

## From the Old Brewery S2-EP3 .mp3

**Announcer:** [00:00:03] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.

**Ian Grosz:** [00:00:18] Hello and welcome to another episode of *From the Old Brewery*, a podcast brought to you from the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture, aimed at highlighting the research of students and staff here at the school.

My name is Ian Grosz, a Ph.D. research student in creative writing, and joined today by three wonderful guests: Professor Alison Lumsden, who is Regius professor of English literature at the University of Aberdeen, director of the Sir Walter Scott Research Center and honorary librarian at Scott's former home, Abbotsford, where she's also a trustee of the Abbotsford Trust. Also joining me is Anna Fancett, who is a research assistant at the center. And lastly, Natalie Tal Harries, who's a research fellow, also working at the Walter Scott Research Center here in Aberdeen.

So, Anna has published articles in the *Scottish Literary Review* and *The Wenshan Review*, as well as book chapters, blogs and teaching resources. Building on her doctoral research on the significance of familial representation in the novels of Walter Scott and Jane Austen. In 2020, she was the winner of the Jack Medal, which is awarded annually for the best article in a subject related to reception or diaspora in Scottish literatures, and she's currently working on a Walter Scott companion for McFarland's 19th century series, which is aimed at students, teachers and interested lay readers.

Natalie is working on the AHRC funded Edinburgh edition of Walter Scott's Poetry Project in her post as a research fellow with the center. She's also an ECR fellow at the Institute of English Studies at the University of London, where she's been working on the late Indian influences of PB Shelley. Natalie's research interests are primarily focused on Romantic poetry, and she's particularly interested in the ways in which the varied and often esoteric reading and interests of Romantic writers informed metaphysical exploration, transcendental experience and visionary expression in their poetry.

So welcome, all three! I got through that massive introduction there. So again, welcome.

Ali, I just wondered if you could start us off by telling us about the center and its history and its aims and some of the past projects, coming onto the current project it's involved with at the moment.

**Professor Ali Lumsden:** [00:02:21] Yes. So the Walter Scott Research Centre was established around 30 years ago, and it was really established by my former colleague and Emeritus Professor David Hewitt, to support the work of the Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott's fiction, So the Edinburgh Edition of the *Waverley Novels*, and that was a project to edit all Scott's fiction in 30 volumes. So that is why the Centre was set up, really to support that work, and that indeed was quite a task that involved returning to all the manuscripts, proofs and editions published in Scott's lifetime, and that was completed in 2012. But in the time between the Centre being set up and 2012, obviously it meant that Aberdeen had also gained a reputation for Scott studies through the work of the edition, and we'd acquired a wonderful collection of Scott materials, the Bernard C Lloyd Collection of Scott Materials, which is now in the Duncan Rice Library and also become something of an international hub for Scott Studies. So, with the novels complete, we turned to editing Scott's poetry. And so, the Centre, among other things, is now supporting the editing of the Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott's poetry.

**Ian:** [00:03:36] So how did you... how did you personally come – just for those people who don't know – how did you personally come to Scott and how did you get involved with the Centre to become the director?

**Ali:** [00:03:44] Well, I was an undergraduate at Aberdeen in the 1980s, and I studied some Scottish literature and I went to Edinburgh to do a PhD on contemporary Scottish fiction. And while I was there in my first few months, I thought, well, I should really read some of the older stuff as well. So I did and I thought, well, this is much more interesting than this modern material. So I ended up writing a Ph.D. on Scott and James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson. And I think this might be interesting for some of our postgraduate students to hear. In the last few months of my Ph.D., I applied for a teaching fellow post at Aberdeen, which I didn't get. But while I was being interviewed for that post, I was speaking to David Hewitt about my work on Scott. So six months later, when I had finished my Ph.D., David got in touch with me and said he had a six month job for a research fellow on the Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott's fiction, *The Waverley Novels*, and would I be interested in applying for it? So I did, and I thought this is a six month part time job it will fill in a bit of time till I decide what I'm going to do. And yes, 11 years later I was still in that post and in a much-promoted position and here I am now. A life with Walter Scott.

**Ian:** [00:05:09] brilliant, so total fate, but a great trajectory.

**Ali:** [00:05:11] Yes, partly fate and partly serendipity.

**Ian:** [00:05:15] So we've got to say a big congratulations for the funding that you've got from the AHRC, which is an amazing, cool million pounds! And if you could tell us about that – you've mentioned it briefly there – but could you tell us a bit more about that project: about the poetry?

**Ali:** [00:05:29] So when the novels were completed we felt we should turn our attention to the poetry. I think it probably would have been impossible to start with the poetry. It might be more logical to start with Scott's poetry and then move on to the novels because Scott wrote the majority of his poetry before he wrote his fiction. But I don't think there would have been any appetite for that. In some ways, the novels created a renewed interest in school, which facilitated the very idea of an edition of his poetry.

