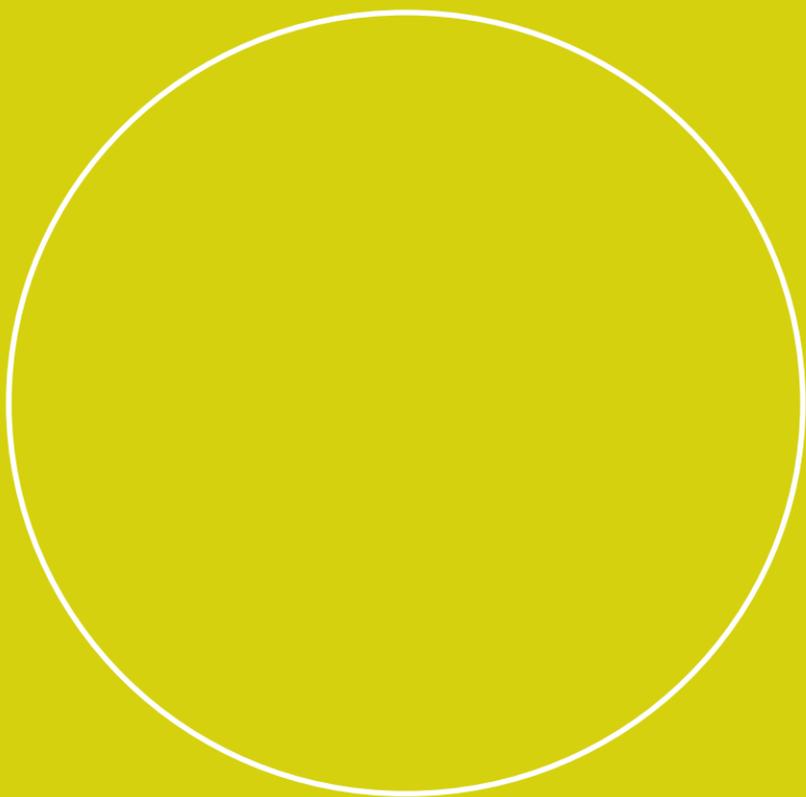




from there to here



from there to here

POETRY FROM THE ST MAGNUS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL ORKNEY WRITERS' COURSE



St MAGNUS
INTERNATIONAL
FESTIVAL

THE **GEORGE MACKAY BROWN** FELLOWSHIP

First published in 2012 by

The George Mackay Brown Fellowship

in a limited edition of 200 copies

Compiled and edited by Pam Beasant

Designed by Iain Ashman

Text and photographs © individual contributors

This collection © The George Mackay Brown Fellowship

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed by The Orcadian Ltd,
Hell's Half Acre, Hatston, Kirkwall,
Orkney, KW15 1DW

The Orkney Writers' Course is run as a partnership between the St Magnus International Festival and the George Mackay Brown Fellowship. It was supported by the Scottish Island Writers' Network and Orkney Islands Council. Thanks to the staff of the Pier Arts Centre, the Stromness Hotel and Stromness Café Bar.



Eight talented poets converged from all over the UK and beyond to take part in the Orkney Writers' Course 2012. Based in the Pier Arts Centre, Stromness, and working intensively over four days, the writers produced poetry which was read at the dedicated Festival event, *Poems, with Tunes, Tea and Cake*, in the Stromness Hotel. Additional course sessions included an experimental join-up with the Orkney Composers' Course, where the writers' lyrics were set to music. This collaboration was so much enjoyed, it's planned to develop it in future courses. Festival poet Alice Oswald led an electrifying masterclass, and Kristin Linklater delivered a pre-event session on voice, presentation and relaxation techniques.

This pamphlet represents a small sample of the work produced. With a range of styles and influences, the poetry reflects eight clear voices, and the experience of working together on the course. It was a privilege to be part of that process.

