

FLAGSTONE PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

KEEPERS

OF THE



Education Pack

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A FOREWORD FROM THE WRITER & DIRECTOR

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Hello, and a very warm welcome to this – our education pack! It's a privilege to be able to share this resource with anyone who would like to learn more about *Keepers of the Light*, and with any learning environment that might like to take inspiration from the play.

It's been the biggest privilege of my writing career to see this production come to life, for two reasons; First, I get to pay my respects to three men who dedicated their lives to protecting lives at sea. Second, I get to explore my own family heritage, shining a light on a bygone career which has fascinated me since childhood days of hearing about my grandfather – the late Sinclair Cragie's – working life.

This production does not attempt to answer what happened to the disappeared keepers; instead, it explores the myth, and crosses the choppy seas of folklore and speculation to get to the very crux of storytelling itself. I hope you enjoy learning about the play as much as I have researching, writing, developing and staging it too, alongside my incredible creative team.

I've suggested a few fun classroom activities and would love to hear from anyone who has enjoyed exploring these!

Please do keep in touch:
keepersofthelightplay@gmail.com

Izzy Gray

Writer & Director



THE FLANNAN ISLES MYSTERY

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What became of the missing keepers?

The answer, we might never know. Certain facts are true; that the three men on duty - James Ducat, Thomas Marshall and Donald McArthur - were likeliest to have disappeared on the 15th of December, 1900. This was the last date an entry was made in their log book, and it was also on this evening that a passing ship first noticed the light was out. Sadly, it took time for word to reach land, and it was 11 days before a ship could be sent.

Many believe that the men were swept out to sea, perhaps taken by high winds, or a freak wave. Other theories (including some touched upon in the play) were a little more colourful. Perhaps the most compelling accounts, however, come from those first sent to investigate the abandoned tower.

Below are the telegrams, sent by the first on the scene; Captain Harvey (master of the relief vessel, *The Hesperus*), Joseph Moore (the relief keeper, and first to step foot through the door) and Robert Muirhead (Superintendent for the Northern Lighthouse Board, who led the inquiry into the disappearance). Though much is corroborated in their accounts, even they contain discrepancies, which have left many to wonder whether the strangeness of the event may have altered their recollections, or whether something more was amiss...

"A dreadful accident has happened at Flannans. The three Keepers, Ducat, Marshall and the occasional have disappeared from the island.

On our arrival there this afternoon no sign of life was to be seen on the Island. Fired a rocket but, as no response was made, managed to land Moore, who went up to the Station but found no Keepers there.

The clocks were stopped and other signs indicated that the accident must have happened about a week ago. Poor fellows they must be blown over the cliffs or drowned trying to secure a crane or something like that.

Night coming on, we could not wait to make something as to their fate. I have left Moore, MacDonald, Buoymaster and two Seamen on the island to keep the light burning until you make other arrangements."

Captain Harvey, master of *The Hesperus*
1st telegram to be sent to the Superintendent
26 December 1900

I was the first to land...I went up, and on coming to the entrance gate I found it closed. I made for entrance door leading to the kitchen and store room, found it also closed and the door inside that, but the kitchen door itself was open. On entering the kitchen I looked at the fireplace and saw that the fire was not lighted for some days. I then entered the rooms in succession, found the beds empty just as they left them in the early morning.

I did not take time to search further, for I only too well knew something serious had occurred...Mr McCormack and myself proceeded to the lightroom where everything was in proper order. The lamp was cleaned. The fountain full. Blinds on the windows etc... The following day we traversed the Island from end to end but still nothing to be seen to convince us how it happened. Nothing appears touched at East landing to show that they were taken from there. Ropes are all in their respective places in the shelter, just as they were left after the relief on the 7th. On West side it is somewhat different. We had an old box halfway up the railway for holding West landing mooring ropes and tackle, and it has gone. Some of the ropes it appears, got washed out of it, they lie strewn on the rocks near the crane. The crane itself is safe.

The iron railings along the passage connecting railway with footpath to landing and started from their foundation and broken in several places, also railing round crane, and handrail for making mooring rope fast for boat, is entirely carried away. Now there is nothing to give us an indication that it was there the poor men lost their lives, only that Mr Marshall has his seaboots on and oilskins, also Mr Ducat has his seaboots on. He had no oilskin, only an old waterproof coat, and that is away. Donald McArthur has his wearing coat left behind him which shows, as far as I know, that he went out in shirt sleeves. He never used any other coat on previous occasions, only the one I am referring to."

Joseph Moore, relief Keeper
28 December 1900

I am of opinion that the most likely explanation of the disappearance of the men is that they had all gone down on the afternoon of Saturday, 15 December to the proximity of the West landing, and that an unexpectedly large roller had come up on the Island, and a large body of water going up higher than where they were and coming down upon them had swept them away with resistless force.

I have considered and discussed the possibility of the men being blown away by the wind, but, as the wind was westerly, I am of the opinion, notwithstanding its great force, that the more probable explanation is that they have been washed away.

