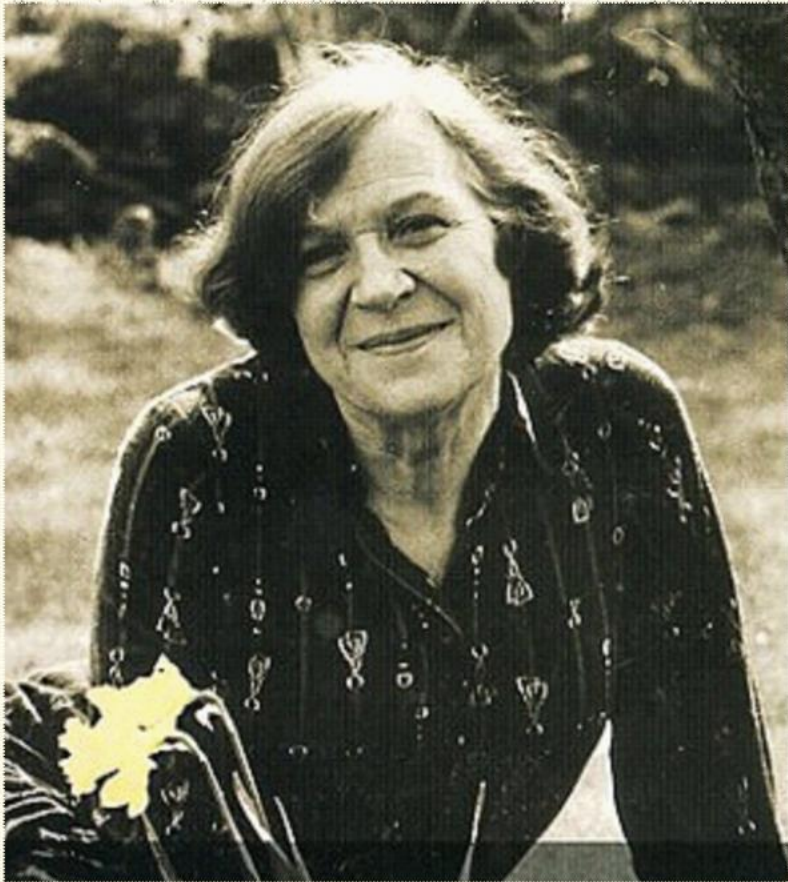


Jessie Kesson

1916 - 1994

Writer, playwright and radio
producer

Jessie Kesson



Writer, playwright and radio producer.

Born 28 October 1916 - died 26 September 1994

1916-1994

Born
Jessie Grant McDonald
in the workhouse in Inverness



Grandmother and the unforgiving Grandfather c1918.



Liz's sisters with Jessie's half-sister Peg c 1918.



Jessie's mother Liz had been disowned by her father when it was discovered that she was pregnant.

This appears very harsh, however, this was the second time Liz had become pregnant. Her first daughter, Peg (Margaret), was taken in by the family and brought up as their own.

Liz and Jessie moved from the workhouse back to Elgin and settled in a room in 'The Lane'.

They lived off poor relief and Liz's earnings as a prostitute. Hungry, dirty but later Jessie wrote about happy times in 'The Lane' and how Liz had given her an appreciation of the countryside and poetry.

In an interview Jessie said:

'All the things I know, she taught me The good things. I mean. She could make the cherry trees bloom even when it was winter. Hidden birds betrayed their names the instant she heard their song. She gave the nameless little rivers high hill sources and deep sea endings. She put singing seal in Loch Na Boune and a lament on the long, lonely winds. She saw a legend in the canna flowers and a plough amongst the stars.' 'And I would be blind now, if she had never lent me her eyes.'



Ladyhill Lane, Elgin

But this life was not to last. Liz McDonald was found guilty of neglect.

At the age of 11 Jessie went into care and was sent to Proctors Orphan Training Home, Skene in Aberdeenshire.

Jessie visited Proctors later in life and in recent years it has been boarded up and is for sale.



She attended the local village school



and was encouraged to develop her writing skills by the
Dominie, Donald Murray, headmaster of Skene School
who recognised and nourished her rare writing talent.

Jessie – top row middle

At 16 , denied the opportunity to continue with her education Jessie went into service but after suffering a nervous breakdown she spent a year “the lost year” as a patient in Aberdeen Royal Mental Hospital.

When she was considered to no longer be a danger she was sent to Archbuie Croft, Abriachan where she was boarded out as a “dafty” for 6 months.



She met her future husband, Johnny Kesson there and they married in Inverness. The couple eventually settled on the Black Isle as cottars during the second world war.

By chance, on a train, Jessie met Aberdeen author, Nan Shepherd. Jessie and Nan became friends and it was Nan who suggested that Jessie should attempt the short story prize in 1941. Isobel Murray in her biography of Jessie Kesson wrote – ‘An intense love of nature was something that both women shared.’



Nan also introduced Jessie to Neil M Gunn who encouraged her to begin writing for the ‘Scots Magazine’.