So we began work on that with a pilot project which was part of Ainsley McIntosh's PhD project here at Aberdeen. She did a thesis on an edition of *Marmion*, Scott's second long poem, what that would look like, and that was working very much in collaboration with us to see whether, you know, what would need to be done, how it would be different from the novels, how we would need to undertake a project like that. And Ainsley's work allowed us to see that, yes, that was a possibility. We moved on to have Carnegie funding for a pilot project and British Academy funding to test some of her findings on three other of Scott's poems. And that gave us the expertise really then to apply for the AHRC funding. We had two volumes published by the time we applied for funding, *Marmion* and *The Shorter Poems*. So we established a proof of concept which showed we could do it and we were fortunate enough to get the money from the AHRC. That money is to edit a further five volumes of Scott's poetry. And when I say edit, maybe you'd like to hear a bit about what we actually do?

So, what we're aiming to do is to try and restore Scott's work to the form in which it would have appeared at the time of publication had it not been subject to the kinds of pressures, speed inaccuracies that emerged during that initial process. With the poetry, unlike the novels, we realized that Scott, through the first few editions of the poems, was actually improving his work, as well as it is deteriorating through the natural process of one text being transmitted to the other. We also realized that unlike the novels which are published anonymously, Scott is very public about his writing and publishing of poetry. His friends are chipping in, their telling him what they think he should do, he's showing them drafts of his poems. He's reading them aloud, and everybody under the sun seems to have an opinion about these poems. So there's an awful lot going on as the poems are appearing in their first early editions and those editions are appearing very rapidly, within weeks of each other. And so in that initial creative process, Scott still very actively engaged in the work, but it's simultaneously being improved by Scott and deteriorating.

So, what we're aiming to do is to get the best possible version of that text created during the initial creative process, as we call it. And we do that by going back to the manuscripts and the proofs where they exist and they don't really exist as far as we know, for the poetry and the editions published during Scott's lifetime and also all the publishing correspondence and personal correspondence that we can find to build up a picture of what's going on. And so, our primary aim is to establish that text, to record all the changes we've made to it as a result of that process. And then to provide the reader with the support they need to fully understand the text in the way of essays, emendation lists, glossaries, notes, maps, if required. So, you can see there's a lot of work to be done, which is why we need that money and the wonderful assistance of Anna and Natalie to do that. But we're also all very much with the Centre what our long-term team has always been, not just to produce these editions but also in a sense to recalibrate Scott in some way. Or we sometimes use the analogy of retuning the Harp of the North. That's a line from one of Scott's poems.

**Ian:** [00:09:48] It's a good line.

**Ali:** [00:09:49] So we're sort of fine-tuning Scott, who calls himself the Harp of the North. And so, we're also aiming to interpret Scott's work through critical work, through outreach work and activities to make it accessible and relevant for modern audiences. So, the other half of our AHRC project is engaging new audiences, which is very much Anna's department of the project, where we have a specific aim that is funded by the AHRC to provide materials for schools to help them to engage, to introduce them to Scott's poetry. But we do lots of other things as well.

**Ian:** [00:10:31] Just going back to what you said about returning the Harp of the North... And so it's a restoration process, is what I'm getting. Is that right? Yeah, so it's a process of restoration, but also, you're saying *recalibration*. So, in what way are you hoping to 'retune' that...?

**Natalie Tal-Harries** [00:10:50] I think in some ways the recalibration is kind of our perception of Scott and our understanding of him as a writer and as a poet, because, as Ali says, there's been, you know, a loss of interest, retained interest, I think, in the fiction, in the novels. But his poetry, although very popular at the time when it was published more recently, hasn't received very much critical attention. So, it's a process of restoring the work, but also, I suppose, retuning in terms of our understanding of Scott and where we see him kind of within the canon and in relation to his contemporaries and other writers as well.

**Ian** [00:11:32] I think he's been through a few phases, Scott, hasn't he? He's gone from, you know, massively famous at the time, to a little bit unpopular and kitsch, almost, and then he seems to be coming back into the...into the fore.

**Ali:** [00:11:47] I think that's... that's true, really. Scott suffered from his popularity, I think, in that he was so popular at the time when he was writing, you know, he was the best seller of his day. And he made a huge amount of money from his creative work, something we would all sort of be envious of, I think. And, you know, he was offered the poet laureateship, which he declined. You know, he was made Sir Walter Scott for his services to literature, essentially. And he really was internationally, not only in Scotland and in Britain, but internationally...he was the leading writer of his day. And I think anybody who is that popular is going to in some ways reach a process of decline, I think. It's overexposure.

The other thing I think that happens is that he's pressed into the services of Victorian sensibilities. You know, he's made far more...he's interpreted as being far more respectable and...and morally sound. And you know, the element of adventure, which is one aspect of his work, is sort of used for the services of Empire and all that's really unfortunate, so that by the time you come to the beginning of the 20th century, I think people are just partly sick to death of Scott, but also they have a false interpretation of Scott, although it's interesting that somebody like Virginia Woolf, you know, writes a brilliant essay called *Illumination at Abbotsford*, where she's speaking about the fact that...that Scott is one of the first people to put gas lighting in his house. But she's also speaking about the fact that Scott's work can illuminate things. So even the modernists have a certain attraction to Scott and you can guarantee they'd all read him. But he did fall from grace in the 20th century. But I think in the last 30 years has had a bit of a revival.