...I may state that, as Moore was naturally very much upset by the unfortunate occurrence, and appeared very nervous, I left A Lamont, Seaman, on the Island to go to the lightroom and keep Moore company when on watch for a week or two. If this nervousness does not leave Moore, he will require to be transferred, but I am reluctant to recommend this...

...I would desire to record my deep regret at such a disaster occurring to Keepers in this Service. I knew Ducat and Marshall intimately, and McArthur the Occasional, well. They were selected, on my recommendation, for the lighting of such an important Station as Flannan Islands, and as it is always my endeavour to secure the best men possible of the establishment of a Station, as the success and contentment at a Station depends largely on the Keepers present at its installation, this of itself is an indication that the Board has lost two of its most efficient Keepers and a competent Occasional.

I have the melancholy recollection that I was the last person to shake hands with them and bid them adieu.

Robert Muirhead
Superintendent, NLB

CHARACTERS

In the play, we are introduced to six characters. There are three actors, who each play two parts – that of a 1900 lighthouse keeper (based upon the real men), and a modern day technician. With each dual-role, we see parallels in characterisation, both in terms of hierarchy within the group, and in terms of personality and ideology.

In this section of the education pack, we'll introduce you to each of the characters.

DUAL ROLE 1: JIM & DAVIE



Jim

Based on the real-life James Ducat, the character of Jim is the Principal Keeper of the Flannan Isles lighthouse crew, who disappeared in 1900. He has been a keeper for 30 years and is close to retirement. He takes the post at the Flannans as one of the last of his careers, despite being fearful of the islands. He is a religious man and tries to lead the group with kindness, but this is not always effective when it comes to handling conflict.

Davie

As the senior technician, Davie is also the leader of his team, who have been sent over to the lighthouse to complete some routine maintenance on the tower. Davie has a strong affinity for lighthouse heritage, as both his father and grandfather were keepers. He respects his job, but like Jim, is quite soft when it comes to leadership style, and often struggles to keep his colleague Alec in check. Davie is a firm believer in 'sticking to the facts', and refuses to believe that anything sinister happened to the disappeared keepers.





Tam

Tam is based on the real-life Thomas Marshall. He is second in command to Jim and not happy about it, having been recently demoted. He resents his drop in status and takes this out on his young colleague, Donald. Unlike Jim, he questions the value of religion, instead preferring to read gothic literature. There is a suggestion that he may have a drinking problem, and that his demotion might be due to a violent act, rather than the 'negligence' recorded on his records. He seems at one with the stormy weather, and brings a sinister atmosphere to the lighthouse.



Alec

Alec was formerly in the Merchant Navy, and now works for the Northern Lighthouse Board. He brings a lot of laughter to the group, but has a serious edge too. He often picks on his younger colleague, Mac, and particularly seems to question modern notions of masculinity. We get the sense that Alec may have struggled with his mental health during his time at sea, and this comes out when he drinks alcohol. Alec likes to explore the darker theories about what might have happened to the men who disappeared in 1900.

DUAL ROLE 3: DONALD & MAC



Donald

Donald MacArthur is the youngest and most inexperienced member of the 1900 keeping crew. He is an 'occasional' keeper, which means it is not his full time job, and he only fills in for other keepers as required. Tam sees Donald as an outsider, pointing out that he is not originally from Lewis, and that his inexperience is putting them all at risk. Donald struggles with the isolation of being stationed at sea, and longs to be back with his young family. He is kind and gentle, and only responds to Tam's bullying when pushed to the brink.



Mac

Like Donald, Mac is the youngest member of his team, having only recently taken on this apprenticeship after finishing college. He is energetic, playful, but also unimpressed with the keeping lifestyle - much to his colleagues' dismay. Mac doesn't know the story of the Flannan Isles mystery, and Davie and Alec take great joy in filling him in. Despite his apparent bravado, we soon learn that Mac finds ghost stories and the environment of the lighthouse frightening. Mac brings a lot of humour to the play, but also poignant moments too, and he often finds a way to address some of the more emotional facts of the story.

ISOLATION

The Flannan Isles Lighthouse is one of Scotland's most remote towers, with the islands 20 miles west of the Outer Hebrides. The setting of the play is important for two reasons. Being trapped together so far from land creates inevitable tension and conflict between both the modern characters and their 1900 counterparts. It also creates an opportunity for several characters to explore their own sense of personal isolation. Donald struggles with being new to the Isle of Lewis and to the keeping profession, just like Mac's lack of knowledge and experience creates a barrier with his older colleagues. Alec and Tam both face mental health struggles, but find it difficult to express this to the other men. Davie and Jim feel conflicted in their roles as peacekeepers, exhausted by their inability to prevent conflict. Each character experiences literal and emotional isolation at some point in the play, and the remote lighthouse becomes a symbol of their loneliness.

