its faded beauty can revive distant memories.

Robbie continues, though -

"My love is like a melody, so sweetly played in tune."

You can imagine the melody from the words, whatever tune he first imagined when he wrote the poetry. It will be gentle, but true, not noisy. A song sung beautifully but honestly can make people think back to happiness - or sadness - just like a fragrance or image.

His skill was in finding simple words to share with readers the passion and tenderness of his feelings. He didn't write fancy poetry with big words and classical references. He was a farmer's son, not an aristocrat or academic. *Red Red Rose* is in Scots and easy to understand. The language of parting is universal. Hundreds of years before The Proclaimers would walk 500 miles and 500 more, Robbie swore he would see his love again "*though it were ten thousand miles*". Bob Dylan chose *Red Red Rose* as the song that was most influential on his

life. In *Make You Feel My Love* (which was covered by Adele in 2008) Dylan writes that he would “go to the ends of the earth for you”. Taylor Swift sang of “a red rose” that “grew up out of ice frozen ground with no one around to tweet it” in her song *The Lakes*. Robbie Burns inspired the Romantic poets Wordsworth and Shelley in their use of landscape and humble language to explore profound emotions. So yes, there is even a connection between Taylor and Robbie.

Robbie wrote love songs and poetry for different women over the years. By the time he died, aged 37, he had fathered 12 children. He was a very good poet. A young Walter Scott met him and found him charismatic – “his manners rustic, not clownish, a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity”. In his portrait (now in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery) you can see his soulful brown eyes and romantic good looks, so it wasn’t just the writing that made him a success.

But the music is as important as his words, to me at least, in making *Red Red Rose* timeless. The version I know is easy to sing, but hard to sing well. It covers a wide range – many people find that it starts too low, or finishes too high for them to manage without straining their voice. It is in a major key, which means it sounds ‘happy’, but it is a simple tune that allows the melancholy of the lyrics to resonate. Like many of Burns’ songs, it doesn’t need a grand accompaniment, but sounds truest with a simple backing, say a fiddle or guitar, or even nothing at all. It is a folk song, not a massive rock anthem. That means the singer is very exposed. A melody to be so sweetly sung in tune is easier when you have lots of other people playing to hide behind. *Red Red Rose* requires integrity of voice, not fancy tricks. It requires confidence but not loudness. It is best in an intimate space and to be shared rather than shown off. The music and words in synergy together combine to make something greater than the sum of its parts. It’s a lot like love. Imagine being the person *Red Red Rose* was sung to for the very first time.

If you were to write a love song, what would you use as the symbol?



Robert Burns (1759–1796) is Scotland’s national poet and a cultural icon, best known for his heartfelt poetry and songs in Scots and English. His work, including *Auld Lang Syne* and *Tam o’ Shanter*, explore themes of love, nature, and social justice. Burns’ honest portrayals of everyday life and his championing of the common person made him beloved across generations. Celebrated globally each January on Burns Night, his legacy continues to influence literature, music, and Scottish identity.

THE STORYTELLER



Sadie Maskery

Sadie Maskery lives in Scotland by the sea. Before lockdown she was a jazz and folk singer. Since 2020 she has written poetry and been published in various places including Poetry Scotland, Gallus, Poet’s Republic, The Selkie and The Scotsman. Her most recent collection, *With The Usual Apologies*, is published by Red Ogre Press **[Buy it here]**.

She is available for any readings or festivals if bribed with snacks.

EDINBURGH REMAKERY

Edinburgh Remakery an award winning charity and environmental social enterprise committed to diverting waste from landfill, building a stronger community, and promoting a culture of repair and reuse. Our business model is based on the principles of the Circular Economy. We repair, refurbish and responsibly recycle what others send to landfill, and we pass these repair skills onto others within the Edinburgh community.

To achieve this we:

- Run creative Community Clubs to reduce social isolation
- Provide free refurbished tech to people who need it most
- Provide a free Tech Disposal Service for businesses
- Make it easy for individuals to donate their old tech
- Repair and refurbish donated tech
- Sell affordable refurbished electronics

Our Purpose is to Waste Less Live More

Our Vision is to create a culture of sustainable, waste-free living, and protect our planet for future generations to come

Our Mission is to reduce waste by providing repair and reuse services and training to communities and businesses



ABOUT THE ARTIST



Isabell Buenz

Isabell is a visual artist, maker and workshop facilitator based in Edinburgh. She is interested in using expressive arts in personal development and as support methods, using various art forms such as dance, crafts and art in her work with people of all abilities.

The artist draws on her background of growing up in Germany at a time when recycling was still in its infancy. Her first craft book was introducing her to crafting with newspaper which started her life-long interest in reusing and repurposing any kind of material.

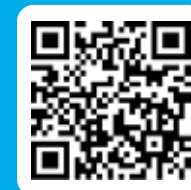
Isabell has lived in Scotland since 1989 and has exhibited her work across the UK and abroad. She has been hosting regular workshops for the Edinburgh Remakery and other organisations in Edinburgh and the Scottish Borders where she runs a variety of workshops with a focus on the reuse and repurposing of materials.



www.isabellbuenz.co.uk



[@isabellbuenz](https://www.instagram.com/isabellbuenz)



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Your donation helps fund creative Community Clubs that reduce social isolation, build confidence, and spark joy through shared experiences. You'll also be supporting our Tech Gifting Programme, providing devices and data for those in need, and hands-on Repair Cafés – all helping to build a more connected, inclusive Edinburgh. And it's not just people you're helping – by supporting repair, reuse, and education, your gift protects the planet too.

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THE QUEEN'S AWARDS
FOR ENTERPRISE:
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2022

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