

Have you seen these statues in Edinburgh Park ?

Before their time.

Statues have featured a lot in the news recently especially in relation to the Black Lives Matter protests. One of the anomalies we identified in the Edinburgh statuescape is the lack of statues featuring women.

We recently discovered four statue heads at Lochside Crescent celebrating Scottish Literary greats. Two of the four bronze heads are of prominent women – Jackie Kay and Naomi Mitchison. The other heads are Norman MacCraig and William Sydney (WS) Graham.

Jackie Kay (b. 9 November 1961), is currently Scotland's makar, or national poet. She said that while growing up in Scotland, she "got beaten up quite a lot" because of her mixed heritage – born to a Scottish mother and Nigerian father. She was adopted by a Scottish couple (Helen and John Kay) and raised in Glasgow. In her memoir *Red Dust Road* she refers to herself as "part fable, part porridge".

Back in October 2012 before we knew of Colin Kaepernick and "taking the knee", Kay wrote a poem about kicking racism out of football. Her poem, "Hear My Pitch" remembers Arthur Wharton, the first black professional footballer to play in the UK Football League. Wharton, was born in Ghana; his father was half-Scottish and half-Grenadian. He came to England in 1882 and by 1894 was playing for Sheffield United. Jackie read her poem on the pitch before kick-off at the Sheffield United

v Portsmouth match on 29th October 2012. Sheffield United are passionate supporters of the Kick It Out campaign, which started back in 1993. Kick It Out works with the football authorities, professional clubs, players, fans and communities to tackle all forms of racism and discrimination. Kay is sculpted by Michael Snowden.

Kay's tenure as makar runs until 2021. The position is rewarded with an annual stipend of £10,000. Kay states that she feels enormous pride in being appointed to the role and while it has nothing to do with her own financial position – she wants the next makar to be paid the more reasonable amount of £30,000.

Naomi Mitchison née Haldane, (1 November 1897 – 11 January 1999) was a hugely prolific and controversial Scottish author. Perhaps her most well know work is *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* (1931). A vast novel encompassing a mixture of history, folklore and magic.

In 1916 she married Gilbert Richard (Dick) Mitchison a lawyer and Labour MP. Following the success of *The Corn King*, she and her husband purchased Carradale House in Kintyre. She spent most of the years of World War II at Carradale and became deeply involved in the local community. In this period she transitioned to poetry and created 'The Alban Goes Out' is a long narrative poem describing a night's fishing with the Carradale fishermen.

Mitchison was no stranger to controversy. She was commissioned in 1932 to write a guide for children and parents to the modern world which became *An Outline for Boys and Girls and Their Parents*. While the critics loved it it was roundly criticised by conservatives and religious leaders for its alleged Soviet leanings and lack of emphasis on God and religion. She also authored *We Have Been Warned*, which was published in 1935. Its depiction of rape, free love and abortion horrified and alienated many in polite society.

Mitchison traveled extensively and was a frequent visitor to Botswana, where she was made a sort of tribal mother (Mmarona) to the BaKgatla people. *Mucking Around* published in 1981 is an account of her global adventures across 50 years and five continents. Her sculpture is by Archie Forrest.



CAPTION: Bronze statues of Jackie Kay and Naomi Mitchison.
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