MASCULINITY

Both lighthouse keepers and technicians occupy roles which have traditionally been seen as 'for men'. Throughout the play, we see male psychology explored throughout the relationships that the men hold with each other, but also through their ideologies about what makes a man. We see this particularly through the characters of Alec and Tam, who are critical of the younger men in the group. They consistently seek opportunities to belittle Mac and Donald, with Alec comparing Mac's enjoyment of going to the gym to taking 'testosterone shots' and Tam remarking that he doubts Donald has 'never known a blister on his skin'. In a working environment where hierarchy and visions of masculinity come hand-in-hand, this is one of the main sources of conflict throughout the play. The notion of toxic masculinity comes increasingly to light through the bullying behaviour, and this creates the bedrock for tension between the men. It's also worth noting that the play explores visions of masculinity through two different time frames, and it's interesting to see that the modern day men are able to find resolution, while the 1900 characters are not.

HORROR

Early on in the play, Mac reflects “I reckon there’s enough ghost stories kicking around this place as it is.” which lends itself to one of the play’s key themes - horror. The enduring mystery of what happened to the Flannan Isles keepers quickly becomes a horror when it is left to the imagination of those left behind, and throughout the play, we meet references to the genre - from the ‘local folklore’ which explores the various myths and legends about the islands being haunted, to the text which is referenced throughout, ‘The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde’, the knife which becomes central to the story, and the ghosts of the former keepers who haunt Mac’s dreams. There is a suggestion throughout that perhaps the underlying horror of the story is the fact that there is no answer to what happened to the disappeared men. It’s a fact which many of the characters struggle to overcome, and in doing so, their theories become increasingly gothic. In Tam’s closing speech, when describing the lighthouse, he reflects that ‘there were ghosts long before we got here, and they’ll be here long after we’ve left’, which could be interpreted literally, or could be an implication that perhaps human psychology will always have a tendency to seek ghost stories where it can.

STORYTELLING

This is perhaps one of the most important themes to the play. It begins and ends with characters reflecting upon the power of storytelling. Stories can impact our perception of people and place, and they can also twist the truth when left in the wrong hands. Because no one holds the answer to what became of the Flannan Isles keepers, people refuse to let the story rest. Over time, history and storytelling, have created a narrative which has overshadowed realities. The play is structured around storytelling; when Davie and Alec realise that Mac doesn’t know the story connected to the lighthouse, they take great delight in filling his head with ‘fanciful tales’, but in doing so, they also share with the audience the various theories which have emerged (and grown arms and legs) over the years. The play also invites the audience to consider themselves as storytellers; rather than try to resolve the mystery, it leaves it open-ended for us to decide what must have happened. Is there an innocent explanation, or was it something sinister?

Meet the Team

Izzy Gray: Writer, director & producer 10

Originally from the windswept Orkney islands, it's safe to say that playwright Izzy has never strayed too far from her islander roots, with much of her writing inspired by the sea, its people and folklore.

Izzy's writing experience began in the travel industry. In addition to running her own website *Blethers from Afar*, she has seen work published across leading publications including *Lonely Planet*, *Time Out* and *The Skinny*.

After completing an MA (Hons) in English and a further postgraduate qualification in playwriting with the University of Edinburgh, Izzy's love of theatre has shone through into her professional life. When she's not making theatre with her own company *Flagstone Productions*, she's encouraging others to get involved through her job as a Creative Engagement Co-ordinator with *Capital Theatres*.

Theatre credits include: *The Simmer Dim* (2021) *Sea Glass* (Army @ The Fringe, 2021), *Keepers of the Light* (2022) *Beastie* (2022) & *The Whaler's Wife* (2023).

Short film work: *The Interval* (2020), *Secret Santa* (2020) and the award-winning *Golden Boy* (2021)



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MOVEMENT DIRECTOR Ana Norrie-Toch

SOUND DESIGN Kit Wilmott

COMPOSER Ewan Watson

SET DESIGN Danny Main

ARTWORK Rachael Gray

TECHNICAL PRODUCTION Tom Sulat

MATERIALS Re-Set

Cast



Rhys Anderson
as Mac & Donald



Fraser Sivewright
as Alec & Tam



Garry Stewart
as Davie & Jim

SYNOPSIS

Keepers of the Play is a one act play, with an Introduction followed by eight scenes. Although the set does not change - representing the interior of the Flannan Isles lighthouse - some parts of the play imply that the action is taking place outside, on and around the island of Eilean Mor.

INTRODUCTION - TIME FRAME: 1900

The play opens when the character of Jim (James Ducat) enters the darkened interior of the Flannan Isles lighthouse. He carries a storm lamp, which he uses to illuminate certain objects in the room. He smiles, knowingly, as flickers of memory come back to him. He stops at the bookcase, his attention drawn to a particular book. This sparks a thought, and he begins to speak to the audience.



Jim tells the audience that his father used to tell him stories about a group of islands called The Flannan Isles, west of the Outer Hebrides. As a child, Jim used to have nightmares about the islands, and imagines himself drowning at their feet. As an adult - a Principal keeper - he finds out that he is going to be relocated to work at the new lighthouse, which has just been built on those very isles. He tells us that the lighthouse was only in operation for one year before 'the darkness set in'. At this point, the characters of Tam (Thomas Marshall) and Donald (MacArthur) enter, and a movement piece begins.



