THE ALASDAIR GRAY ARCHIVE

THE Agnes Owens ARCHIVE

CREATIVE SCOTLAND

ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL

END OF PROJECT MONITORING REPORT

WRITING IN THE MARGINS*

* TWO LITERARY RESIDENCIES



HEATHER PARRY & KIRSTIN INNES

CREATIVE DISCIPLINE	YEAR	PROJECT SCOPE
Writing	2026	8 months

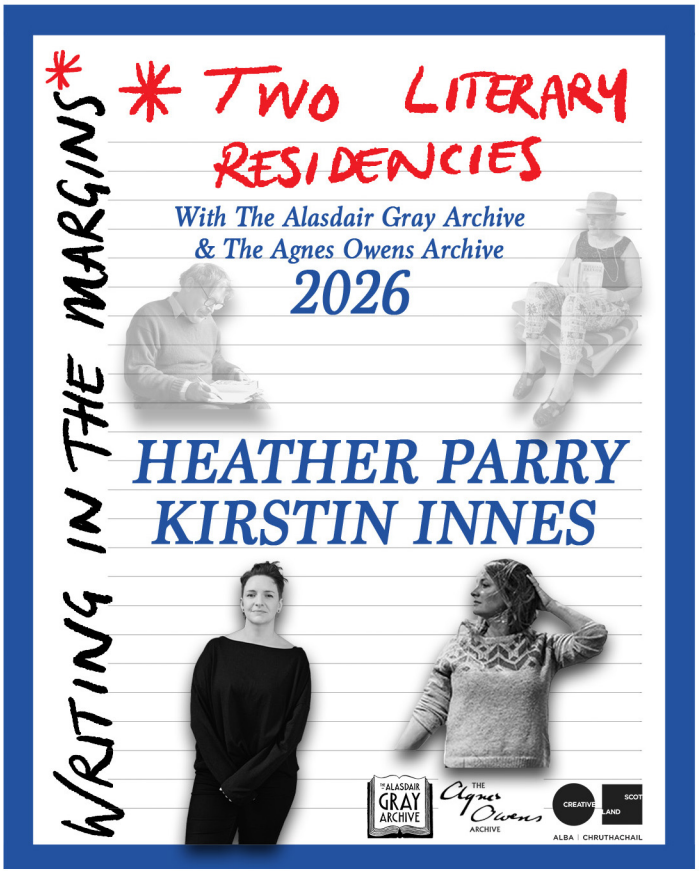
OUTCOME	FUNDER(S)
New Fiction: Novel	Supported by The National Lottery through Creative Scotland

Project Overview

The Alasdair Gray Archive (AGA) and The Agnes Owens Archive (AOA) appointed Kirstin Innes and Heather Parry as Writers-in-Residence for 2026, following a highly competitive open-call process which attracted more than 130 applications via a rigorous shortlisting and interview process led by Sorcha Dallas (Custodian of AGA and AOA), Chitra Ramaswamy (author and journalist) and Dr Rodge Glass (Creative Writing, University of Strathclyde). The eight-month residency programme, *Writing in the Margins*, invited the writers to explore how class, gender and societal expectations intersect across the works of Alasdair Gray and Agnes Owens, under the overarching theme of 'neglected voices'. Supported by The National Lottery through Creative Scotland, the residencies created dedicated time, space and access for two contemporary writers to engage with the archives, develop new creative work and explore the continuing relevance of Gray and Owens's writing. The programme formed part of AGA and AOA's wider commitment to developing the archives as living, generative resources, where historical collections can inspire new creative practice, research and public engagement.

Delivery & Approach

The residencies were structured around sustained engagement with the collections at both archives, allowing the writers to explore archival materials, follow individual research interests and develop new creative responses without prescribing a particular form or outcome. This open approach reflected the project's central theme of 'neglected voices', creating opportunities to consider the social, cultural and literary contexts surrounding Gray and Owens's work, and the ways in which questions of class, gender, identity and societal expectations continue to resonate today. The programme also provided opportunities for the writers to connect with the wider creative, academic and community networks surrounding AGA and AOA. Alongside their individual practice, both writers contributed to public events, workshops and discussions, sharing their perspectives and bringing new audiences into contact with the collections. The individual writer contributions included later in this report provide further detail on the creative work developed, the impact of the residency on their practice and their reflections on working with the archives.



Writing in the Margins - Heather Parry and Kirstin Innes Announcement, 2026. Designed by Abby Carter

Public Engagement & the Agnes Owens Centenary

A significant part of the programme's wider impact was its contribution to the 2026 centenary celebrations of Agnes Owens. The residencies were developed in dialogue with AOA's wider programme, ensuring that the appointment of contemporary writers supported a broader ambition to bring renewed attention to Owens's work and legacy. Both writers participated in public discussions at the Agnes Owens centenary book launch at Milngavie Town Hall in May 2026. Kirstin Innes also contributed to a panel discussion at the Byres Road Book Festival in September 2026. These events created opportunities to introduce Owens's work to contemporary audiences and explore its place within Scottish literature, particularly in relation to class, gender and the representation of working-class lives.

Innes also delivered open-access creative writing workshops at Alexandria Library as part of the centenary programme. These sessions encouraged participants to develop their own creative responses, resulting in *People Like This*, an anthology of new writing published by AGA/AOA and launched as part of the Byres Road Book Festival. This provided a tangible community outcome, extending the influence of the centenary programme beyond literary discussion and into new creative production. Heather Parry delivered a creative writing workshop for participants in the *Writing in the Margins* writing group in Glasgow, providing an opportunity to engage directly with an established writer and explore approaches to creative practice.



