



Across the Barricades: the 1970s

If a single writer in a country is in chains, then there are links in that chain which bind us all.

Vaclav Havel, member, Czech PEN

From its earliest days PEN has promoted international understanding. In supporting writers under threat it has always highlighted the predicaments of communities in conflict.

In the 1970s Joan Lingard, now Scottish PEN's honorary president, began publishing a series of books for young readers centred on the Protestant-Catholic divide in Belfast. She – like PEN – believes in the power of fiction to cross boundaries.

By Scottish PEN's 50th anniversary in 1977 the organisation was gaining in strength and prominence. Historical novelists such as Dorothy Dunnnett and Nigel Tranter, who became president of Scottish PEN, highlighted issues of Scottish identity. Others, such as Archie Hind, explored contemporary realities. A growing confidence in Scottish writing coincided with greater awareness of the perils faced by writers in many other countries.

International PEN's Writers in Prison section had been formed in 1960.

In 2016 the section was renamed Writers at Risk to reflect the many ways in which writers, journalists, editors and publishers are endangered. Every day we hear of writers who challenge authority facing imprisonment, torture, forced exile and murder.

Scottish PEN has been particularly energetic in campaigning to protect writers and highlighting the realities of oppression.