

First Minister plants a tree in memory of Marie Colvin

First Minister plants a tree at Traquair House in memory of the American war correspondent Marie Colvin.

THE corner of an orchard within the tranquil surroundings of Traquair House at Innerleithen in Peeblesshire is perhaps an unexpected place to find a tree and plaque dedicated to the American war reporter Marie Colvin, so tragically killed in February 2012 in Syria while covering the Siege of Homs for The Sunday Times.

But then to a great degree, that is what the ethos of Traquair House and its annual two day platform Beyond Borders has always been about: an opportunity for serious international dialogue and cultural exchange.

Now in its 10th year, Beyond Borders provides a beacon for topics that so many other international festivals, for their own reasons, choose to avoid.

This year, subjects ranged from William Dalrymple expanding upon his latest book The Prince Who Beat the Empire (the life of the rebel Indian prince who took on the East India Company) to Sir Tom Devine on the Scottish Clearances (Lowland and Highland), and Staffan de Mistura, former Special Envoy to Syria, talking about his life and work in pursuit of peace.

Equally thought provoking was a heart felt plea from barrister Fiona Darrick, TreeSisters founder Clare Dubois and Kite Insights founder Sophie Lambin – Women Leading Climate Action for a Just Future. Charlotte Muller-Stuart introduced a school striker's perspective. All powerful stuff.

Marie Colvin's colleague Lindsey Hilsum has written *In Extremis*, a tribute to her great friend. Marie's was a life selflessly dedicated to covering the front line of world catastrophes at a terrible personal cost. This was a woman of great integrity whose determination to report on what was actually going on behind the media black out proved fatal. If there can ever be any consolation, it is that her death made the world sit up and take notice.

Lindsey's talk was preceded by a discreet tree planting ceremony performed by Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon. Many of those present had known and loved Marie Colvin.

In July 2016, Marie's family, having obtained incontrovertible proof that the Syrian Government had directly ordered her assassination, filed a Civil Suit against the Syrian Arab Republic. They were awarded \$302million in damages.



Photo Roddy Martine