



Better days coming?

Falkland Society Newsletter, March 2021

Dear member/Dear supporter,

The snow has come and gone, our garden is looking cheerful with snowdrops, crocuses and winter aconites. Some of us have had our Covid jags. Could better times be on the way?

Last year I wrote a series of articles for these Newsletters on the theme "Tree of the Month". We're returning to the theme of trees for this month's online meeting: Tom Christian, a noted tree expert, will be talking to us about "**Trees in the Landscape**" on Wednesday 10 March – see your invitation below. This year's theme of craftsmanship continues with an article on the goldsmith and silversmith Rod Kelly.

We're continuing to add to our Historic Falkland website – www.historicfalkland.scot – with items about various aspects of the history of our town, including of course our Wikipedia-style encyclopaedia of Falkland Historic Buildings – more about this below.

And don't forget if you missed any of our previous Zoom lectures you can view the recordings at <https://falklandsociety.org.uk/recordings.shtml>.

In this issue:

- [Invitation to the March meeting](#)
- [Progress on the Wiki](#)
- [Rod Kelly, Silversmith](#)
- [Future meetings](#)

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

Peter Burman (Chair)

March Meeting

Your invitation to the Falkland Society meeting for March 2021

Tom Christian on "Trees in the Landscape"

After working for several years on collaborative programmes at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, which led to extensive travel to some far-flung parts of the world, Tom now works freelance as a consultant dendrologist and horticulturalist. His clients range from private estates, National Trust for Scotland, to smaller organisations and community groups.



A specialist in unusual trees, Tom's interests include how our gardens and landscapes can be made more resilient in the face of climate change and other challenges. Tom is also Assistant Editor of the website [Trees and Shrubs Online](#) which is set to become the definitive reference work on woody plants grown in northern temperate gardens.

18:45 for 19:00, Wednesday 10 March
Meeting ID: 825 6670 9348

To join the Zoom meeting, click on the following link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82566709348>

From 18:45 on the 10th.

If you can't join from your computer, you can dial in by phone on

0131 460 1196 or **0203 481 5237** or **0203 901 7895**,

and then quote the meeting ID **825 6670 9348**

Progress with "Falkland Historic Buildings"

We're continuing to improve "Falkland Historic Buildings", our encyclopaedia of Falkland and its heritage; it now contains over 300 articles, including almost every street in Falkland, and the majority of the older houses, and we've made one excursion into Newton; Freuchie to follow. I've also updated the home page and the look and feel of some of the articles – your comments and criticisms would be extremely welcome.



[Main page](#)
[Discussion](#)
[Read](#)
[Edit](#)
[View history](#)
[More](#)

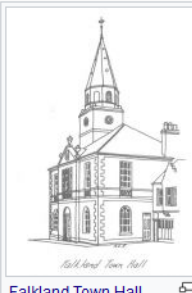
Falkland Historic Buildings – Main Page

Will you help us expand this site to document our history and our heritage? Email us at news@falklandsociety.org.uk if you'd like to get involved.

Welcome!

Welcome to **Falkland Historic Buildings** – the online encyclopaedia of Falkland and its heritage.

Falkland is an former Royal Burgh in the the "Kingdom" of Fife, south-east Scotland. The historic core of Falkland includes the **Falkland Conservation Area**, and two areas have been specially designated by Historic Environment Scotland (HES): the **Falkland**



Falkland Town Hall

What's on this site?

This site aims to cover the whole of the historic **Parish of Falkland** including **Freuchie** and **Newton of Falkland** as well as the **Royal Burgh of Falkland**, plus two sites of particular interest outwith the **Parish**.



The Kirk and the Palace are prominent in this view of Falkland from the **East Lomond Hill**

[Main page](#)
[Recent changes](#)
[Random page](#)
[Help](#)

[Tools](#)
[What links here](#)
[Related changes](#)
[Upload file](#)
[Special pages](#)
[Printable version](#)
[Permanent link](#)
[Page information](#)

And of course we're still asking you for your memories and your images. Photos of Falkland as it used to be, and shops and houses when they had different names: I'm glad we captured a photo of the Palace Pantry before its rebirth this month as Helen's Bakery!

