

Shortlist for this year's Walter Scott Prize revealed at Abbotsford

The six-strong Shortlist for this year's Walter Scott Prize has been revealed by way of a treasure video hunt shot at Abbotsford, home to the Prize and to Walter Scott himself.

The six books were revealed in the historic walled gardens, entrance hall, and grand library of Abbotsford, with the treasure trail ending in Scott's study at the desk where he wrote many of his most famous works.

The six books on the Shortlist for the £25,000 Prize, with authors hailing from England, Ireland and the Netherlands, were revealed as:

THE HEART IN WINTER Kevin Barry (Canongate)

THE MARE Angharad Hampshire (Northodox Press)

THE BOOK OF DAYS Francesca Kay (Swift Press)

GLORIOUS EXPLOITS Ferdia Lennon (Fig Tree)

THE LAND IN WINTER Andrew Miller (Sceptre)

THE SAFEKEEP Yael van der Wouden (Viking)

The judges of this year's Prize, chaired by Katie Grant, said:

“From the escapades of young combatants in the Peloponnesian war in Sicily in the 5th century BC to a tender story of families isolated at home in the great British winter freeze of 1962/3, the shortlisted novels for this year’s Walter Scott Prize paint a wide literary canvas of richness and subtlety.

“They are a celebration of storytelling, encompassing a tale of revenge and reconciliation in post-occupation Netherlands, a picture of family claustrophobia in Tudor England, an exhilarating cross-country adventure through the Wild West, and a revelatory exploration of evil – under a thick social disguise – in 1950s New York.

“Together the books illustrate the founding principles of the Prize, bringing stories set in the past into our own time, through fine writing that is infused with ambition and originality to produce novels guaranteed to live long in the memory.”

The 2025 judging panel comprised writer Katie Grant (Chair), art historian James Holloway, children’s author Elizabeth Laird, broadcaster James Naughtie, writer and filmmaker Saira Shah, and two judges new to this year’s panel – previous Young Walter Scott Prize winner Rosi Byard-Jones, and bookseller Rosamund de la Hey.

Now in its sixteenth year, the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction is run by The Abbotsford Trust, the independent Scottish charity which manages Scott’s extraordinary home in the Scottish Borders and which is dedicated to celebrating and furthering Scott’s legacy. It is supported by Hawthornden Foundation, the Buccleuch Living Heritage Trust, and the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry in memory of Elizabeth Buccleuch.

Matthew Maxwell Scott, great-great-great-great grandson of Walter Scott, and Trustee of Abbotsford, said: ‘The best

historical fiction is not dry fact – it also tells us how the past felt, and holds a mirror to the present.

“By recognising the very best writing, the aim of the Prize is to inspire more people of all ages to discover the joy and value of historical fiction, to give both established and emerging writers a wider readership, and to bring together authors, readers and audiences to celebrate and question each other.

“ It’s therefore wholly appropriate that this Shortlist announcement comes direct from Abbotsford, the home of great historical fiction.’

The winner of the 2025 Walter Scott Prize will be revealed on 12th June in a live event at the Borders Book Festival in Melrose, Scotland, and receives £25,000, while each shortlisted author is awarded £1,500, setting the Prize amongst the richest fiction prizes in the UK. To qualify, books must have been written in English, be set more than 60 years ago, and have been published during 2024 in the UK, Ireland or the Commonwealth.