Pamela Beasant
course director and tutor



Jen Hadfield
guest tutor



Andrew Sclater, GW Colkitto, Catriona Yule, Julie-Ann Rowell,



Brynna Bailey, Benjamin Morris, Helen Vincent, Lydia Harris

Poem to bring us from there to here

I

To dream of leaving the Water of Leith
To dream of leaving the dried garden
To dream of leaving the house newly inhabited
To dream of leaving my straddled house of muddled anticipation
To dream of leaving the perspex lampshade on my cat's head which is tied
 on with gold string from an old Christmas present and which dangles
 loosely behind and tufts round his neck
To dream of leaving the corner of the porch smudged with the same
 smudge for nineteen years
To dream of leaving the half-said lie
To dream of leaving the lines that the wind and the rain
 have pushed through the bedroom wall
To dream of leaving but not being able to go

II

To dream of travelling through the sculpture croft of Lotte Glob at 121,
 Laid, Loch Eriboll, I think
To dream of travelling through candy-floss
To dream of travelling through a vessel made of glass, an ocean made
 of silk
To dream of travelling through beds of fluid moving air, held up, but
 not cushioned
To dream of travelling through the fog of my mind, the six a.m. alarm
 droning buglike into an envelope of sleep
To dream of travelling through Whyte's Causeway, Kirk Wynd, and
 Dunniker Road
To dream of travelling through this brutal green spring
To dream of travelling through the signs telling the sheep to avoid
 the underpass
To dream of travelling clean through stone

III

To dream of arriving: unfinished

To dream of arriving: naked and blooded

To dream of arriving: at night unbridled by darkness

To dream of arriving: fit for anything

To dream of arriving: to walk to the water's edge, run my hands across its skin

To dream of arriving: at Eliza Frazer's step

To dream of arriving: fear-soaked and stinking

To dream of arriving: a cannon between two benches ready for firing

To dream of arriving: where the heart is

where it does not hurt

and being glad



Brynna Bailey

My feet

My feet wish they could sing
to your smiling chorus of 'no shoes, no shoes'
Where I grew up it was illegal to drive barefoot
illegal to enter a public bar without appropriate
footwear
but really it was more about who did not have shoes
than simple acts of joyful barefoot rebellion.

This acorn

This acorn is from an oak tree
in my father's garden
planted two hundred and thirty years ago
by a homesick Englishman.
I know
you will think me a liar
but it sings.

It sings to me of other acorns
that grew unmolested
that became tall ships with trembling sails
planed
oiled
waxed.
Not prevented from birth.

I'm afraid

I'm afraid, I told him
I'm afraid of everything
I keep speaking but it seems
no-one can hear me.
So he unbuttoned his ribcage
showed the still damp fingerprints
where the surgeons had tried to repair
the near-defeat of his grief
a raw and puckered absence
charred like the shadow
on a Nagasaki pavement.

What I carried

What I carried here
was my madness,
a raging death-bent child
embedded like a secret, an occult
plasmodium beneath my ribs.
I followed the dusk-lit trail
of weeping ghosts to the water's edge
through a street worn smooth with endings.

Poteen

Sure, he says, it is only potatoes
here have some and try it.
The mug mists with fumes
misses my lip
as I tip it, dip my tongue with caution.
Almost felled by the smell, to show willing
not to seem rude, I swallow anyway.
It is only later, so much later
groping my way through naked trees to find
bits of my clothing still swaying on their
sudden perches that I begin to think.



I hear now

I hear now that you are afraid
of the silence in your room
refuse to shower or even eat
and you cannot recall your life at all.

I wish you unendurable terror
I curse you under every rising moon
that you should escape all memory
not even this song of hate can reach you.





GW Colkito

An Orkney Prayer

like some old ceremony conducted by priests we have been gathered
from many parts drunk together talked as strangers
have become friends

I could run on with this and have a feeling

there is a poem in these circling thoughts

(clockwise never widdershins)

each came our own stone with creases and lumps

with names scratched into us

with dates with parts broken from lightning strikes

from unseen blows by others

or self inflicted

chipped and aged

we sit in a ring

voices I hear voices

I hear

i

and now it is not i

some indefinable shift in the soul

in those voices spoken imagined embracing loving an incantation

Trust your self Trust your reader Trust your listener

and as I chant an inner whisper Trust your fellow poets.