**Ian:** [00:13:41] So it's a quite a challenge to be...to recalibrate in the public view, I suppose, and Anna, your work is very much part of that, as Alison said. And what...what challenges are there for you to try and... I mean, introduce modern young children to a, you know, an 18th century author? That's quite a task. How do you manage to what ways did you look into to try and do that?

[Scott was, of course, a nineteenth-century author but writing about events in the eighteenth-century through his *Waverly* series]

**Anna Fancett:** [00:14:03] So I use... it's a great question. I use lots of different methods. I think one of the big challenges is that Scott's language is quite different to what most children are exposed to today. And the age groups that I'm working with might not have read any 19th century literature at all and let alone any Scott. So, I have a few different tactics. So, the first one is choosing good pieces of literature, good extracts from the poems, I should say, that can be taken in small sections and which are easily accessible. So, there are some parts of the poems where you have to have read the whole canto to understand what's going on. And obviously I'm not going to use those extracts. I'm going to use short little bits that can stand by themselves. And, and then of course, I try to create activities that are fun, that are engaging, that relate to issues and ideas that the pupils might have in their own lives and focus on the poetry itself in conversation with those other aspects.

**Ian:** [00:15:12] That's a hugely creative approach to...what might seem from the outside as a sort of...slightly stuffy, sort of stuck in an archive, kind of daily occupation. But what you're doing is quite a...quite a creative and fun aspect...

**Anna:** [00:15:27] I think Scott is incredibly fun. And if we can find ways to help children experience that, then that's even better.

**Ian:** [00:15:36] Could I...could any of you give us a flavour of the kind of text that you're dealing with? I mean, you mentioned there, you choosing those small extracts to take into the schools, but would anyone, does anyone feel like giving us a bit of Scott?

**Anna:** [00:15:48] I know Natalie and I both selected a couple of extracts before we came in today. Do you want to?

**Natalie:** [00:15:54] I think we've both got something from, we both looked at a few lines from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, is that one of the ones you're working on at the moment as well? So, I mean, I can read you a few lines from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* if you like. Some of my favourite lines from the poem – a description of Melrose Abbey by moonlight. But the way in which it's described, you kind of get this wonderful mixture of nature and the supernatural and sort of spirituality all in just these few lines. I shall do my best to read it well.

The moon on the east oriel shone,  
Through slender shafts of shapely stone,  
By foliated tracery combined;  
Thou would'st have thought some fairy's hand,  
'Twixt poplars straight, the osier wand,  
In many a freakish knot, had twined;  
Then framed a spell, when the work was done,  
And changed the willow wreaths to stone.

**Ian:** [00:16:50] It's lovely. Isn't that so...it's so romantic, isn't it? He's a romantic author and poet, but really, it's the epitome of romance, isn't it? Great?

**Ali:** [00:16:59] I think it is maybe worth saying a little bit about how that passage is contextualized because, you know, yes, it is romantic and this is, this description of Melrose Abbey by moonlight is one of the things that helps fire the Scottish tourist industry because everybody wants to go and see Melrose by moonlight after they've read this, this poem.

But it's so complex in that what's actually is going on here is William of Deloraine has ridden through the landscape to Melrose and as he's passing through the landscape at great speed. Even though he's riding, he is observing the fact that the landscape is closely associated with all these historical events. So, it's not only a description of landscape, but it's a description of the way in which memory, history, the past and landscape are all combined. And Scott's one of the first people actually to really enact that very, very modern sort of idea.

**Ian:** It's a very contemporary theme, isn't it?

**Ali:** But then in terms of what Anna's doing, it's great fun because he's actually going there to dig up the body of the Wizard, Michael Scott, so he can retrieve the Book of Might, the magic book, which contains all these spells which are going to allegedly resolve the plot details.

**Ian:** [00:18:16] That sounds brilliant, like a film. You can imagine it in film....

**Ali:** [00:18:18] So it's great Gothic stuff as well.

**Anna:** [00:18:21] I think it's very filmic, actually. Some of the ways that he transitions between scenes, it blows my mind that he hasn't actually seen a film because they're very, very filmic in the way that he does it. So, in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, you often have sounds overlaid, so the image will be telling the story and there will be a sound that will then merge with his telling and his time. Which for me is...yeah, for me that's something that you get from cinema, but it's here before cinema.

**Ian:** [00:18:52] Do you have that with you. Have you brought that along?

**Anna:** [00:18:54] I don't have that particular one with me. I'm sorry.

**Ian:** [00:18:57] I'll have to look that up.

**Natalie:** [00:18:57] You've just reminded me as well, Anna, of some of the fight scenes that you have with, you know, these kinds of these chivalric knight figures that you have all these kind of very famous warrior figures. And the rhythm of the verse as you're reading these fight scenes, again, it's cinematic in the sense that the rhythm kind of underlies the action of what's happening. And if somebody falls you really do get wrapped up in in the specifics of the fight, and you're kind of following it in a way that, if I'm being perfectly honest, some films haven't grabbed me in the same way as Scott's kind of description of these scenes.

**Ali:** [00:19:32] But then he snaps you out of that by using rhythm again to remind you that you're, you are not actually entirely located there, that you are located in a different sensibility, that you're observing these scenes through. So, you know, he uses rhythm and rhyme often and rhyme schemes and rhythm to kind of move you between different temporal planes and remind you where you are located as a reader and actually in quite a mind-blowing way, sometimes.

