



## The urgent present: the 1930s

*The present all urgency.*

Edwin Muir, founder member, Scottish PEN

In the 1930s the social and political situation at home and abroad became increasingly troubling and caused divisions within PEN.

Internationally, the rise of Fascism was casting its shadow. In 1933 German PEN refused to back a PEN campaign against the burning of books, and was expelled.

PEN struggled to prevent the persecution of writers. In 1937 during the Spanish Civil War, the poet and playwright Federico Garcia Lorca was executed by the Fascists. PEN could do nothing, but did help to secure the release of Arthur Koestler, also imprisoned by the Fascists

Helen Cruickshank, who published her first poetry collection in 1934, played a crucial role in strengthening Scottish PEN.

Meetings were held at her home in Corstorphine, Edinburgh. Her hospitality, and often her financial support, helped to keep the organisation going. She helped many Scottish writers, including the Muirs, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, Neil Gunn and MacDiarmid, who described her as a 'catalyst' to the Scottish Renaissance.

Scottish PEN was growing. Others who joined in its first decade included Catherine Carswell, A J Cronin, Nan Shepherd and William Soutar.

In 1934, Scottish PEN hosted International PEN's twelfth annual Congress. This was a statement of Scottish cultural identity and an opportunity to demonstrate Scotland's literary vigour.