I am crying

(maybe I should not tell you that - but I trust you)

run your lips through my tears

Had your chips

Mothers swear by chips
over chip pans
at times swear because
thought police, do-gooders,
weight-watching gestapo
shout
Not Chips Not Spuds
NO
but they don't have to feed
on a budget
you can't fill a tummy with lettuce
or tomatoes (if they will eat them)
apples and oranges are crap
at soaking up gravy or
topping a pie or
shutting the little buggers up so
that they don't stare blankly
at the plate saying
where's the chips

Home to Orkney

(Note: extracts from a longer poem, selected by the editor)

- ... rumbling wheels
support the stuffed case
a mind overflowing
- ... Journey begun
the case seems lighter
hopes rolling
- ... A9 - No problem
with no wheel to hold
blue sky thinking
- ... Truth and lies
cases roll on beyond
one lifetime
- ... nightmare of broken strands, broken me, broken
- ... Life rolls on
Wheels spinning unbidden
The thread
- ... An Orkney sea an Orkney sky and I
together
lie at harbour.
- ... I travelled 14 hours
The thread of road weaving north
- ... The textile printed, years ago,
reclotches
- ... I wrap myself in.
- ... Home
Is where peace
Is

Meditation on Kirkwall

From the tower of St Magnus Cathedral
looking down on the chancel roof

feel
a suction
a desire to flip
into the void to break
the link between feet and
ground to fall

fall

fall

f

a

l

l



Lydia Harris

*The mouse my father sees in the
broken burglar alarm sensor*

I push a pencil up the back,
tap the plastic casing 4, 5 times.
He says, *It's curled up there,*
it won't come out.

He says, *You don't believe me.*
It's there, it can't get out.
It's sleeping.

He sees through my tale
about a crack big enough
for tiny bones and that it's outside now,
and my mother when she points out
mice don't climb walls.

Later when I say good bye,
he's watching out for it,
turned in on itself
among the loose wires and dust.

If you were the boat at Tufter

I'd unhook your loop of blue rope,
lie feet to prow, not ask about currents.
If you said, *Sure, I'm caulked, tarred,*
oiled, braced, I'd say I knew it all along.

Moon

Balanced on the point of itself
 behind Noltland
 it sinks without scoring
 the surface of the sky.
 Dig there and you'll find
 earth warm as a resurrected body.

Elevators, shouts Ivy,
I'm playing elevators.
 She slides down the guard rail.

Me too, calls the moon,
all the way to the Fair Isle,
all the way to Sami country
where I'll let a girl
in reindeer slippers
embroider my face.

Where

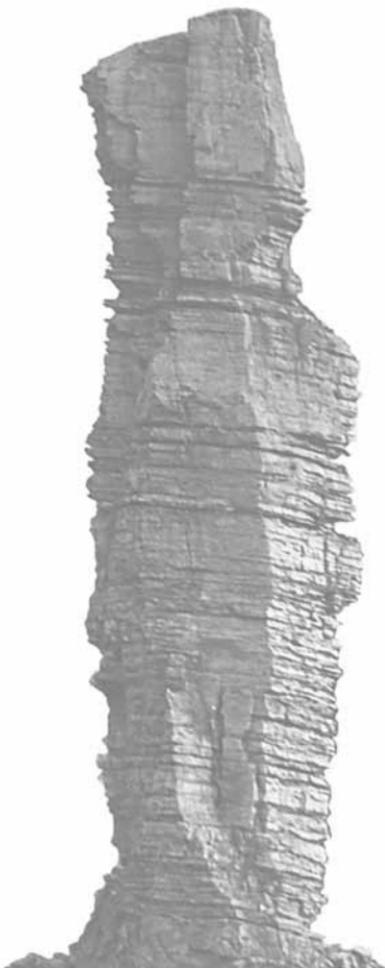
The sign at the break in the wall
 and the finger on the black line
 of the road on the map. The line
 of the river and the sign of the city.
 The sign of the city, the line, the line
 to the mountain. The line that becomes
 the mountain. The home. The home
 in the shadow of the mountain. The room
 in the home. The corner of the room
 in the home in the shadow of the mountain
 where your finger follows the black line
 from the edge of the page. The speck
 on the line. The dot where the line breaks.
 The break in the ink of the line.
 The sign at the break in the wall
 where the finger makes its mark.



Benjamin Morris

Haiku

The Old Man of Hoy,
standing tall despite his age.
Birds nest in his beard.



Vantage

It was not
at first
visible from
the far side
of the hill
but on scaling
the summit
of the verge
which rose
as a rainbow
staked into
the soil—
the fine chill
of the upper aether
distilling the blood
and leading the breath
to fall in clumps
to the earth—
it was then
possible to espy
from the apex
of the curve
a great forest
rising beyond
and below
spread clear
to the horizon,
an acre
to the eye
at an inch,
a distance of
a month's march
from where
our present position
met the first tree.