**Natalie:** [00:20:00] Yes, he's an incredibly skilled and poet and, yeah, I think it would be nice if we remembered him as such.

**Ian:** [00:20:10] Do you have an example as well, Anna or...?

**Anna:** Yeah, sure....

**Ian:** [00:20:13] A different one, that you wanted to talk about? You don't have to, but if you've got one...

**Anna:** [00:20:17] I could read the beginning of that same poem, from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Okay. And this is an extract that always pops up in my head when I'm trying to think of other things. So, it says:

*The way was long, the wind was cold, the minstrel was infirm and old. His withered cheek and tresses gray seemed to have known a better day. The harp, his sole remaining joy was carried by an orphaned boy. The last of all the bards was he who sang of border chivalry.*

And then it goes on with this beautiful description of the minstrel before he then tells the story that is the rest of the poem. And I'm using this extract with the children, just to introduce the idea of a mysterious character. So, we're going to start with that extract and then think about what could happen to the minstrel next and who he might meet on the path and use it more like a creative writing prompt. And so it's full of detail and full of emotion, and really great to be used in that way.

**Ian:** [00:21:28] It's a classic sort of quest set up, isn't it: that you get in all the Disney films, you know...

**Anna:** [00:21:32] So yeah, so I think they will be very familiar with the idea of a mysterious old man walking along a path, going somewhere...

**Ian:** [00:21:40] Just that rhythm again: of the language and the...and the imagery. It's...it would easily catch a child's imagination, I think. Is that what you find?

**Anna:** [00:21:48] Yeah, I think so.

**Ian:** [00:21:50] So, so for you...Sorry, Alison, you were about to say?

**Ali:** [00:21:52] Oh I was just going to say, but the quest he is actually on is to remember how to be a minstrel and to remember how to tell stories. And by the end of the poem, he's not the last minstrel, he's the latest minstrel. And you know, we have to imagine Scott's the next minstrel. And this act of storytelling has rejuvenated, you know, this the minstrel. And that's a kind of really modern idea as well: that it's through storytelling that we can rediscover ourselves.

**Ian:** [00:22:18] Yeah, absolutely. That's what we're all trying to do on the creative writing PhDs, isn't it? [laughing]

**Ali:** [00:22:22] Exactly.

**Ian:** [00:22:25] So...so you two guys...what a great opportunity to be part of such a well-funded, supported project, and get a chance to work with Alison and the Center, and it might seem...people might assume, you know, you finish a PhD, you start straight away with the Scott research centre, but that's not quite how it happens is it? And I wondered if you could both give us a sort of summary of...of your journeys from, you know, bog standard finish your PhD, and then end up with this...these roles that you have now.

**Anna:** [00:22:53] I love your confidence of 'bog standard finish' of your PhD, you know, that easy thing that people do! [laughing]

**Natalie:** [00:22:56] Tick that one off. Yeah!

**Ian:** [00:23:01] Sorry, yeah. I haven't got there. Yeah. Just give me...give me chance.

**Natalie:** [00:23:04] We'll come back to you when you're finishing up.

**Ian:** [00:23:08] With even less hair than I've got now...

**Anna:** [00:23:11] So for me, I was very teaching focused. I've always loved teaching education, pedagogy, the whole thing. So, after I handed in my Ph.D., I did the CELTA course for teaching English as a foreign language. And I think a week after I'd actually completed everything for the PhD, I flew to Saudi Arabia and I did a year of English language teaching. And yeah, and that was deliberate because a lot of people have told me that they...they fell into kind of a slump after their PhD and it was good to have something, something there.

And then I went to Japan for a semester teaching academic skills. And then I had enough teaching experience to get a job at a university in China and where I stayed for two years, teaching literature and a little bit of English language and academic skills and things like that. And then I had three years as an assistant professor in Oman where I focused predominantly on literature, and then I came back and started here. So that's been my journey so far.

**Ian:** [00:24:20] That's been fantastic...though. I mean, no gaps whatsoever...You're straight in and rolled with it, and very adventurous, too. It's a really adventurous journey.

**Anna:** [00:24:28] Yeah, I knew that I didn't want to have any gaps because I thought that it would make me really depressed. So I sort of took everything I could, and it sounds really easy and neat looking back, but obviously that represents something like three or four hundred job applications. And so, there were a lot of job applications and a lot of things that didn't work out in that process.

**Ian:** [00:24:52] And people miss that, I think. People miss the effort that goes into anything, and it seems when you look back, it seems like a seamless, easy journey, but actually involves all of this hard work and stress and worry and...and constant hard work.

**Anna:** [00:25:04] So I was very fortunate. I went to the countries that I've always wanted to live in. So, people think "Oh, it was easy for you. You just selected the countries and you went." But I applied all around the world. It's just I happened to get the countries that I wanted to go to, yeah. But there were a lot of job applications. I have a big rejection spreadsheet, which is just very sad to look at.