The three men struggle over the rope. At times, they use it to come together as a team. At others, they go on separate journeys, pulling each other in different directions and struggling against the tension.

The men are battling against a storm until they reach The West Landing (a view point). They explain that they've been coming here every five days to watch for their 'relief' (the boat which comes from the mainland with supplies, and to rotate the men working). For 15 days, the relief has not come, and the relationships between the men have begun to disintegrate in the isolation. The men leave the stage, one at a time.

SCENE I - TIME FRAME: PRESENT DAY

Warm lighting indicates a time shift to present day. We hear a helicopter. Three men - Davie, Alec and Mac - enter the lighthouse, arguing amongst themselves. They are technicians, working for the Northern Lighthouse Board, and have been sent to the lighthouse to undertake some routine maintenance on the electrics.



Through their conversation, we learn different things about each of the characters. Davie and Alec have worked together for several years, and Davie comes from a long line of lighthouse keepers. Mac is new to the role, having recently graduated from college.

We sense that Alec is already growing frustrated with the energetic Mac's company. While Mac is away to the toilet, Alec wonders what it must have been like for keepers back in the day, stuck together on a post like this if they didn't get along. He and Davie reflect on this question as they leave the room to begin their duties.

Alec's question leads us into Scene II.

"...i reckon no matter how nice; how tolerable your company was; you'd get sick of each other in the end."

SCENE II - TIME FRAME: 1900

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Following on from the question of what might happen if keepers didn't get along, Scene II follows a moment of conflict between the characters of Donald and Tam.

The scene begins with Donald attempting to pay an accordion in the kitchen. Tam enters, cross that Donald has woken him from his sleep. Tam explains that keepers work unusual shift patterns to look after the lantern at night, and criticizes Donald for not taking the job seriously.



Sensing an opportunity to belittle his colleague further, Tam plays a practical joke on Donald, convincing him that there is a tropical garden at the south end of the island, where plum trees grow. Tam persuades Donald that he should go and collect some plums to have after dinner. Eager to please, Donald heads outside, despite the growing storm outside.

Jim, the Principal keeper, enters. He gently encourages Tam to be kinder to Donald, having noticed friction between the two. Upon learning that Tam has played 'the plum trick' he chastises him for bullying Donald and sends him out into the storm to fetch him back.

SCENE III - TIME FRAME: Present day

We return to modern day. Davie and Mac are completing some paperwork. Alec is outside, working on the solar panels. The weather has begun to worsen.

Davie and Mac bond, as Davie shares his memories of his father's career as a keeper. He remembers visiting his father at work, and in particular, remembers the mechanical noise made by the lighthouse's turning mechanism.



Alec enters, explaining that it's "blowing a hoolie" outside. He explains that he's found the fault with the solar panels - a frayed cable. Mac can't believe that they've been sent all the way out here for such a minor fault, and asks whether anybody would even notice if the lighthouse stopped working. This prompts the others to remind him of a very famous time that did happen, back in 1900. It becomes clear to Alec and Davie that Mac does not know the story of the Flannan Isles mystery.

"...this lighthouse is home to a mystery. one of scotland's darkest tales!

Davie and Alec take great delight in giving Mac a run-down of what happened back in 1900. They explain that the three keepers disappeared from their post. They re-enact the scene for Mac.

The Hesperus (the relief boat) was sent to investigate, but found nothing of the men; "Only traces of the storm...and a scene left behind in panic!"



It becomes clear that Davie and Alec have different views on what must have happened to the men. Davie is sure they must have been swept into the sea, perhaps while salvaging equipment from the storm. Alec thinks something more sinister may have happened.

As they argue the matter, we sense a growing tension between the men, as Davie feels that Alec is questioning his authority. Mac steps in, suggesting that there's time to hear both sides of the story. He asks Davie for further information on his 'accident' theory, and Davie explains how easy it would be to fall from the steps at the West Landing. Alec is still unconvinced, so Davie insists they take a walk out to the area, to see for themselves. He leads his colleagues outside, leading us into Scene IV.

Scene IV re-enacts Davie's version of events.

Jim and Tam are at the dining table. We learn that the storm outside is one of the worst they have ever experienced, and Tam is worried that their crane - one of the most important pieces of equipment - needs to be secured. Jim tells him that he has already asked Donald to do so yesterday.



Tam is distrusting. He feels that Donald is incapable of doing the task properly, and berates Jim for not supervising. The two argue over whether it would be safer to check the crane or stay safe inside. Really, this is a debate about power, and through the argument we learn that Tam has recently been demoted due to negligence. This is clearly a sore point for him, and explains his insistence on checking the crane.