Julie-Ann Rowell

Killer

To see that tall fin in the water –
the brutality of the fin, its portent,
its effortless slash, that confidence,
you don't need to see the eye, know the sex,

refining its journey, a hoopla with the waves,
all bone, all fissure, not struggle
though struggle must deepen resolve.

High on the cliff, safe to look and wonder at
the next fin and the next, a pod seems the wrong word –
a pod contains, a pod is of earth, not roving sea.

But it's the only animal with Killer in its name,
just so we know, don't get it wrong, that slicing fin.



Knowing the difference

Wind describes the land here, sculpts faces, hands,
a force that brings its own complications – a constant
ringing in the ears, like the nag, nag, nag of love.

Many insist there are no trees on Orkney and will not
hear any different. Sheep on a bare hill
they understand, just as they understand how

my small town crouches in the valley by the long
cool lash of the River Dart. No one believes I've seen
grey seals as high up as the weir, fives miles from the sea

and thereabouts the wind is caught, contained, the sandy
river, the still wide glide, the dip and down stays in mind
as does Orkney's great expanse, the sound and salt of Mainland.

Both places share summer rain, trenches of it, diabolical rain
occluded signs of rain, dripping, drenched.





Andrew Sclater

Orkney weeks

(Note: extracts from a longer poem in progress, selected by the editor)

Your wall
is your picture,
your frame is a door
to the sea.
And what is light
more than water
of midsummer-no-night?

Your hearth has been fractured,
and, in these soft channels,
the joists of your floors
lie with all of your joinery,
undone in nettles
beside the braw brown burn,
to whiten in coldbiting winds.

The raddled bone
is skull,
the huddled sheep
the dyke.
Your thrawn curtains,
torn and torn,
blown below zero.

One broken laugh
at Bu.
A chimney's
roar in The Breck.
At The Lash,
the Neck of Brodgar,
Bockan,

the winds may be souther
or wester
or easter,
be norther or barer
than a smooth shaven liar,
or blowing from Souter
or puffing from Hoy.

**

I took the yole
out there
where
you'd hear
silence
that's slept
with the sea

and you'd see
far off an ecstasy
of moss
on stone,
one lone
eider
flown.

**

The boy's head was fair, so
brimful of brochs and breakage
of pitchers, adornment of amulets
tossed down by Picts.
When he went
to the college,
he died.

**

The corpse of our summers,
 the faint smell of flowers,
 the winter's nights fucking for unending
 hours to stir up the water through geos,
 then batter the seabirds
 through Birsay's
 black gut.

Kye to milk
 and herring to split.
 A neck of a hen
 to be broken again.
 Fling the kelp far off over the lazies.
 Now, take up your needle
 but first light the lamp.

**

The pillars of the kirk
 strengthen your bones
 more than lifting stones.
 Wear the dirk
 proudly.
 It shall be your salvation
 should anything happen to me.

Do not be fooled by the summer.
 It is later than you think.
 The winter lies in the sea.
 I go first to the sea
 and you follow after.
 I shall embark for Hudson's Bay
 in one week and one day.

I have no courage to go,
 to leave you.
 Do not say
 one word. The grey
 mare is sick.
 You may have to have her shot.
 Have you shot her or not?

When the bairns run from the door
 say a prayer.
 When the bairns play at the shore
 say another.
 When I am fair foo wi the drink,
 do not run to your mother
 but say another.

Look to your oars
 Row
 Over the voe,
 No
 Pool will swallow you
 Fool,
 Row.



Helen Vincent

Tuber Triptych

Taboo

'If a woman is expecting a baby, she should not eat potatoes' (old saying)

She's eating potatoes
to the sound of clicking tongues.

Better to go outside and kill the craving
with a cigarette.

Champ

(Champ is a Northern Irish recipe for mashed potatoes with spring onions,
often given to children piled in a bowl with a well at the top filled with butter)

There's a mountain on the table
white, shot through with green.
Steel boat splashes the yellow
lake in the hollowed peak.

A cream volcano!
Foaming lava cascades
carries the green flecks away.

There's a steel drill twisting through to the core:
this mountain's falling in on itself;
valleys contoured for seconds
melt into streams.