**Natalie:** [00:25:29] I like the idea of a spreadsheet though. That's very organized.

**Anna:** [00:25:34] Well, it's because you find yourself applying to the same universities and you want to remember that you've applied before and see who you've interviewed with before

**Ali:** [00:25:40] Well done.

**Ian:** [00:25:43] So how about you Natalie. How was your trajectory?



**Natalie:** [00:25:46] So after I finished, I worked in student support for a number of years supporting autistic students, undergraduates and postgraduates, across disciplines. So that was, you know, the academic job market is really tough and I wasn't able to find a position within academia straightaway, but I thought it was important to try and do something that was related. I was, I was continuing to work in universities. I was continuing to engage with students. And it was really helpful during COVID, actually, because I think in some ways, I got perhaps more insight into how difficult it was for students than potentially some lecturers, because I had that kind of one-on-one time with them every week and they were sort of telling me some of the things that they were struggling with. So, I'm hoping that will stand me in good stead, hopefully we'll never have to go back to that situation again, but hopefully that will stand me in good stead.

So yeah, sort of maintaining an academic element to my work, I suppose, but at the same time I continued with my own research, and took any opportunity that I had to try and go on research trips. So, for example, another element of my support worker job meant occasionally I would have the opportunity to go to Oxford. And so I would always make sure that I was in the Bodleian Library doing my own research as much as I could around my shifts.

**Ian:** [00:27:14] And did you continue to try and publish and things like that?

**Natalie:** [00:27:16]. Yes. So, I stayed as active as I could within the kind of Romanticism research community, I presented at conferences, I published. And then again, there were quite a lot of online events during COVID, so that was quite useful to be able to sort of, you know, maintain engagement and things. And then, I was quite selective, so I applied for jobs that I knew I really wanted. But that's because I was fortunate enough to have a temporary day job that I genuinely loved. So...

**Ian:** [00:27:49] Not so desperate for the money. [laughing]

**Natalie:** [00:27:50] I wasn't, well, I was really keen to sort of get started on my academic journey properly, but at the same time I thought it was more important that my first post be something that I was genuinely really invested in rather than something that I just...

**Ian:** [00:28:06] ...took you away from your interests a little bit, just for the post. Yeah.

**Natalie:** [00:28:10] Yeah, so for me this post is perfect because textual editing was what I wanted to do. Archival work, research projects, it's just very much in my wheelhouse and yeah, and now I get to work on this incredible project and spend most of my time working in libraries, which is just a dream job.

**Ian:** [00:28:32] Of course. I think that's really good for both of you because you didn't hang around. You just you went for it, didn't you, Anna? And you continued to maintain that interest: an academic interest, excuse me, and publishing. And I think that's important. I think people...it's so easy, I think, probably to finish a PhD and then go, oh, what now? You know? Deliveroo...

**Natalie:** [00:28:57] And yeah, I think it's very natural to be sick of the sight of your thesis by the time you're finished...

**Ian:** [00:29:00] Yeah, already there....

**Natalie:** [00:29:06] Yeah, exactly. [laughing]. So, the thought of having to go back to it and find parts that can be developed into publications is probably the last thing that you want to do but it's also the best starting point. Because, I got some really good advice from my previous supervisor and he said the temptation I know is to start a brand new project, but you've done all this work and you really should do something with your thesis and try and get it published in one way or another, whether that's articles or a book, before you move on to something else. And I do think that was good advice. As much as I was sort of sick of the sight of my thesis, I just I kind of didn't look at it for a month or two and then I went back to it.

**Ian:** [00:29:45] Have you managed to do that then? Have you managed to translate your thesis into published work in one form or another?

**Natalie:** [00:29:51] Yeah. So, I have...I've published a couple of articles on the, the aspect of my thesis that was to do with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, or chapters rather in critical texts, and then my project at the Institute of English Studies at the moment on Shelley is kind of a development of the parts of my thesis that was on Shelley in India, and then I'm kind of looking to, to put together a proposal for my first book which will incorporate aspects of the thesis as well.

**Ian:** [00:30:23] So, just to get a quick sense then...you've described your journey, but what years did you both complete your PhD?

**Anna:** [00:30:30] And it's daunting to say. So, my actual graduation was in 2015 and my viva was in 2014, so I say 2014 or 15, depending on how I feel.

**Natalie:** [00:30:43] Yeah, I had a similar thing. I think my viva and submission was 2018, but I didn't graduate until 2019 I think.

**Ian:** [00:30:49] That's good. Just to get that sense of...of how long it might take actually to...Yeah, to land a peachy job...

So just going back to what you both do then, you know, it's difficult to, you know...you talk about being in library and archives, and your work is slightly different, Anna, I know. Would you both be able to describe what...I know every day would be different, probably, but what does a typical week, kind of look like for you both, and what are you actually currently kind of...working on, mostly?

**Natalie:** [00:31:16] So I would normally spend quite a large portion of my week in a library or an archive, especially at the moment. So, the next volume due for publication, some of the work that needs to be done for that volume at the moment involves looking at Scott's manuscript letters and kind of comparing lines of verse that appear in the letters with the printed version of the letters. And so, for that obviously you have to be in the library that holds the manuscript. It's not something that you can do remotely. The brilliant thing about that is it means that I sometimes get to travel. So, I recently went to the Royal College of Surgeons Library in London to look at, you know, four Scott letters, but it was necessary and therefore I...