Jim forbids Tam from leaving the lighthouse. While Jim goes upstairs to check on Donald, Tam disobeys his command and heads out into the storm. Panicked to discover his missing colleague, Jim follows closely behind. We hear a loud wave crashing, indicating that the men are in trouble.

SCENE V- TIME FRAME: Present day

Davie, Alec and Mac return after visiting the West Landing. They are still arguing the matter. Davie points out that the 1900 evidence states that two sets of oilskin coats were missing, indicating that the men must have chosen to go out into the storm. Mac questions why the third set remained, suggesting there's more to the story.

Davie receives a radio call from the helicopter. They can't land in the high winds and will try again in the morning. The technicians are to be stuck in the lighthouse overnight. Mac responds with horror, unsure how to entertain himself. Alec suggests that he could read, and finds a first edition copy of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*, with a strange message inside the cover. Davie finds a bottle of whisky in the pantry, and the three settle on having a drink instead.



Alec finds a book, *A History of Scottish Lighthouses*, which has a chapter about the disappearance. He shows Mac that there is reason to be suspicious of Davie's account. He draws attention to strange entries which were written in the 1900 log book. He points out that Thomas Marshall is inconsistent in his description of the storm, and suggests that perhaps "there is something very sinister that he wanted to hide."

Alec hands costume parts to the other men, openly acknowledging that they're going to act out his theory of what happened in 1900.

SCENE VI- TIME FRAME: 1900

We return to 1900. Tam is at the table reading Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde. Jim potters about in the kitchen. The two debate the influence of the novel, with Jim remarking that he doesn't enjoy the 'dark science', and Tam liking that it 'taps into the human psyche'. Jim suggests they have a drink together, which surprises Tam, as alcohol is banned on lighthouses and Jim is usually a stickler for the rules.



Suddenly, Donald enters. He confronts Tam, accusing him of stealing or tampering with his accordion. Jim tries to diffuse the situation, but Donald continues to accuse Tam. Enjoying seeing Donald wound up, Tam antagonises him, pointing out their class differences and suggesting that the lad is out of place. Pushed to his limit, Donald accuses Tam of being a bully and lets slip that he's aware of Tam's reputation. He implies that Tam lost his previous job for something more sinister than negligence, and the two come close to a physical altercation. They are pushed apart by Jim, cueing a quick transition to Scene VII.

SCENE VII- TIME FRAME: Present day

We return to present day. The three technicians are now very drunk. Alec carries on telling Davie and Mac his theory; that a fight broke out, and a murder occurred. His ego inflated, Alec begins picking on Mac, questioning modern masculinity.

Davie berates Alec for telling 'fanciful tales', to which Alec points out that even the Lewis locals believe there is something sinister about Flannan Isle. Mac is disturbed to find out that many believe the island to be haunted and tries to leave the lighthouse. At this point, the team are plunged into a powercut. Davie and Alec run to check on the equipment, leaving a fearful Mac on his own.



Mac is visited by the ghosts of Jim and Tam. They do not speak, but strip him of his modern fleece, indicating a transition to Donald. Through a mix of movement and overlapping dialogue, the ghosts reenact two different scenarios - first, Davie's theory that they are swept into the sea. Second, that a fight has broken out and Jim has lost his life. The ghostly sequence ends with Davie's dying words, and the three characters drift off to sleep.

SCENE VIII - TIME FRAME: PRESENT DAY

Dawn breaks. The three technicians are asleep, having drunk themselves into a stupor. The radio wakes them up, and Davie and Alec tease Mac for his behaviour during the night. Mac is still convinced he has seen the ghosts of the disappeared keepers.

Whilst getting coffee from the pantry, Mac uncovers Donald's accordion. He brings it through, and after discovering that Alec can play, the men sing Kris Drever's *Wild Hurricane*.



Davie receives word from the helicopter crew that The Hesperus is on the way back. The men begin to gather their belongings, and begin reflecting on the sadness of the story they've been arguing. Mac points out that it's sad that lighthouses are no longer manned, and that they just 'sit their empty'. The men agree, and there's an air of resolution as Davie and Mac leave to meet the helicopter.

Alec stays behind and dons the Principal Keeper uniform, indicating a shift back to Tam. The play closes with a speech about the dangers of storytelling, and Tam questioning whether in a mystery like this, an audience will always require a villain. He reflects that on a place like Flannan Isle, "there will never really be peace."

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANA NORRIE-TOCH



CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOUR CAREER PATHWAY AND INSPIRATIONS AS A MOVEMENT DIRECTOR?

I trained professionally BA Hons Dance Artist and MSc in Theatre and Performance Studies in Edinburgh, and it was working with a group of actors (including our very own Rhys!) that inspired me to move into Movement Direction. I love this collaborative way of working, supporting the actor in discovering and developing character movement as part of the world of the work. I am also passionate about exploring what I see as Movement Heritage ; researching how Scottish communities engage with our landscapes within their heritage and culture. Recent work on this includes my Artist Residency, focusing on Peat Cutting - a collaborative exploration with the community on the Isle of Lewis, a tradition that holds so much movement ; rhythm, transfer or weight, momentum and partner work - a natural choreography of community and landscape. These stories and experiences of movement inspire me and I am passionate to show their creative and artistic engagement between people and landscape.