Kirstin Innes and contributors to *People Like This* at the publication launch at Byres Road Book Festival, 2026. Photograph by Alasdair Watson

Digital engagement formed another strand of the programme. Parry and Innes both published a series of free and publicly accessible Substack essays reflecting on their time at AGA and AOA and exploring related literary, cultural and social themes. These contributions created an additional route for audiences to engage with the residency and its ideas beyond in-person events and the physical archive. The programme also connected with the wider publication activity surrounding the centenary. Innes and Parry both wrote new introductions to Agnes Owens's Polygon republished novels, launched as part of the wider centenary celebrations. This represents an important contribution to the renewed circulation and appreciation of Owens's work, helping to bring her writing to new readers. Short films and case studies on Innes and Parry have also been shared as part of the final evaluation with their support and advocacy for AGA/AOA's work being an ongoing legacy of the project. Together, these activities positioned *Writing in the Margins* as an integral part of the wider centenary programme, connecting archival research, contemporary writing, publication, public discussion and community participation.



The Agnes Owens Archive before it officially opened in 2026. Photograph by Alasdair Watson

Organisational Impact & the Value of the Living Archive

The residencies have demonstrated the value of supporting contemporary writers to engage directly and over an extended period with archival collections. Rather than treating the archives solely as repositories of historical material, the programme has shown how they can operate as active spaces for creative experimentation, exchange and the production of new work. For AGA and AOA, the project has generated new interpretations of the collections, strengthened connections between the two archives and created opportunities to share their material with audiences who may not otherwise have engaged with it.

The writers' responses have also helped highlight the continuing relevance of Gray and Owens's work, connecting their literary concerns with contemporary social and cultural conversations. This is particularly significant for AOA, which officially opened in January 2026 as AGA's first standalone satellite archive. Established through an initial donation of more than 700 items from Agnes Owens's son, John Crosbie, the collection continues to develop through further donations and oral history recordings gathered as part of a Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities Collaborative Doctoral Award led by researcher Laura MacDonald. The residency programme has helped establish AOA as more than a place of preservation, demonstrating its potential as a resource for contemporary creative practice, research and public engagement. It has also highlighted the wider networks of influence connecting Owens and Gray, reinforcing the value of considering their work in dialogue.

More broadly, the project reflects AGA's interdisciplinary and socially conscious approach to heritage, creativity and public engagement. Since its founding in 2020, AGA has developed a model of practice informed by Alasdair Gray's working methods and his belief in the social value of creativity. *Writing in the Margins* has extended this approach by creating opportunities for new writers to engage with the collections and generate work that reaches beyond the archive itself.

Legacy & Future Activity
While the formal residency period concludes in 2026, the programme has established a number of ongoing creative and public engagement opportunities that will extend its impact into 2027 and beyond.

These include:

- **Sharing new creative work:** Kirstin Innes will present sections of her new novel, *The Trojan Wummin* (working title), at AGA's Gray Day 2027, offering audiences a further opportunity to encounter work developed through the residency. Parry will also share the idea for her new novel at this event alongside drafts and sketches created as part of her residency.
- **Continued creative development:** Both writers will continue developing their respective creative practices, with Innes's new novel and Parry's forthcoming 2027 fiction publication representing longer-term outcomes of this period.
- **Community and participatory legacy:** *People Like This*, the anthology emerging from the Alexandria Library workshops, provides a lasting record of new writing generated through the centenary programme.
- Further workshops: AGA and AOA will continue exploring opportunities to develop the participatory strand of the project, including potential workshops with Heather Parry/Kirstin Innes for local organisations.
- **Ongoing digital engagement:** Parry's Substack essays provide a publicly accessible record of her residency experience and a resource for continued sharing through the archives' digital communications.
- **Continued centenary legacy:** The new Polygon editions featuring Innes's and Parry's introduction , will support the ongoing circulation of Owens's writing and contribute to the longer-term aims of AOA.

These activities will be connected to AGA and AOA's wider programme of creative commissioning, education, research and public engagement, ensuring that the relationships and creative outcomes established through the residencies continue to develop.

Overall Impact
Writing in the Margins has delivered a successful programme of creative development, archival engagement and public participation. It has supported two contemporary writers to develop new work while creating opportunities for wider audiences to engage with the collections through workshops, public events, digital writing and new publications. The programme has also made a significant contribution to The Agnes Owens centenary, helping to bring renewed attention to her work and its relevance to contemporary audiences. Through its connections with community activity, literary events and publication, the project has extended the reach of the archive beyond its immediate audiences and generated new creative responses to Owens's legacy.

For AGA and AOA, the residencies have reinforced the value of a living archive model in which collections are not only preserved and interpreted but actively used to inspire new work, build relationships and support cultural participation. Crucially, the outcomes extend beyond the funded period. The creative work in development, the community anthology, the digital essays, the new introductions to Owens's reissued novels and the planned Gray Day 2027 presentation provide a continuing legacy for the project.

AGA and AOA would like to thank Creative Scotland and National Lottery players for supporting *Writing in the Margins* and enabling this programme of creative development, public engagement and archival exploration.

Find out more about The Alasdair Gray Archive and The Agnes Owens Archive by visiting our website:
www.thealasdairgrayarchive.org