**Ian:** [00:32:01] So, do you have to wear the white gloves and everything...

**Natalie:** [00:32:02] Ah no, so white gloves are, yes, this is a common misconception.

**Ian:** [00:32:07] I don't know why I...I don't know I focused on that...

[laughing]

**Alison:** [00:32:08] They're a TV invention, they're an invention for television, I think.

**Natalie:** [00:32:16] Yes, it's quite the controversial issue with archivists. So yes, actually, white gloves means that you don't have as much, what's the word I'm looking for?

**Ali:** [00:32:24] You're clumsy.

**Natalie:** [00:32:25] You're clumsy, yes.

**Ian:** [00:32:26] Ah, so you're more likely to...

**Ali:** [00:32:28] You're more likely to damage it.

**Natalie:** [00:32:29] You could potentially break the corner of a page or something.

**Ian:** [00:32:32] So, it's more about restricting handling rather than...

**Natalie:** [00:32:36] Yes.

**Ian:** [00:32:36] than having any kind of direct contact.

**Natalie:** [00:32:38] Yes. So, you'd want to have clean and dry hands and be using a book rest and snake weights so that you're touching the pages as little as possible.

**Ian:** [00:32:46] **Sorry about that. I just thought it was** interesting. [laughing]

**Natalie:** [00:32:48] Just so you know. No, that's alright.

**Ali:** [00:32:50] And also acid free paper to follow the lines.

**Natalie:** [00:32:53] Yes, exactly, and sometimes to interleave so that you can actually read because sometimes things written on, on two sides of the page is quite difficult to read. And then there's that wonderful cross-hatching that ... because manuscript paper and ink was quite expensive, so you sometimes come across letters where they have written from left to right across the page, and then they turn the page and they write along the other way. So, you've got this cross-hatching handwriting and then on both sides of the page. Thankfully, I have yet to have to decipher one of those.

**Ali:** [00:33:24] Scott doesn't actually do that very often, but his friends do.

**Natalie:** [00:33:27] Yeah, his friends do.

**Ian:** [00:33:30] And do you ever find any...sorry to jump in again...have you ever found any verse in letters that have never made it to publication.

**Natalie:** [00:33:36] Yes..

**Ian:** [00:33:37] Wow, well that would be quite exciting, I guess?

**Natalie:** [00:33:40] Yeah. So, some of the things for David Hewitt's volume have never been published outside of the printed letters. Is that right Ali?

**Ali:** [00:33:49] Well, that's right. And there are letters that have never been printed as well. So, there's verse within letters that have never been printed.

**Natalie:** [00:33:55] Yes. So it's...yeah, so sorry, back to your original question of how my week went.

**Ian:** [00:34:04] Yes, sorry, yeah. It's me that's sent you off-track.

**Natalie:** [00:34:05] No, it's okay. I'd just forgotten what I was talking about.

**Ian:** [00:34:08] Asking about white gloves and random facts...

**Natalie:** [00:34:11] That's all right. [laughing]. So, yes, a big portion of my work is working in libraries and archives with manuscripts or collating two versions of a published poem. So, for example, at the moment I'm looking at the eighth edition of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and comparing it to the first edition and looking for any differences. Anything from, you know, added lines to a semicolon instead of a colon.

**Ian:** [00:34:41] How do you decide? That's quite a responsibility.

**Natalie:** [00:34:43] I just record it all.

**Ian:** [00:34:45] Ah, okay.

**Natalie:** [00:34:45] Ali will get to make those decisions.

**Ali:** [00:34:49] We always say when you are collating, we always have a standard, what we call a standard of collation, which is normally a first edition, and we compare everything else to that standard of collation and - so that would be the manuscript, proofs and editions published in Scott's lifetime. And while you are doing that obviously you can't suspend your thinking process, but, you know, not to try and decide whether it's textually significant while you're doing it, just record and then as a separate process to put all those things beside each other and look at them and work out what's textually significant.

**Ian:** [00:35:23] So, it's a disciplined process.

**Ali:** [00:35:25] So it's a very disciplined process, and the aim is to try and restore what the author intended to write in the sense not of meaning and intentionality in that sense, but in terms of what they actually wanted published. So, you know, sometimes that will come down to a word in the manuscript that's just been misread because Scott's handwriting is not always the easiest. Well, he clearly intended this word and somebody misread it as something, so it's that kind of intentionality. But you gather all that evidence, you gather the evidence about the publishing history of the text and what's going on around that. And then you make decisions about what you should be doing to provide the best possible text. And all textual editing is quite rule governed. So, you know, we have an editorial policy that runs to nearly 50 pages, which really is a rule book and it says, you know, you can make

changes like this, but what you can't do is just make a change because you think I like that better than that. You have to say I'm making that change because I think something went wrong between.

**Ian:** [00:36:33] So, these are well-established, laid down protocols for this kind of research.

**Ali:** [00:36:38] Ah well, every edition should establish its own protocols based on the particular circumstances of the author. But there are also, you know, lots of theories around textual editing that help you to establish those protocols.