So may we please ask you to go to <https://historicfalkland.scot/wiki/> and look around - perhaps search for your own home, or a place you know, or just follow the links to "Random page" or "Recent changes", and tell us of anything that's wrong or needs expanding.

Answers by email, please, to ross@foxeearth.net.

Ross Burgess

Rod Kelly, Goldsmith and Silversmith

All my grown-up life I have sought to prove that you don't have to be wealthy to commission craftwork or art of beauty, interest and significance.

In the 1970s and 1980s I was creating and adding to a Register of Artists & Craftspeople as part of my professional role as General Secretary of the Council for the Care of Churches and the Cathedrals Fabric Commission for England. Every week, requests would pour in asking for advice about commissioning a piece of craftwork – a silver chalice and paten, say, or a suite of embroidered vestments, an altar frontal, furniture, stained glass, carved work in stone or wood, whatever the focus of that particular church or cathedral at that moment. Often it was the sort of commission that would draw the members of the congregation together and it was amazing how many people of goodwill would happily contribute to the cost of commissioning something *new*, as opposed to contributing to the repair of the roof or the conservation repair of stonework. The best sort of supporter would, of course, be happy to support both creativity in all its forms and conservation of historic fabric and craftsmanship.

I devised a methodology which I have continued to use as the basis for such commissions ever since. First of all, I recommend taking a look at what is available and 'asking around'. Our Register was helpful in this process, and not infrequently a parish would send two or three people to look through the photographs of work by, let us say, John Piper, as an artist designing for the medium of stained glass. I would recommend the visiting delegates to do their utmost to visit other churches where the same artist or craftsworker had been commissioned. The parish

might end up with a number of possibilities; I encouraged them to do so and, if possible, to give younger and less experienced people the opportunity to make a pitch for the commission as well as older and better-known ones.

Meanwhile a fundamental early step would be for someone in the parish to draft a Brief which would then be considered by the Parochial Church Council. A brief should be straightforward and might be along the following lines:

'The parish wishes to commission stained glass for the east window which is at present plain glazed and dazzling on summer Sunday mornings. The theme of the window is to be *The Supper at Emmaus*. Until the artist/craftsperson has been chosen we are only asking for approaches, concepts and ideas. Design work will follow later once the artist has been chosen. There is to be space at the foot of the window for a well-lettered inscription which will explain that the window is a celebration of the sixth centenary of the church.'

Location, medium, subject, purpose - all clearly established.

Equipped by now with the Brief and five short-listed candidates I next recommended inviting them for interview, stressing that design work was not being requested at this stage, but that each of them should prepare a statement about their previous work, whether in churches or elsewhere, and what their *approach* would be to designing a window with that subject and for such a crucial position in the church. An explanation of the likely cost was also requested. Sometimes I was asked to participate in such interviewing sessions; without exception, they were very fascinating occasions. Usually, the choice was then straightforward but by the end of the day we had learned a great deal. For ten glorious years I was the Arts Adviser to Lincoln Cathedral and we followed this methodology through two major commissions – a complete set of furniture for an entire chapel below the great east window, for which we chose Nicholas Hobbs; and a sculpture of *Our Lady of Lincoln*, for which we chose Aidan Hart. They were model commissions and are considered to be a great success. Nicholas Hobbs has spoken at one of our Craft Symposia on the Falkland Estate, and we regularly keep in touch.

Against this background, I was pleased at some point around 1980 to be asked to represent Churches/Cathedrals on the Court, or governing body, of the Royal College of Art in Kensington. I sat on the Court for seven years and visited the various departments – ceramics, metalwork, textiles, whatever – on a rota, so that at any one time I was up to speed and knowledgeable about what was going on. Usually, the Head of a Department would invite me to lunch (where I would meet other members of the teaching staff, all eminent in their particular fields) and we would spend the morning or the afternoon in the department, looking at what was going on, chatting to the students, and occasionally invited to give them a short talk.