Jessie was very gregarious and made friends with whoever she met.

Nan also suggested Jessie to the BBC in Aberdeen where she met producer Elizabeth Adair.

Elizabeth remembers 'Jessie liked to be intimately connected with her radio plays, taking small parts or voices in the background.'

Jessie with her producer, Elizabeth Adair, at the BBC in Aberdeen in 1950.



Jessie and Johnny had two children Avril (born 1938) and Kenneth (born 1945). The family moved to London in 1947.

At first, Jessie took whatever work she could get – cleaner, cook, artists' model.

Liz, her mother, died of syphilis in 1949.

Jessie went on to produce BBC's 'Women's Hour' and wrote over 90 radio plays.

“The White Bird Passes” was filmed for BBC television in 1980 and “Another Time, Another Place” became an award-winning film.

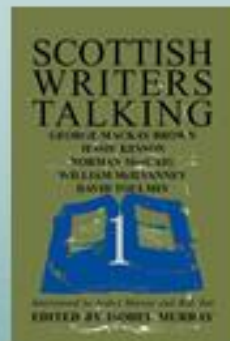
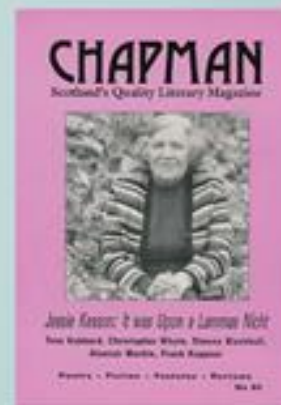
This film is interesting in itself - Who is this?
Phyllis Logan in Downton Abbey



Phyllis Logan won a BAFTA award for - Most Outstanding Newcomer to Film 1984

And this?
Gregor Fisher before Rab C Nesbitt





“next to the printed word I love radio and words and the sound and the meaning of them is my thing.”

Jessie was awarded an honorary
Dlitt in 1987 from Aberdeen University so
she finally got her degree and the
“Scarlet Goon”



Nan Shepherd said that Jessie had 'the sense of life gushing out in all sorts of ways.'

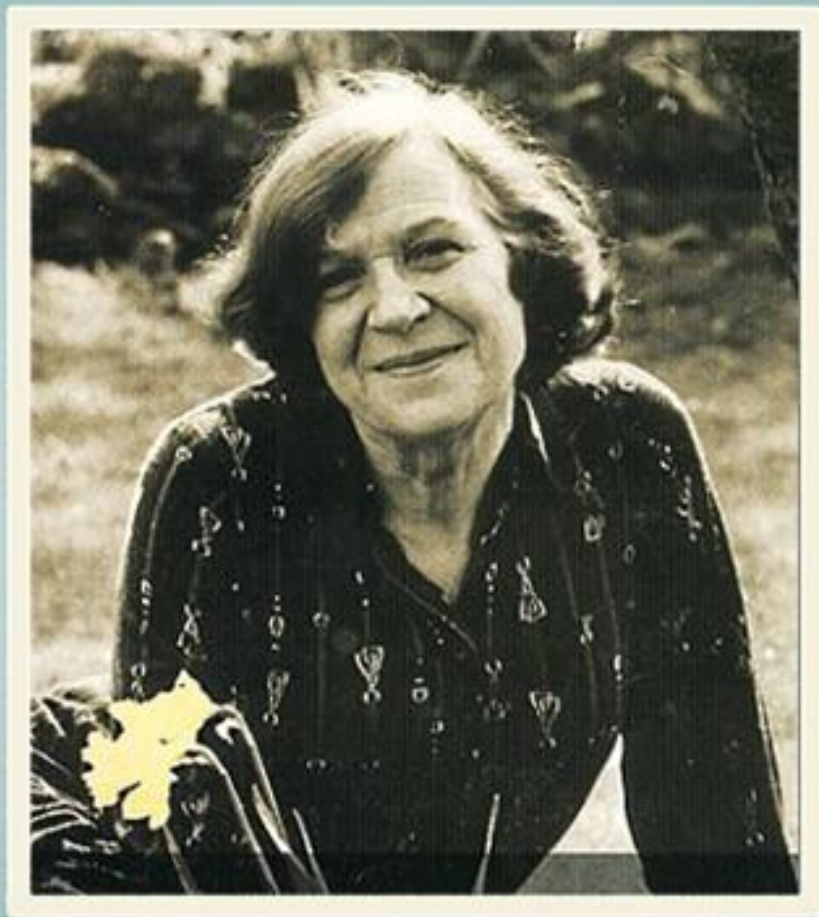
The vicar who met her before Johnny's funeral recognised 'her overwhelming sense of awe and wonder in the beauty of language...and the loveliness of words'.



Moniack Mhor Writers Centre, Abriachan has a Jessie Kesson Fellowship which runs for the month of March and is now in its 6th year. The Fellowship has been established to provide a writer with the time and space to write, as well as raise awareness of Jessie Kesson in Highland schools.



Jessie Kesson



1916-1994