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Our new book finally complete!

Falkland Society Newsletter, November 2020

Dear member/Dear supporter,

We achieved a major milestone on Monday 2 November: we completed work on the major new Falkland Society book, ***Falkland and its People 1901–1913***, and sent it off to the printers, More on this, and how to pre-order your copy, below.

This month we have the third in our new season of online lectures, with a talk by Nick Boyes, consultant in stone and other traditional building materials (19:00 on Wednesday 11 November, by Zoom as usual; join from 18:45 onwards). More about this, too, below.

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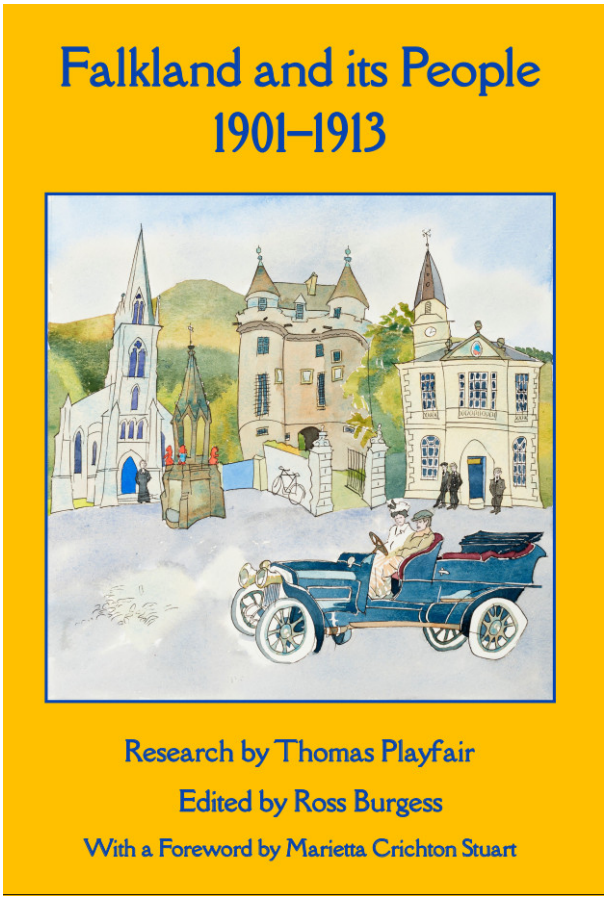
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A reminder that this Newsletter comes to you from The Falkland Society, Scottish Registered Charity SC017201, www.falklandsociety.org.uk.

Peter Burman (Chair)

Falkland and its People 1901–1913

The front cover of our new book features a specially-comissioned painting by Peter Jones, which he completed at very short notice so that we could get the artwork off to the printers by the 2nd of November. Peter was of course our speaker at the September meeting, and many of you will know his little book of images of Falkland. His cover painting combines a number of Falkland landmarks in his familar style, with a car and a few figures to suggest the Edwardian period.



The hardback book runs to 557 pages, with 62 pictures and four maps. Bill Pagan in his review says:

> *Great credit is due to the author and to the others who assisted in the researches of this fascinating book, and to the author of the Introduction, which sets the context. It is so much more than a town diary, indeed it is a valuable addition to the canon of social history, and deserves to be read far beyond Falkland, Fife, and Scotland.*

This project was made possible by a grant from the Falkland War Memorial Trust, and generous contributions from 18 individual sponsors. We extended the sponsorship scheme until the text was sent off to the printers, so that it could proudly include the names of the sponsors (apart from three who wish to remain anonymous).

We are now taking advance orders and temporarily waiving any postage and packing charges. You can download an order form at www.falklandsociety.org.uk/flyers/OrderForm.pdf and send it in with your cheque for £20 per copy. The books will be mailed out to you when we receive the printed copies, early in December.

November Meeting

You are invited to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Falkland Society Meeting for November 2020:
Nic Boyes, International Traditional Materials Consultant, on
"Stone and Earth – Falkland, Scotland, China and India"

18:45 for 19:00, Wednesday 11 November 2020

Meeting ID: 819 5367 8893

To join this Zoom Meeting, click on **https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81953678893**
from 18:45 onwards on the 11th.