A placid pool remains,
a few islands standing.
the shiny steel boat comes into harbour

and you're asleep

Your head and your cloud-covered hands on the table
of your high chair.

Potato, or

Musically, lyrically,
Alter-syllabically
Differently, sonically
Possibly, Gershwinly
Po-tah-to.

Sunrise, 2:54 am

You're the only one I can tell these things to
in the empty bar at night
During the day they're unspeakable
How can you drop these words into conversations
About petrol and pints of milk?

I don't know why you're here.
I'm here because
some days I think I won't get up anymore
The morning is nothing to me
I can't feel the sunlight on my skin
Some times it's only the brute rain
battering my face that tells me I'm alive

Then I have to deaden the dark hours
until the bottle's empty on the table,
Everyone else has gone to sleep.

Ring of Brodgar, Midsummer Eve

As the yellow flowers usher us out,
the stones close ranks behind us.

This land wants us off its premises:
it has urgent business to transact

With the white foam and the waves
impatiently knocking at its back door.



Edge

There are only two reasons
to come to where earth meets sea.
One is to reach the end
to run as far from the centre as road allows
let the hills bracket you off from the world beyond.

The other, to pause on the shore
then start the engine, or reach with your hands for the oars
Or, if the wind lets you, set sail.





Catriona Yule

Digging

In the splotch
of bogginess
I am filthy and clean.

Weight of foot,
clart of earth
smeared on my fingers.

They are holy, just as I.

Seeking instinctively
the crackled, pink skin
of potato:
solid, deep, guttural.



Impostor

Dainty thing aren't you?
Not so much a spud
as a puny coconut, a wiry hair,
a crooked aerial.

Don't think you're up to the soup,
the gloop of a hearty meal
barely make a mooful
to be truthful.

Your nowt but a shrivelled sack
topped with a sprig,
the wig of fakedom,
the yearning to be a tattie.



Renga

24 June 2012, Pier Arts Centre

A day of rainbows, horizontal showers,
light on squally water
at one a.m.

The gutter is full of flowers
there's no room for the rain

The steeple reaches
into the night's shine
people hum in their sleep

A hungry owl
yearns for darkness

Two bodies shift on a bed
one holds
one turns away

The stones on Swartmill
change place

The static light
of nowhere
and no one

If the snow comes and lies here
I will send you no answer

You'd have liked the puffins
for your neighbours
you'd have liked the touch of thrift

Spend, spend, spend
no wonder you eat alone

Orkney cats keep watch
guard their patches.
The mice are ready

Leaves fall on your face
I watch with open heart

This madness waxes and wanes
from the shore
I see a silver plate

A season of curtains
and cinema teas

Lauren soaks my nails in water
warmed by the turbine at the back

Something's changed in the air
the line of snow
is retreating up the hill

The little egret comes back to his mate
they reunite among sticks

The water knows the oar
as the soil knows the spade
as the air knows the wing

A tuneless hum to all of you
humming the hills and heart awake.

Bryna Bailey, GW Colkitto, Lydia Harris, Benjamin Morris, Julie-Ann Rowell,
Andrew Sclater, Helen Vincent, Catriona Yule, Jen Hadfield, Pam Beasant

BRYNNA BAILEY has written poetry since childhood. She grew up in Cape Town, South Africa, at a time when words were used as weapons and, if used in protest, were censored or banned, their passports confiscated. She has lived, worked and travelled extensively in most of the countries in southern Africa and in Israel. She eventually washed up on the shores of Orkney,

GW COLKITTO has published two poetry collections and a poetry pamphlet. He has had short stories and poetry in magazines and anthologies and an ebook novella *The Case of the Hungarian Foot* released by MX Publishing. Winner of the Scottish Writers' Groups' Short Story Competition 2011 and Poetry Competition 2012, he is a member of Read Raw Ltd, writers' collective, and regularly performs in Glasgow. Some of his work can be read at www.gwcolkitto.co.uk

LYDIA HARRIS was a teacher of English until 2006 when she retired and concentrated on her writing. Her first collection, *Glad not to be the Corpse*, was published in January 2012 by Smiths Knoll. Her poems have been published in magazines.

