

# Winners of this year's Young Walter Scott Prize for writers of historical fiction announced

The winners of this year's Young Walter Scott Prize for writers of historical fiction have been announced, with first places awarded to Katherine White in the 11-15 years category for her entry,

A Bog; A Blaze, in which the writer links the discovery of a 'bog girl', ritually murdered thousands of years ago, to the Nazi killings of children with disabilities and which the judges praised as "an original and brilliant story"; and to Sophie Berry in the 16-19 years category, for The Red Road, a story described by the judging panel as "a sensitive and powerful exploration of a racist lynching in Virginia in 1893".

The Young Walter Scott Prize – which is now open for submissions for next year – is for young writers aged 11-19 who are invited to submit a short story of 800-2000 words, set in a time before they were born.

Chair of the Judging panel, Elizabeth Laird, said: "Once again, it's been a joy to be a judge of the Young Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction. Both winning stories are

outstanding, but it was hard to choose the winners when the standard across the board was so thrillingly high.

“Each entry is a surprise, with subject matter this year ranging from the life of the Plantagenet Queen Isabella, to that of a young Black beggar in Victorian London, taking in, along the way, the assassination of Czar Nicholas and his family, the Unknown Warrior, the Easter Rising in Dublin, and a pony destined for Queen Boudicca’s chariot.

“There are stories set in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Korea, Ancient Greece and Chernobyl in Ukraine, with subject matter as varied as the locations. A vintage year of great stories from promising young writers.”

Talking about her winning story in the younger age group, A Bog; A Blaze, Katherine White from the West Midlands said: “My story is a little unusual in that I decided to set it in two distinct time periods that are separated by almost two millennia.

“Initially, it was only going to be set in one period, 12BCE, after a vicious Roman invasion in what is now the Netherlands. However, I realised that much of the popular consciousness around that time is based on the Romans themselves, rather than the profound impact their conquest often had on ‘barbarian’ tribes. Naturally, I wanted to do what I could to combat that.

“But as I researched the subject of my story more – the bog body of a disabled girl found with a noose around her neck and clad in what was possibly a sacrificial cloak – I kept being reminded of one of the many horrors of the Nazis, and in particular Aktion T4, a mass murder programme, where disabled Germans, including children, were taken from their families to be killed.

“What struck me most about these two stories was that although disabled people may have initially been treated better in the

1930s than 12BCE, the Yde Girl is better preserved – better remembered – than all those nameless and faceless children slaughtered by the Nazis. The fact that I could look at her face while writing my story just drove this point home for me. I had to write about it.”

Winner in the 16-19 years category Sophie Berry, from Kelso in the Scottish Borders, said of her entry, The Red Road:

“I chose to set my story within post slavery Virginia, 1893, during the time of the Jim Crow laws. Oppression and inequality are, in my opinion, the most important aspects of our past to look at, and I knew my piece was going to be centred around a specific and violent form of oppression- the lynching of a black man.

“I feel the type of racism experienced by black communities under the Jim Crow laws is relevant to the police brutality and race-based violence we are dealing with in modern times. Under the Jim Crow laws, African Americans were not enslaved, yet still experienced discriminatory violence under the façade of ‘justice’.

“I find it interesting how the same excuses used to justify lynching in the 1800s are still being used to justify many kinds of oppressive violence towards black people today, as well as other minorities.”

The two winners each receive a £500 travel grant, their stories will be published in this year’s Young Walter Scott Prize Anthology, and they will be special guests at the Borders Book Festival in Melrose, Scotland, in June (12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>) to be presented with their prizes.

Runners-up and highly commended young writers were also awarded in each age category. In the 11-15 age group, one runner-up was awarded: Suzannah Tulloch from Essex, for her story Mouse. There were five highly commended writers in the

younger category: Vijithan Aariyaki for Did We Deserve This?; Mary Gardner Smart for Pink Cardigan; Elan Latif for Hope; Sara Musabbir for Together We Are Dynamite; and Alexandre Portier for The Unknown Warrior.

In the category for writers aged 16-19, two runners-up were awarded: Hersh Singh from London for Romanov and Connie Schoales from Earlston in the Scottish Borders for Isabella. Four highly commended writers were also recognised: Bella Lee for City Rot; Queena Gu for Juvenilia; James Majid for The Boy and the Man, Easter 1916; and Freya Roodhouse for Seven Angels with Seven Plagues.

On the judging panel this year was award-winning author Elizabeth Laird (Chair); Young Walter Scott Prize director Alan Caig Wilson; literary agent Kathryn Ross; former Literary Editor of The Scotsman, David Robinson; and previous winner of the Young Walter Scott Prize, Rosi Byard-Jones, who is also a judge this year on the main Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction.

Founded in 2015, the YWSP has an association with the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, which was last year awarded to Kevin Jared Hosein for Hungry Ghosts. The 2025 Walter Scott Prize Longlist was released in February from Abbotsford, home of Sir Walter Scott himself, with the shortlist due in April, and the winner set to be announced at the Borders Book Festival in Melrose in June (12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>). The winners of the Young Walter Scott Prize will also be presented with their awards at the same event.

The YWSP was founded by the Duke and the late Duchess of Buccleuch. Sir Walter Scott was a kinsman of the Dukes of Buccleuch; Henry, 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke to whom his first major success The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border was dedicated; Charles, 4<sup>th</sup> Duke, his close friend; and Walter Francis, the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke, for whom he was guardian and mentor. The 10<sup>th</sup> Duke founded the

Walter Scott Prize in 2010 to honour the immense contribution Scott made to cultural life worldwide. The Walter Scott Prize is now managed by The Abbotsford Trust, an independent Scottish charity, and supported by the Hawthornden Foundation. Both prizes are supported by the Buccleuch Living Heritage Trust.

### **11-15 AGE GROUP**

**Winner – Katherine White**

**Runner up – Suzannah Tulloch**

**Highly commended – Vijithan Aariyaki**

**Highly commended – Mary Gardner Smart**

**Highly commended – Elan Latif**

**Highly commended – Sara Musabbir**

**Highly commended – Alexandre Portier**

### **16-19 AGE GROUP**

**Winner – Sophie Berry**

**Runner up – Connie Schoales**

**Runner Up – Hersh Singh**

**Highly commended – Bella Lee**

**Highly Commended – Queena Gu**

**Highly commended – James Majid**

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