If you can't join from your computer, you can dial in by phone on **0203 481 5237**
or **0203 901 7895**, and then quote the meeting ID: **819 5367 8893**

Stone and Earth – Falkland, Scotland, China and India

I first got to know Nic Boyes about a quarter of a century ago after he met me and my MA students from the University of York at the world-famous Rosslyn Chapel where he was already laying the foundations of his deep knowledge of that building – Rosslyn Castle as well as Rosslyn Chapel – including how best to treat the problems that had beset the structure over centuries, principally ingress of moisture. At the time the Chapel was covered with an immense carapace so that it could dry out. Nic was a senior conservator at Historic Scotland. I had never heard the problems and solutions of stone sculptures and structures explained with such brilliance and intelligibility: my students were inspired! Thereafter I invited Nic to York to teach on the annual Stone Conservation Week of our international MA in Conservation Studies.



Fast forward and Nic set up his own company, Nicolas Boyes Stone Conservation, where he built up a team of capable stone masons and stone conservators. They worked on bridges, castles, churches, monuments, houses great and small, market crosses (including Cupar), medieval and later stone sculpture. I acted for seven years as an adviser ot the company on art historical aspects, and followed with interest their work on spectacular projects including the monuments on the Esplanade of Edinburgh Castle, St Bernard's Well in Stockbridge, and above all the five-year long programme of conserving the exterior (and preparing for the conservation of the interior) of the Rosslyn Chapel. Nic and the Countess of Rosslyn made a TV programme for BBC2: a model of how the good stewardship of buildings can make brilliant, gripping television.

Fast forward again and Nic had become a high-level consultant in stone and other traditional buildings materials, especially earthen building techniques. He and Richard Fraser advised the Falkland Stewardship Trust on how the Temple of Decision, on Black Hill, could not only be pulled back from the brink of total collapse but provide a training opportunity for the volunteers

who help to maintain the land and buildings of the Falkland Estate.

Fast forward yet one more time and Nic is now an International Consultant on stone and earthen structures with missions to China and India behind him and a regular relationship with the Indian National Trust for Art & the Cultural Heritage (INTACH).

Please join us from 18:45 onwards on 11 November for an informal chat followed at 19:00 by what will surely be a most memorable talk.

Peter Burman, Chair

The Falkland Listed Buildings Survey

Back in August many of you submitted forms about the history of your own houses as part of our Listed Buildings Survey – and if you didn't do so then there's still time - the form is available for download at www.falklandsociety.org.uk/flyers/ListedBuildings.pdf. You may be wondering what has happened to the information you submitted. The short answer is that the editing of *Falkland and its People* has taken precedence over the last couple of months, but I will be getting back to the survey results from now onwards, ready for a formal launch at the Falkland Society meeting in January when I will be talking about some of the more interesting results.

One achievement so far is that we have a new Internet space - historicfalkland.scot (not to be confused with historicfalkland.com which is the Society's photographic archive, maintained by Stewart Thomson). The new .scot domain will house sources for Falkland's history, including the historic buildings database arising out of the survey, plus Jack Burgess's year-by-year chronicle of Falkland life.

Ross Burgess

Life seen from our kitchen windows: the Cash bench

One of the privileges of living on Brunton Green is simply to see the world go by and also to note the reaction of our innumerable visitors. The first thing they generally do is to stand in front of the distinguished war memorial which is still less than a decade old and study the names very carefully. They also often ask what the Polish word means at the foot of the inscription panel ('Thank You' - so simple and so gracious a tribute from the Polish airmen who were stationed in Falkland in war-time, the descendants of some of them still members of the wider local community). Many make their way into the Aladdin's Cave of Tim's well-stocked shop, a veritable mecca for many visitors both local and international. The third group linger longest and sit for a while – to enjoy a chat, or the sunshine, to picnic, or simply to rest and enjoy the tranquil scene – on one or other of the three benches, two of which face more or less south and one, the Cash bench, faces more or less west.