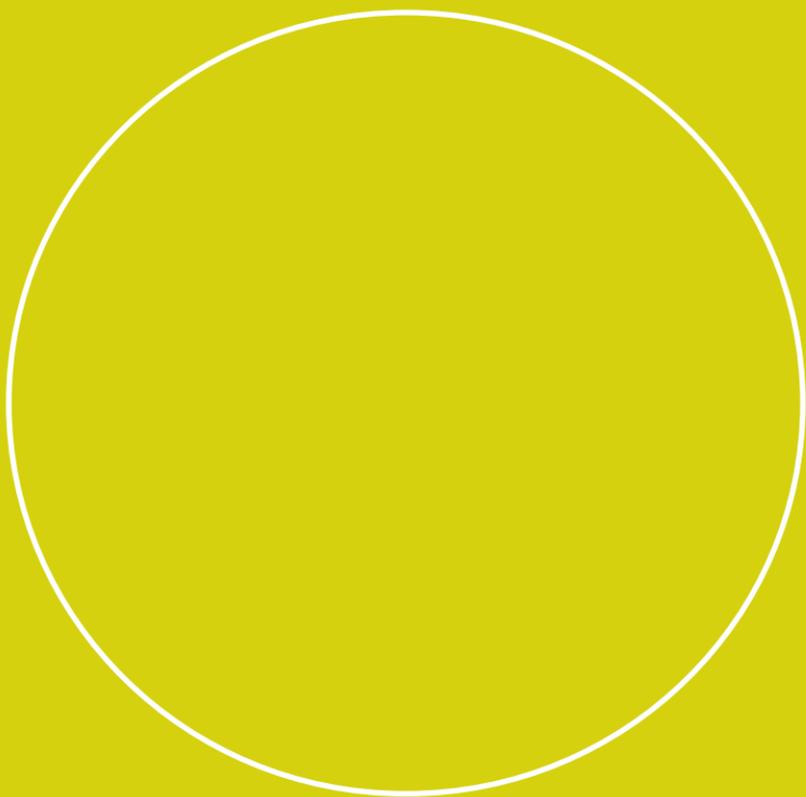
BENJAMIN MORRIS is a writer and researcher whose work – poetry, fiction, plays, and essays – has won such awards as a fellowship from the Mississippi Arts Commission, an artist's residency from A Studio in the Woods, and, recently, shortlisting for the Crashaw Prize from Salt Publishing. His research work has included positions at the Open University and the University of Edinburgh, where he is currently a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities.

JULIE-ANN ROWELL started writing poetry while studying for her MA in Creative Writing at Bath Spa University. She won first prize in the New Writer Poetry Competition for a short collection, and was runner-up in the BT Section of the National Poetry Competition in 2000. Her pamphlet, *Convergence* (Brodie Press) was granted a PBS Award, and her first full collection, *Letters North* (Brodie Press) was nominated for the Michael Murphy Memorial Prize for best first collection in Britain and Ireland, 2011.

ANDREW SCLATER has worked as an actor, gardener, lecturer, garden historian, and editor of Darwin's letters. His interests in art and landscape now tend towards internal landscapes. He was shortlisted for the inaugural Picador Poetry Prize in 2011. His work has won awards from New Writing North and the Scottish Book Trust (including mentoring by Gerry Cambridge), and a residency at Hugh MacDiarmid's Brownsbank Cottage. Andrew builds drystone dykes and lives in Edinburgh.

HELEN VINCENT was born in Belfast, and lived in Oxford and London before moving to Edinburgh a decade ago. She now lives within a stone's throw of Portobello beach. She has written poetry all her life, like many other writers trying to use lyric as a way of capturing the moment in the struggle against narrative and time.

CATRIONA YULE is a poet, short story writer and playwright from Aberdeenshire. Her work has been published on the Poetry Scotland website and in *Northwords Now*, *POTB* and *The Eildon Tree*. Her play, *Birdhouse*, was a winning entry in the WAC New Playwriting Festival and produced at The Lemon Tree in 2009. She is currently collaborating with ceramicist, Anne Murray, exploring folklore inspired by George Mackay Brown's poem, *A Reel of Seven Fishermen*.



Brynna Bailey

GW Colkitto

Lydia Harris

Benjamin Morris

from there to here

Julie-Ann Rowell

Andrew Sclater

Helen Vincent

Catriona Yule



St MAGNUS
INTERNATIONAL
FESTIVAL

THE **gmb** GEORGE MACKAY BROWN FELLOWSHIP