**Ian;** [00:36:53] So, are you formulating those...that kind of guidance for each volume?

**Ali:** [00:36:58] No, we did it before. We had guidance: the guide for editors for the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels, which had taken years to develop before anything was published. Our pilot projects and Ainsley McIntosh's work was about getting to the point. So really you want to have that formulated before you publish anything.

There are a couple of volumes such as the volume that Natalie's helping David Hewitt with at the moment, which maybe requires some tweaking to the editorial policy because of the particular circumstances. But as far as possible, you want your policy well established, which is one of the challenges with a project like this, is you have to do a lot of work before you ever publish anything, and to make sure you're in a good position before you start. And actually, in modern academic life, that's hard because REF, you know, publish, publish, publish. And so, you've almost to buy yourself the time by publishing, well I published lots of articles during that REF cycle so that I had a REF hand because I knew I wasn't going to get any of this really meaty stuff published because you know that was going to take time. So, you know, it's like seeing your academic career as a whole, I think, is really important if you want to do a big project like this.

**Ian:** [00:38:13] Okay, so...so archive-based mostly, Natalie?

**Natalie:** [00:38:17] Mostly, but then also some of the work that I do is to sort of to contribute to the supporting material that we would provide in the editions. So going through the poems and trying to find any, you know, from terms that need expert definition and because it's not just as simple as looking at up in a dictionary, to historical events that might require some context in order for a modern reader to understand, to Scott's wonderful, extensive notes, which he provides to his poems and are almost as long as the poems themselves, I would say. In which he does sometimes provide explanation for what's going on in the text, but he often also talks about things that interest him or that might have, something in the text has maybe reminded him of something that he wants to talk about.

He quotes from texts that he's read, and texts in his library. It's kind of...almost like a parallel narrative to the poem itself, but the notes require quite a lot of supporting material in order to be able to trace the different sources or the, you know, the people that are being referred to, the texts that are being referred to. And so that's another big part of my job. And again, I think a really good decision that was made for these editions is that in the supporting material, we're not going to veer into the realm of, sort of, trying to impose our own interpretation upon the text. We're just trying to provide all the information that a modern reader needs.

**Ian:** [00:39:51] So a reader can make their own...

**Natalie:** [00:39:52] And make their own judgments. Yeah.

**Ian:** [00:39:56] Do you feel you're getting closer to Scott? Do you feel that he's...he's materializing out of the past for you a bit more?

**Natalie:** [00:40:03] Certainly. I don't know if my imagined version of him is anything like what he actually was. He's sort of like this avuncular uncle who has an amazing library, and we just sort of have cups of tea and talk about weird books. That's who he is in my head. [laughing] But that's probably because I spend a great deal of my time looking at what he was reading and trying to sort of get into his thought process. And he's such a multifaceted, you know, character. There's so many different sides to his personality, but Scott as sort of reader, and scholar, and poet: those are kind of the aspects of him that I'm most interested in.

**Ian:** [00:40:43] Great. Thank you. And so, Anna: your working week. I know you're taking some of the material and putting it out into towards new audiences. So, is that what you spend the majority of your time?

**Anna:** [00:40:54] I guess so. My work is very different. So I'm creating resources for primary six, primary seven, secondary one and secondary pupils. My role is 50% of full time so I'm not here all the time. And so far I've been rereading the poems and creating resources and tying them in to the curriculum for excellence that obviously the schools will be following. And I'm just at the stage now where I'm hoping to take these resources into schools and trial them and see how the children respond, whether the teachers like them, whether the teachers think they're meeting the right levels or if they are at the right levels. And so Ali and I are actually going to the Association of Scottish Literatures Teachers' Conference on Saturday, and we're hopefully going to be showing what I've done so far to teachers and asking them for some feedback and asking them if we can trial the resources in their schools. And so very different.

**Ian:** [00:41:56] So that's quite daunting as well. But also quite exciting.

**Anna:** [00:42:00] Yeah, very exciting.

**Ian:** [00:42:01] And lovely, lovely to hear as well: how...how the center, and how academia is...is communicating with...with the wider world and community, and community engagement, which I think is great. So, your working week, then? I mean, what kind of material: are you taking published Scott work that's in the domain, or using archives also?

**Anna:** [00:42:22] I'm not using any archives at all for this role. And so I'm, as I said earlier, part of what I've been doing is selecting extracts that I think will work well with children and also that will tie in with the Curriculum for Excellence. There's quite a lot in the Curriculum for Excellence about understanding and information that's just or inferring information from text and understanding different perspectives. And those are things that Scott is great for, particularly the perspectives. He often writes things from slightly different angles or kind of shifts. And so I'm picking up on those needs or those requirements, matching them to the texts that have already been published. So, when... yes, at the moment I'm using the editions that are currently available. And then as the new editions come out, then I will be shifting things across.

**Ian:** [00:43:29] So you say it's a 50% commitment? So how do you use the other 50%, or do you just take a breather? [laughing]

**Anna:** [00:43:37] I wish I could say that I just watch TV. [laughing] That would be a great thing.

**Natalie:** [00:43:44] One of the busiest people you could care to meet is Anna.

**Anna:** [00:43:48] So I have my own research as well. So, like Natalie, I've been publishing, and some of the articles based on my PhD. Some of them are slightly different. All on Walter Scott, actually. I think everything I've published has been on Walter Scott. And I also teach for a couple of other universities online, and I have a few other kinds of small roles here and there doing some tutoring and some research with some other groups. And I have a storytelling business.