That to the efforts of Councillor David MacDiarmid the central bench, which had collapsed ignominiously during August, has been replaced by a new one of the same pattern as before.

Closest to Brunton House is the Cash bench with its inscription plate:



This is a brilliant inscription because it tells in a few words an amazing story of a long-established local family and the musical gifts and fame of two of them. Their story is intimately linked with the life of the Royal Burgh of Falkland.

It is one thing to erect monuments but another important duty is to respect and maintain them. So, I want to celebrate two Falkland people to whom we owe much for their sturdy and long-lasting contributions towards the preservation of Falkland's cultural heritage: John Smith and Bert Dalrymple. These two Falklanders keep a keen eye on what needs to be done to look after our place, both as a whole and in telling details. A month ago, after some careful planning and with the support of the Community Council, Bert and John took the Cash bench in hand. First John power-washed the bench from top to toe, a grim but necessary task thanks to the innumerable birds who use the tree above as their temporary accommodation; then Bert and John took the bench into Bert's garage where they sanded it down, a long and laborious job; finally they applied *Sadolin Extra* which 'feeds' the wood and also gives it a sheen pleasant to the touch and eye. The result is a triumph.



It will be obvious to everyone what a great improvement has been effected by Bert and John: the second image shows them enjoying their handiwork on the last day of October. 'Sending the bench away' would have been one possibility, at a cost of some hundreds of pounds, but what they did was not done to save money. It was to show, quietly and unobtrusively, how important good maintenance is for the present and future of our town of Falkland; and how it can be done with love. This applies to our numerous listed

buildings and all buildings of traditional materials and skills; to our streets with their extensive pavements with their different kinds of patterns and surfaces (a distinction in which only Culross can rival us in the whole of Scotland, an example of 'local distinctiveness'); to our precious green spaces and our trees, shared by everyone whether residents or visitors; and by our monuments, great and small, which include this memorial bench.

Three cheers for Bert and John and for all that they do, quietly and steadily, for the community and our visitors.

Peter Burman, 1 November 2020

Tree of the month

Silver Birch, *Betula pendula*

In the garden of Brunton House we have two trees which have been giving us even more pleasure than usual during the recent sun-dappled autumn days. One is a silverbell tree, *Halesia Carolina*, and the other is a silver birch tree. The silverbell tree has just been expertly pruned by Cupar-based arboriculturalist Callum Braithwaite, retaining its delicate shape but done so skilfully that we feel confident that we shall have a little more sunlight in the garden next summer.

The silver birch - it was decided by consensus - was not ready for pruning just yet, though we shall keep an eye on it during the next year or two. I was glad about its reprieve because it, too, has a most beautiful shape – like a natural canopy – and we enjoy the sense of protection it gives, and shelter, and its complex constructional aspects (if one can say that about a tree) both during the winter and when it is in leaf. Almost all the leaves have now gone but their autumn colour has been a very bright and cheerful yellow.

It is curious that previous owners planted two trees which each have the word 'silver' as an element in their popular name. We are grateful to them. I hope to write about the silverbell tree on another occasion (while for December it will be tempting to write about the holly). Meanwhile I have been investigating the silver birch which is very frequently encountered in the woodlands of the Falkland Estate and throughout Fife. It tends to spring up very readily when woodland has been clear-felled, or following a forest fire.




The Brunton House silver birch, showing (1) the silvery bark on the trunk; (2) the yellow autumn leaves.

Its popular name is easily explained by the white-ish (or silvery) colour of the bark. The bark begins by being an attractive golden-brown but later develops a white-ish papery tissue on the surface, and this peels off in flakes. I always find it enjoyable to allow my eye to travel up and down the trunk of a birch tree and to note the extent of peeling which it has reached. Its flowers are much-loved catkins.