WHY WERE YOU DRAWN TOWARDS WORKING ON KEEPERS OF THE LIGHT?

Izzy's vision and take on this story instantly jumped out at me - the story, intertwined with the landscape/seascape of the Flannans on the lighthouse keepers was a dream opportunity and team to be a part of.

This came from a previous adventure of mine on a Creelers boat on the West Coast, where we spoke in depth of the physicality of working with rope and the dangers in working with it too. From this, I saw the rope as a binding together of physicality, but also danger, tension and potential fate of the characters.



HOW DID YOU STRUCTURE THE REHEARSAL PROCESS? DID YOU HAVE A SET PLAN IN MIND WHEN YOU BEGAN?

The collaborative process in which we worked was structured around the rope and the landscape/seascape environment of the work. Importantly, figuring out how we could explore the relationships between the characters together – through the rope, gave ownership to the actors to find this movement. I knew I wanted to incorporate the rope, but didn't want to go in with a set movement vocabulary in place. Even with the short rehearsal process – the discussion, exploration and above all fun we had in working with the rope really bound the work together.

HOW DID YOU WORK WITH THE MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGN OF THE SHOW?

The music and sound design were a luxury to work with. There were subtleties of the story already within it, a dream for building movement. Although not being dictated by the rhythm of the music, it was inspirational in the creation of the movement with the actors and opportunity for shifting movement dynamics.

INTERVIEW WITH THE CAST ²⁴

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO BEING INVOLVED IN KEEPERS OF THE LIGHT?

RHYS: I love mystery/thriller stories and not knowing much about this particular story I dived headfirst into documentaries about the keepers even before I was cast. I remember contacting Izzy (the writer/director) to ask if I could read the whole script before my audition because I was absolutely hooked on the writing and the characters.

FRASER: I loved the script. It's witty, exciting, dramatic, surprising and a fantastic challenge for an actor as, not only do we play two roles each, we are all on stage most of the time.



WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES WITH PLAYING A DUAL-ROLE PART LIKE THIS?

GARRY: For me it is making both men true to their time and period. I have never been a lighthouse keeper or an engineer so making them real and true for a modern audience is uppermost in my mind. I don't want anything I do to feel out of time and place for anyone watching the play. One small example would be that in Jim's time (late 1800s) when working men literally rolled their sleeves up, they did so to the bicep of the upper arm. I have seen this in so many old photographs and it is iconic. Small details can make a big difference.

FRASER: I also want to make the characters physically different, in their body language and the way they present themselves. I usually find gestures in rehearsals that define one character from another. In Keepers of the Light we are helped that the characters come from different places geographically so their accents aren't the same and that leads to a different way of talking which also informs the characters movement.

RHYS: I definitely have a lot of respect for both of the characters and I think more so for Donald. In the play he's the youngest of the keepers, so for him to stand up to his superiors and challenge them because he believes something is fundamentally wrong is very inspiring. And I think that was something I got to find out while exploring in rehearsals.

FRASER: I had to delve deep into Tam's motivations as he can't just be an angry man, he has to have reasons for the bitter, cynical side he displays. As he exists in a time when men were very much discouraged to open up about their feelings, fuelled by alcohol, he lashes out at other people for his self-perceived failures. Throughout the rehearsal process I discovered Alec, on the other hand, is only too aware of his alcohol problem. I decided that, sub-textually, Alec has had a prolonged abstinence only he knows about, so when the drink starts to flow at the Flannans there's a danger he might be pushed over the edge emotionally.

GARRY: Working with other company members during rehearsal always makes you re-evaluate how you work your characters. The discussion between the director and the other actors on how the characters relate to each other is invaluable. You find the tensions that facilitate the drama and the areas of release where comedy can diffuse that tension. You never really have a full three-dimensional idea of your character until the rehearsal period is over. That comes with working through the play with director, writer and other company members.



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IS IT DIFFICULT TO APPROACH PLAYING SOMEONE WHO HAS ACTUALLY EXISTED? AND WHO HAS DISAPPEARED IN SUCH STRANGE CIRCUMSTANCES?

RHYS: You really have to treat the source material with a great respect and to always do your research. These guys actually lived and were a part of peoples' families. It would be awful if a relative of one of the disappeared keepers was sitting there in the audience watching actors do a disservice to them and their family heritage.

FRASER: I think because we are investigating the myth itself and not saying definitively that this is what happened to the men, we are freed up to create the story from our imagination. It would be different if we were playing a more modern real-life character as there might be video and sound to research, but we have to rely on books and photographs and that's a good thing, as we can create these characters from our mind's eye. These were real men who died in terrible circumstances though and we've always been mindful of not exploiting their memory and hopefully achieve a piece of theatre which, while being exciting and dramatic, is also a tribute to the three men, their families and the wider lighthouse community.