So, this week I've been on a ship storytelling called The Lady of Avenel, which, of course, is a name from Walter Scott. So, I've been on this, this ship telling everybody about Walter Scott and trying to read them extracts from the novel that the name is from. And so, I work quite a lot with children through my storytelling, which I think and helps for this role.

**Ali:** [00:44:44] That's why Anna's the perfect person for the job.

**Anna:** [00:44:47] Walter Scott and children.

**Natalie:** [00:44:50] And teaching.

**Anna:** [00:44:50] And teaching.

**Ian:** [00:44:52] I don't know how you find the time. I'm struggling just with the PhD. So, on that. How do you both balance your...the demands of this project and do the things you're involved with?

**Natalie:** [00:45:05] So I suppose because my research outside of the Edinburgh Edition of Walter Scott's Poetry project is also quite archival and library based it's quite complementary. So it's, I feel as though the skills that I'm developing within my role at the Walter Scott Research Centre are helping me with my other research and, kind of, also the other way around. I think the skills that I was developing with my other research helped me to get this job and meant that I had the foundations to kind of do the textual editing work that needs to be done in each edition. So, I'm quite fortunate in that my own research and this research I think is quite complimentary.

**Ian:** [00:45:49] Work in parallel...whereas with yours, Anna, it sounds a bit more diverse, the different activities, the different focuses of what you do?

**Anna:** [00:45:56] Yes, but I think everything does come together sometimes in unexpected ways. And you think, oh, that's a connection there. Or, you know, like this week when I've been storytelling and I've ended up talking about Walter Scott and trying to help people recognize him for, you know, the great writer that he actually was as opposed to being a statue in Edinburgh. And so you do have those connections. And, in terms of balancing it all, I don't have a secret formula for doing that. And in a way, because I'm 50% of full time for this role it is based on hours. So I can physically come to the office for the hours that I'm working and that helps.

**Ian:** [00:46:41] Compartmentalise.

**Anna:** [00:46:42] Exactly. Yeah. And then all the other roles will get muddled and mixed in with each other. [laughing]

**Ali:** [00:46:50] I think when you start working on Scott, the trouble is you see Scott everywhere, because Scott's so much part of the landscape, particularly in Scotland, that, you know, your brain never seems to be able to be completely away from Walter Scott because you think, Oh, here's the £10 bank note. It's got Walter Scott on it.

**Ian:** [00:47:07] It's probably worth mentioning that Scott invented the Romantic novel, in a way? Or is one of the key figures...

**Ali:** [00:47:14] Yeah, key romantic figure. Both, I think certainly, you know, the romantic novel is a slightly strange beast, actually, because often when people think of romanticism, they think primarily about poetry. And so the novel he invents - he doesn't exactly invent the historical novel, but he certainly refines the historical novel into the form that that we recognized today. And, you know, we've heard about the sad death of Hilary Mantel in the...in the past few days. And certainly, she writes about Scott and the role of Scott in the historical novel. And, you know, also is quite instrumental in developing a form of novel about national identity or nationhood and the relationship between history and the present that then gets, you know, reused all over Europe and North America as well. So, you know, it's...he is quite a significant figure.

I hope the poetry edition, also though, does in some ways reinsert him back into the more...I don't want to say mainstream romantic discourse. But, you know, there is this sense of the big six, which we've been trying to move away from in romantic studies. You know, basically dead white males, and Scott's another dead white male, but he's a slightly different kind - Scottish dead white male, you know - so I think the more we can do to disrupt that version of romanticism... but also by doing that, actually, remind people that that's what it looked like for the people who were there at the time: that we've been very selective in our version of Romanticism and, you know, hopefully also we have PhD students looking at, sort of Scott's female contemporaries as well, which I think is important.

**Natalie** [00:49:03] And that's another thing that sets Scott apart really, is he was hugely encouraging of his female contemporaries and didn't seem to, sort of see them as inferior writers in any way. Which is refreshing and lovely and just another reason why we like Scott so much.

**Ali:** [00:49:17] I mean, in fact, he says, you know, that what he's trying to do is...is emulate what Maria Edgeworth and what she's done for Ireland, for Scotland. So, he's taken a woman writer as one of his models and saying, you know, I wish I could do that, which I think is, you know, very refreshing.

**Ian:** [00:49:34] Well, thanks very much for such a brilliant insight from the three of you into...into what you do and, we could go on talking for a long time, I think, and if anyone hasn't read any Scott...it's worth reading! And you've got three good advocates for Scott today.



**Ali:** [00:49:48] And I think we could also say to anybody who wants to come and speak to us about Scott, we're in the Old Brewery you know, do come and speak to us. We're always delighted to speak about Scott.

**Ian:** [00:49:56] There you go. You heard it here.

**Natalie:** [00:49:59] And, yes, thank you for having us.

**Anna:** [00:50:01] Thank you. Thanks very much.

**Ian:** [00:50:04] You're welcome. Thanks very much. Thanks for your time.

**Announcer:** [00:50:25] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.