But the great event of the year was the Degree Show open to the public. I always made a point of being there and of looking carefully at the work on show, all naturally the best that the graduate students that year could offer. Many of them were likely to set up their own studios or workshops, perhaps quite soon. Sometimes I would ask immediately if they would like to be on the Register of Artists & Craftspeople, and would give them contact details. On one occasion I skidded to a halt in front of the stall of a goldsmith and silversmith, Rod Kelly.



Rod in his workshop

He was already practising the embossing and chasing skills for which he has become well known. I found his work ravishingly beautiful and wanted very much to have some beautiful but useful work by him. I was already inspired by William Morris's dictum that we 'should have nothing in our houses that we did not know to be useful and believe to be beautiful'. I was gradually achieving one of my ambitions, that we should live in our house surrounded by beautiful, unique and useful objects made by people we knew and liked and often came to love. What, I thought to myself, would be useful to us made of silver? The answer came immediately into my mind: a teapot!

I had already been influenced by various German friends to take tea as more of a ceremony than is customary in British households. Our German friends would bake a cake for us, light a candle as a symbol of welcome, and brew the tea for a carefully measured four or five minutes in a beautiful teapot. We should do the same!

I asked Rod if he had already made a teapot and I shall never forget his response: 'No, but I would very much like to do so, because it would force me to find solutions to one or two really tricky technical challenges that I have not so far had the opportunity to solve'. Silver is a very effective conductor of heat and so I thought to myself that one of the challenges must surely be how to ensure that the handle was not painfully hot to the human hand.

The Brief could be quite short because the teapot would have no formal context but a much-loved (as it became) object of utility and beauty in our home. It did contain the suggestion that the chased decoration all around the pumpkin-like shape of the teapot should be inspired by wild dog roses. The narrow lane leading to our family farm in Warwickshire had hedgerows which, in high summer, were afloat with the blossom of dog roses and honeysuckles and so these had become, and remain, my favourite flowers.

I was deeply impressed when I learned that Rod had spent hours in a reference library researching dog roses. Of course – he was a professional craftsperson – he would do his research as surely as I would in studying a particular church or cathedral. The result, as shown in one of the illustrations, is amazingly beautiful and delicate.

The next issue was cost. I wanted to pay Rod a proper professional price and, of course, as someone just setting up his own workshop, that was necessary for him also. We fixed a price and, naturally, it was a sum that I did not have sitting in my bank account. I asked him if he would be happy if I paid by instalments and he said that would be fine. In a way it made it more fun. The first instalment paid for the design, presented in a very detailed drawing which he framed for us as a present. A bonus was that his workshop was a short walk from where we lived in South Hackney, and so he came to supper at each stage in the making. The second instalment paid for the piece of silver required, the third instalment paid for fashioning it into a shape reminiscent of a pumpkin. And so on. We celebrated each stage and I, eschewing further extravagances for the time being, was very happy to pay on the nail for each stage of the work.



The Teapot

I find to my delight that on his website Rod's Statement says, exactly recalling what we agreed to do all those years ago in 1983, 'I enjoy working to commission, I have often been told by clients how the process of commissioning a piece of silver has been so enjoyable and rewarding. Discussing a brief with a customer. Understanding their interests, discussing the function and shape and then meeting to look at the first sketches is very exciting.'

Rod was born in Berkshire in 1956. After a while spent practising his skills in London he and his wife, Sheila McDonald, an enameller-jeweller from Glasgow, bought a house in Norfolk, about twelve miles south of Norwich, where in after years I often visited them and once or twice stayed with them.