RHYS: The first time we did the show back in 2022 it was incredible the amount of former keepers who came up to the team and commented on how we got everything just right on what life was like living in the lighthouses before they were automated. The living conditions, the work that was carried out and the inevitable tensions that would arise between the keepers.

GARRY: It is vital. There is a story being told that brings together a number of different visions. The story is given music and a sound design. It is given a mood by the movement created to tell that story and it is given a lighting and technical design enhancing the mood and the telling of the story. All these elements create a collaborative experience that is very exciting. When you see all those creative elements coming to gather it makes you very proud to be a part of the production.

RHYS: It's so important, especially when touring because we are all with each other pretty much the whole day. Travelling, eating, working. And the days can be very long. So teamwork is so important. And so is the collaboration side of things too. Things like always trying out different and new ideas to see where each exploration can take us and see if and how it best serves the story.

FRASER: Teamwork is everything in the theatre. You can't do it on your own and we are lucky to have assembled a very talented, committed and good-humoured group for this production. In terms of the spectacle of the production, the sound (Ewan Watson and Kit Wilmott) and lighting (Tom Sulat) have been key on this show. The atmosphere is ethereal and imposing, weaving itself round the audience and hopefully transporting them somewhere else. Ana's choreography gives the show a muscular physicality, which adds to the ethereal nature of the production, aiding the audience and the performers in setting the scene. Izzy's a force of nature, not only writing and directing but also producing and nailing the project in every conceivable aspect. So these teammates set us up with a wonderful platform to go and perform and strive to do the play justice. To see a new play, with original ideas, like this one, shape itself and come to life throughout rehearsals is so satisfying to be a part of and I'm hugely proud of every one of the Keepers team.

WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENED TO THE MISSING KEEPERS?

GARRY: I think they probably were swept away doing their duty. Fighting the sea to help save their friends and keep the light on.

FRASER: They were clearly abducted by aliens! Eh, no, I think one, or perhaps two, of them got into trouble on the cliffs, the others went to help and they were all tragically swept into the sea.

RHYS: I mean it's such a mystery isn't it? I think ever since I started working on this play around about 3 years ago, I have thought about what happened during the weeks on the Flannan Isles and what happened to those keepers almost everyday! There are so many theories. So many stories and so many endless possibilities. I honestly really have no idea, I don't even want to try and chose one because unfortunately the only people who actually know what happened are the three missing men. The official records state that they were trying to secure supplies from the rig, were caught in a bad storm and a freak wave swept them away and they were lost at sea. But I think it was also recorded that during those weeks in December there were no storms of that kind reported on those dates. It's absolutely chilling and quite haunting to think about what could have happened to those men. I am honoured and humbled to be able to tell this story.

SET DESIGN

AN INTERVIEW WITH SET DESIGNER DANNY MAIN

The set was designed and constructed by Danny Main, a designer and carpenter based in Glasgow. He has designed works for a number of theatre, film and arts-related shows for The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Studio Pavilion at House for an Art Lover and the award winning short film *Andros*.

For *Keepers of the Light*, the set was designed and constructed using only reclaimed materials from the theatre industry with the help of Reset Scenery who are a social enterprise who aim to recycle and reuse large scale materials from theatre and film productions. Danny's practise often aims toward working as sustainably as possible, aiming to challenge the current use of large quantities of new materials used for productions in the creative industry.



HOW DID YOU COME TO BE INVOLVED WITH SET DESIGN?

I worked for a while as a supporting actor and really loved seeing the sets in the studios. That led me to RCS where I trained as a set carpenter. In my final years I studied a minor in set design and found myself getting really into design for short films and theatre. I really enjoy working on small touring shows, as it allows me to play around a lot more with modular design, balancing the carpentry and design together as I always aim to build the shows I design.

WHAT MATERIALS DID YOU USE TO CREATE THE SET FOR KEEPERS, AND WHY?

Keepers was built using 100% reclaimed materials. I had wanted to build a full touring show using recycled wood and fixings for a while, and when Izzy accepted. I was super excited to have the chance to show it could be done. Having places like Reset Scenery allowed me to source great reclaimed materials. It is amazing to see the show go on the road for a second time, giving the set pieces a third life rather than being skipped after a few short show dates.

WAS IT CHALLENGING TO CREATE AN INTERESTING DESIGN WHEN MOST OF THE ACTION TAKES PLACE IN ONE ROOM?

I was lucky to have so much great material to work from. Izzy 's script was so descriptive and visual, the history behind it all, It felt right to honour the original lighthouse room. I spent a lot of time looking at the actual lighthouse. I really wanted to break it up, but still make it feel dank and damp and enclosed. I guess building one space allows you to really get into the reference material. Izzy and her team really added so much with the attention to detail with the props and the real costumes from the Northern Lighthouse Board.



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES IN CREATING A SET FOR A PIECE OF TOURING THEATRE?

