

Leith Festival – Ghosts of North Leith

Citadel Arts Group's twelfth foray into Leith Festival is an exploration of the atmospheric North Leith Burial Ground.

Their playwrights' workshop considered what lies beneath the Coburg Street cemetery and found a number of big characters interred in this small cemetery.

Seven members of Citadel's group of older writers each chose to research the story behind one of the graves.

There are people whose achievements and eccentricities will be dramatized in a play, *The Ghosts of North Leith*. Using music, humour and poetry, the drama will raise awareness of this fascinating area of Leith history.

In the Coburg Street Burial Ground lies Lady Anne Mackintosh nicknamed the 'Colonel'. Playwright Rhona McAdam explains she was drawn to her 'as she seemed a strong, independent woman, taking part in the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745. Her husband, Sir Angus, chief of Clan Mackintosh, was a Captain in the government troops. Since he was unable, or unwilling, to raise the clan to fight for Bonnie Prince Charlie, Lady Anne did it instead. When the Jacobites won the Battle of Prestonpans, Sir Angus surrendered to his wife. After the Battle of Culloden, when the Jacobites were defeated, Lady Anne surrendered to her husband.'

Jim Brown took on the poet, Robert Nicol, heralded as the next Robert Burns. Jim said: "I became fascinated by Robert

Nicoll because he was a poet, writer and radical newspaper man born in 1814, who packed so much into his short life. He died aged 23.”

No stone marks the burial place of 12-year-old Matilda Molesworth, but burial records indicate the spot. She features in the real-life story of the Trinity poltergeist. One of the collection of unexplained happenings in Catherine Crowe’s 1848 book “The Night Side of Nature”, it has popped up in anthologies of uncanny happenings ever since.

Another member of Citadel’s playwrights’ workshop, novelist Hilary Spiers wrote about Nellie Gladstones. She explained: “I’ve long been interested in the history of slavery in Scotland. While John Gladstones (buried in North Leith graveyard) and his grandson William Gladstone are better known, I felt John’s wife Nellie (who was known to be a very capable woman) might well have held views at odds with the men in her family. Women were a strong if largely unsung force in the abolitionist movement.”

Elaine Campbell came across the North Leith gravestone of three children and said: “I was intrigued. Who were these three bairns so lovingly remembered? In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the Millar children lived and died, infant mortality was ferociously high. Sadly all attempts to locate the children in church records proved fruitless. There were Millars living in Leith at the time. I have assumed Peter, John and Archibald were part of this extended, prosperous family of merchants. Although the “Three Cherubs” is my fictional account, I drew on historical material to describe their short lives and untimely deaths. By telling their story I hope to have given voice to the countless children who lie long forgotten in North Leith Graveyard.”

Was it chance or Divine intervention that led writers Carolyn and Brian Lincoln to the gravestone of the Rev. Dr. David

Johnston? Previous attempts at finding the grave of this pillar of the North Leith community had proved fruitless. The Lincolns were paying one last visit to the Coburg Street churchyard, when they noticed the letters D.D. poking through the moss. D.D. Doctor of Divinity. They scraped away some moss and there was the name. David Johnston (1735-1824) served the parish for nearly 60 years, a strong leader when Leith was seriously threatened by the ships of John Paul Jones, who supported the breakaway American colonies.

The play, which includes all these stories, and more, will be given a trial performed reading in North Leith Parish Church on 15 June. Citadel Arts Group seeks feedback from this first audience at Leith Festival with a view to staging a full performance of the play later in the year in the same venue.

North Leith Parish Church in Madeira Street welcomes Citadel Arts Group's interest in the burial ground, and the church building which was to have been the keystone of Leith's 'New Town'. Tim Bell said: "I welcome the play as a chance for local and Edinburgh people to see this beautiful Georgian Church before it is released from the Church of Scotland estate in 2024."

Venue: North Leith Parish Church, 51 Madeira Street EH6 4AU

Date: June 15th at 7pm

Tickets: £5 from lizhare@blueyonder.co.uk Tel 07770 623 924

Writers: Carolyn and Brian Lincoln, Jim Brown, John Lamb, Hilary Spiers, Elaine Campbell and Rhona McAdam.

Cast: Mark Kydd, Deborah Whyte, Chelsea Grace, Gregor Davidson, Dale McQueen.

Director: Liz Hare

Sound: Stewart Emm

Citadel Arts Group (SC 034687) is a Leith-based theatre company which specialises in creating new plays based on local stories, memories, and history.

CITADEL ARTS GROUP  PRESENTS AT LEITH FESTIVAL

THE GHOSTS OF NORTH LEITH

A performed play reading inspired by the stories behind the graves
in North Leith Burial Ground in Coburg Street



THURS 15th JUNE 7pm
NORTH LEITH PARISH CHURCH
51 MADEIRA STREET EH6 4AU

Tickets £5
available from lizhare@blueyonder.co.uk
07770 623 924



Guided Tour of North Leith Burial Ground in Coburg Street
Mon 12th June at 2pm. Limited places. Book from lizhare@blueyonder.co.uk

Leith
festival