The silver birch is found right across Western Europe although towards the southern edge of its geographical range it is found mainly in mountainous regions. It is pollution-tolerant, like the plane tree, so flourishes in urban and industrial areas as well as in woodlands and gardens. It has been introduced into North America where it is known as the European white birch and is regarded as ‘invasive’ in a number of States. The silver birch is Finland’s national tree. It is also frequently found growing in the three Baltic republics, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

I have been four times to Latvia, on the first occasion invited by the Latvian Ministry of Culture as a specialist adviser on historic buildings. There were two or three special moments for me during that first visit. Most memorably I was invited to climb up inside the tall 1935 statue of *Freedom* which had managed to survive the Communist era intact, and to engage in a discussion about its conservation. There is a staircase within the attenuated lofty stone plinth and then a tiny ladder inside the statue. There exists a photograph of me advancing on the sculpture with a huge key in my hand, the first time a visitor from another country had been accorded the privilege of such a visit. Fortunately, the key worked! The second highlight was lunch with the Minister of Culture. I

had racked my brains to think of a suitable present, since he was the host of my visit. I knew that he was a composer and a pianist and so I took him a copy of the music of Peter Maxwell Davies's *Farewell to Stromness*. Happily, the Minister was delighted, and promised to play it often. I myself play it often and it always touches me deeply as well as reminding me of that agreeable encounter in Riga, now some years ago, not long after the independence of the three Baltic States. It also reminds me of my many visits to the St Magnus's Festival, over some forty years, on Orkney Mainland, founded by Peter Maxwell Davies, whom I had admired as a composer and conductor since my school-days when he was music master at a school near my own.



The Brunton House silver birch, showing the complex web of branches that form the canopy

The third occasion brings us back to the silver birch. On the final Sunday of my visit the senior civil servant in the Ministry of Culture invited me to lunch at his *dacha* about an hour and a half drive from Riga. The principal architect to the Ministry and his wife came to the hotel to give me a lift. The whole occasion was quite magical. The farmhouse had grapes growing on a south-facing wall, some of which we had for dessert. Many stories were exchanged over lunch. But at the end of the meal our host announced that he was stoking up the sauna, in a building which looked like a potting shed, with a chimney. The wives were going to do whatever wives do on occasions such as this. He said that I should be paired off with his son, a university doctoral student who had taken me boating on the river during the late morning, and he would be paired with the chief architect (who, I noticed, turned rather pale at the prospect). He turned to me genially and said 'Do you prefer to be beaten with birch twigs or with juniper twigs when we get to that point?' I decided not to admit that this was a choice I had never been faced with before and so I said, bravely, 'Both'!

Last month in my column I reported that I was reading and sort-of-enjoying a brand-new book published in August by Little, Brown: Sasha Swire's *Diary of an MP's Wife*, which gives a very vivid picture of the lives of the 'chumocracy' who rule the UK at the topmost levels of Government. She is not only the wife of an MP but also the daughter of an MP, Sir John Nott, who had been MP for St Ives, in Cornwall, 1966-1983, and famously Secretary of State for Defence during the Falklands War (how many times have *you* been asked by a visitor what the connexion is between the Falkland Islands and the Royal Burgh of Falkland?). But there are

many references to trees in her book, and especially to birch trees, speaking of which Sasha Swire says on pp.491-2, 10 November 2019:

> My father gave me these trees when we first arrived at Chaffcombe (the Devonshire country home of Hugo and Sasha Swire). Back then they were merely whips. Today I look up at one of them; a thin show of bright yellow leaves on top of a tall lanky stem. It is bendy and thin, just like my father, despite his great age. Both belie how hardy and strong they actually are; I think it's the silvery-white bark and grey-green fissures that confuse.

In his political memoir, Sir John Nott has written something which I invite us all to ponder, at a moment when the planting of trees has never seemed more important to Scotland or to the rest of the world:

> Of one thing I am quite certain. I will have contributed more to life by planting trees, by nurturing the land at Trewinnard, and by preserving for future generations my home in Cornwall, than anything that I did, or might have done, in politics, business or the army. What could anyone ask for more of life than that? So, I rest, content.

I will conclude with the final lines of a poem, 'Birches', by the American poet Robert Frost, which can be read as a metaphor for dying.

> *I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,*
> *And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk*
> *Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,*
> *But dipped its top and set me down again.*
> *That would be good both going and coming back*
> *One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.*

The whole poem is quite wonderful and is available freely from Mr Google.

Peter Burman, 3 November 2020

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