Designing it to fit in the smallest van possible, as the show was off to so many wee islands. I really wanted to get as much detail in the design as possible, staying true to what was mentioned in the text. Sometimes you have to lose an element of the set for it to tour. I was glad to get the stairs to the lighthouse though. It really brings a moment to life in the show.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1: DRAW UPON WILFRED WILSON GIBSON'S POEM FOR INSPIRATION

For many in Scotland, Gibson's 1912 poem *Flannan Isle* has been the starting point for learning about the mystery. The poem is referenced in the play's script too, and serves as the starting point for Davie & Alec's disagreement over the artistic license often taken with the incident:

DAVIE: But then Gibson goes a bit off-grid.

ALEC: Or gives us more detail on what was found.

DAVIE: Based on a writer's wild wonderings?

ALEC: Based on Moore's account!

Many have attributed the poem to some of the darker theories which have emerged over the years, with the poet drawing particular attention to the onimous atmosphere created when describing The Hesperus' arrival at the abandoned tower:

*But, as we neared the lonely Isle;
And looked up at the naked height;
And saw the lighthouse towering white,
With blinded lantern, that all night
Had never shot a spark
Of comfort through the dark,
So ghostly in the cold sunlight
It seemed, that we were struck the while
With wonder all too dread for words.*

The poem is a perfect starting point for teaching classes (particularly S1-3) about the mystery. Use it as the basis for storyboarding, ask learners to create their own poem about uncovering the scene of a crime, or devise a piece of physical theatre, enacting the crew's discovery.

Poem available: <https://allpoetry.com/Flannan-Isle>

2: CREATE AND DELIVER A MONOLOGUE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A CHARACTER FROM THE COMMUNITY LEFT BEHIND

The play begins with Jim's monologue:

My father used to tell me stories when I was a lad, about a group of islands off the west coast of Lewis. The Flannan Isles. Only to him, and to those who knew them, they were the Seven Hunters.

There was a danger to those rocks. They rose out of the water like seven dark tombs, each with their own story to tell. Many a man had been caught by their snare; merchants, dashed against the skerries; explorers, bound never to find their way home.

I used to dream about those isles, when I was young – my father's words still ringing in my ears. I'd see the souls of men lost to the sea, caught in the blackened gullies below. Spirits swirling in the eddies. Some nights, I'd be falling fae their cliffs. Others, drowning at their feet. I'd often wake through the night, my nightclothes clinging to me as if the saltwater itself had overflowed fae my dreams. My voice damned as I called for help.

Those dreams came back to me that day in 1899, when I first received word that work had completed on the new tower at Eilean Mor, the largest of the Flannans. A Principal Keeper was needed and I was to be relocated. There wasnae time to be fear't of it, mind. Life as a keeper is much like the sea itself; always chopping and changing. You have to go with the tide.

1899, the light went into operation. December, 1900, almost a year to the day – the darkness set in.

It would also be possible to begin the play from another character's perspective, and it would be brilliant to hear from some of the characters connected to the story, but not featured in the play. Interesting examples could be: Joseph Moore (the relief keeper & first to find the tower abandoned), Captain Harvey (of The Hesperus), the wives/families left behind, Superintendent Robert Muirhead (sent up from Edinburgh to investigate for the official inquiry into the deaths). This gives learners an opportunity to explore research, writing and devising skills.

3: CREATE A TWO HANDER SCENE EXPLORING A NEW THEORY ABOUT WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED TO THE KEEPERS

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There is a patterned structure throughout the play. Alec and Davie will disagree upon what brought the disappeared keepers to their fate in 1900. One will put forward a theory, that theory is acted out (in 1900 timeframe) and then we return to present day to analyse its credibility.

This is a fun structure for both English and Drama classes to play with. Working in pairs, task learners with first imagining up a new (and outlandish, if they like!) theory about what could have happened on the 15th December 1900. Following the pattern above, have groups of learners create and present dialogues exploring their theory. Important questions to consider:

- Who is presenting the theory, and what position of power or status do they have in the group? How would you show this through blocking and physicality?
- How will you represent the transition between the two different time frames? Will this be done through costume, lighting design, sound, or performance alone?
- Do the power dynamics shift when the two characters return to their present day selves? How would you show this?



THANK YOU!

Thank you for taking the time to explore our education pack. We hope you've found it a helpful learning resource and guide to the show.

Keepers of the Light will be performed in the following locations, throughout September 2023:

Capital Theatres Studio, Edinburgh – 8th & 9th

The Rockfield Centre, Oban – 11th & 12th

Skye Gathering Hall, Portree – 14th

Breasclete Community Centre, Lewis – 16th

Beacon Arts Centre, Greenock – 19th

The Byre, St Andrews – 21st

Universal Hall, Findhorn – 23rd

Our Coastal Communities Tour has been made possible due to kind support and funding through the Northern Lighthouse Heritage Trust, a charity whose purpose is to preserve and promote lighthouse heritage across Scotland. You can read more about their work by visiting:

<https://www.nlb.org.uk/heritage-trust/>