

Former Makar's archive acquired by NLS

The literary archive of former national poet Jackie Kay has been acquired by the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh.

The archive totals 34 boxes of material that offers unique insight into Kay's life and writing and the rich record of her remarkable personal journey.

Included are personal letters, manuscripts of poems, novels, short stories, plays, diaries and press articles belonging to the poet, novelist and playwright who was Scotland's Makar – or national poet – from 2016-21.

There's also schoolbooks and university writing, early essays, family papers, notebooks, photographs, audio cassettes, prizes, awards and honours.

National Librarian Amina Shah welcomed Kay to the NLS in Edinburgh, and acknowledged her as one of the nation's most acclaimed and noteworthy cultural figures.

Ms Shah said: "The National Library has the literary archives of some of Scotland's most renowned authors, and now we've added another treasure to sit alongside them.

"This collection offers abundant insight into Kay's work and life, which are often inseparable. As a former Makar, prize-winning author and major literary figure, Kay's writing is widely known and in demand, and her archive is of significant research value to academics, students, biographers, historians

and all fans of Kay's work.

"We are most grateful to Jackie Kay for choosing us as the place for her archive. By doing so, she has ensured public access to her archive, which may inspire generations of writers and artists to come."

Kay said: "I'd never have thought, having kept all my old notebooks, jotters and letters for years, moved them from house to house to live in various attics or cellars, that they would finally end up in the best of all homes – the National Library of Scotland.

"And in the very best of company too – with Alasdair Gray, Muriel Spark, Nan Shepherd and Burns amongst many beloved others.

"My son said to me, 'Mum you're going to have nothing to do when you're dead'. It's a comfort and an honour to know that years after I'm gone people will still be able to have a good old rummage amongst my things."

Kay was born in Edinburgh to a Scottish mother and a Nigerian father, but was adopted as a baby by a white Scottish couple, Helen and John Kay, and grew up in Bishopbriggs, near Glasgow.

Her adoptive mother was Scottish secretary of the peace movement, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and her adoptive father was industrial organiser of the Communist Party.

She has previously told how her parents loved poetry and kept works by Scottish poets including Norman MacCaig, Sorley MacLean and Hugh MacDiarmid in the family home. But it was Audre Lorde, the late American writer, feminist and civil rights activist who inspired her.

Kay is the author of "The Adoption Papers", which won the Forward Prize; "Red Dust Road", winner of the Scottish Book of

the Year Award; “Trumpet”; and the Costa-shortlisted “Fiere”.

Scotland’s third modern Makar since the position was established in 2004, she has said it took becoming Makar in 2016 “to feel properly like I belong to my country”.

Kay is currently a Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Salford.

The Library was supported in the acquisition by the Soutar Trust and Friends of the National Libraries.



National Librarian Amina Shah welcomed Jackie Kay to the Library at George IV Bridge in Edinburgh, acknowledging the

poet and novelist as one of Scotland's Jackie Kay chooses National Library as home for her archive most acclaimed and noteworthy cultural figures. Pic Neil Hanna



National Librarian Amina Shah welcomed Jackie Kay to the Library at George IV Bridge in Edinburgh, acknowledging the poet and novelist as one of Scotland's Jackie Kay chooses National Library as home for her archive most acclaimed and noteworthy cultural figures. Pic Neil Hanna



National Librarian Amina Shah welcomed Jackie Kay to the Library at George IV Bridge in Edinburgh, acknowledging the poet and novelist as one of Scotland's Jackie Kay chooses National Library as home for her archive most acclaimed and noteworthy cultural figures. Pic Neil Hanna



National Librarian Amina Shah welcomed Jackie Kay to the Library at George IV Bridge in Edinburgh, acknowledging the poet and novelist as one of Scotland's Jackie Kay chooses National Library as home for her archive most acclaimed and noteworthy cultural figures. Pic Neil Hanna