Later, during my twenty years as Chair of the Fabric Advisory Committee of St Paul's Cathedral, I was a participant in the commissioning of a hanging pyx for the Chapel of St Dunstan (on the left-hand side at the west end of the nave) in the year 2000. Because of the daunting scale of the space involved, the pyx – a container for the Blessed Sacrament – had to be unusually large, again posing severe technical challenges. Rod is seemingly never dismayed by these challenges but is fascinated and drawn by the process of solving them.

Although I was one of Rod's earliest clients, which I feel as a special kind of honour, his subsequent commissions have embraced York Minster (a pair of ciboria, also in the year 2000) and Lichfield Cathedral (an alms dish, 1990). Just to give the flavour of his secular commissions and clients they include a work for the Golden Jubilee Stakes celebrating HM The Queen's

Golden Jubilee, commissioned by the Duke of Devonshire for Ascot; the Queen Elizabeth I crown coin and the two-pound coin to celebrate Isambard Kingdom Brunel, both for the Royal Mint; work for The Silver Trust set up to commission silver for 10 Downing Street by Cherie Blair, the Royal Mint and the Royal Mail; a gold bowl for the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths; and more. His work can be seen and enjoyed by everyone in several of the most prestigious museums in Britain including the Victoria & Albert Museum, the National Museum of Scotland, the Crafts Council Collection, Birmingham Museum, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (particularly pleasing to me as I attended a weekly class there when I was an undergraduate) and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Tim Wilson, Keeper of Western Art at the Ashmolean Museum, has written that

'For me, to help this genius of embossed and chased metalwork in devising suitable iconography for the Ashmolean silver commission was a huge pleasure.'

The Fitzwilliam Museum commission was for a silver binding for the Kelmscott *Chaucer* (2003). A more recent work is the Oxford-Cambridge Women's Boat Race trophy, a superb object, rather like a miniature font, with the bowl supported on tiny columns.

So typical of Rod is that, on one of the Shetland Islands where he and Sheila have a holiday home, he has established The South House Silver Workshop Trust, a registered charity, whose educational purpose is to hold residential Master Classes for young silversmiths. These young silversmiths are already masters of their craft, and highly motivated, but the Master Classes give them the opportunity to spend time with Rod learning a yet higher degree of skill and commitment to their craft.



Rod at the Craft Symposium

In 2016 Rod came to Falkland where he was reunited with the teapot! He was one of the star

attractions at our *Craft Symposium* that year, with the tools of his craft set out on a table adjoining the smaller table where he was demonstrating and describing how he tackles a piece of silver. There was a never-ending queue of people wanting to talk to him, and to give him feedback or ask questions, to follow the inspiring formal talk which he also gave on that occasion.

Right from the beginning of his career Rod's work has been greatly esteemed by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, one of the City of London 'Guilds', which still massively encourages the traditional craft of which it is in a sense the pinnacle. Three times I have lent 'Peter Burman's teapot' to exhibitions at Goldsmiths' Hall. At the opening of one of these exhibitions, Rod told me, a well-known collector of silver said to him, while admiring the teapot, 'It is such a pity that this kind of celebratory work is only commissioned for show these days, and not for use.'

Rod said that it gave him great pleasure to respond by saying: 'On the contrary, Ma'am, this teapot lives on my client's Aga and is used every day.'

These days we use it only at the weekends, partly to keep it in use and therefore actively cherished as part of the intimacies of our daily domestic life, and partly so that we can enjoy its physical beauty and all the memories it holds, of Rod and Sheila, of happy times and sad, and of the friends who have drunk tea from it for nearly forty years.

Future meetings

- 10 March: Tom Christian, Consultant Dendrologist
- 14 April: Karen Dundas, Scottish Wall Paintings Conservators
- 12 May: Fiona Wemyss of the the Wemyss School of Needlework (to be confirmed)
- 9 June: David F. Wilson, public artist

For more about these meetings, see <https://falklandsociety.org.uk/2020-21programme.shtml>.

And if you missed any of the previous lectures in this series there's information about them at <https://falklandsociety.org.uk/2020-21programme.shtml> with links to download the recordings.

[Back to top.](#)



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