



The Falkland Society

Scottish Registered Charity SC017201

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Our New Season

Falkland Society Newsletter, September 2021

Dear <<First Name>>,

Following our usual summer break in August, we're starting our new season as usual with our Annual General Meeting, to be followed by a talk by Kirsty Archer-Thompson, Curator of Sir Walter Scott's celebrated Abbotsford House in the Borders. This month there are also some events in and around Cupar that we hope will be of interest to our members.

Peter Burman (Chair)

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September Meeting

You're all invited to the first Falkland Society meeting of the new season, via Zoom as usual, starting at 19:00 on Wednesday 15 September. To join the meeting please go to <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83666412324> any time from 18:45 on the 15th.

You can also join by phone on **0203 481 5240**, **0131 460 1196**, **0208 080 6591** or **0330 088 5830**, quoting the meeting ID: **836 6641 2324**

The meeting will include our **Annual General Meeting**, to comprising brief reports on the past year's activities, and election of office-bearers and committee members for 2021–2022.

But the main business of the evening will be the first in a series on the theme of 'anniversaries' celebrating 250 years since the birth of Sir Walter Scott. **Kirsty Archer-Thompson** is Collections and Interpretation Manager of Scott's home at Abbotsford, near Galashiels. You may

have seen her on a BBC 4 programme about Scott the other day. Kirsty is responsible for the collections and built heritage of the site, including conservation and research, but also oversees daily management of the house and the visitor experience, heading up a small team of core staff and over 70 volunteers. Scott's reputation has changed substantially over the years, but Kirsty believes his literature, achievements, enthusiasms and foibles are more resonant and relevant today than ever before.

Abbotsford, designed to Scott's requirements by his architects William Atkinson and Edward Blore, and paid for out of his earnings as a poet and novelist, pioneered the Scottish Baronial style. We plan to arrange a Society visit there, probably in Spring 2022, if sufficient members would like that to happen.



Abbotsford (image from Wikimedia Commons)

Our Programme for the Season

All our meetings are on Wednesdays at 7 p.m., and all will be by Zoom unless otherwise stated.

- 15 September: **Kirsty Archer-Thompson on '250 years of Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832): Past, Present and Future' (see above).**
- 13 October: **speaker awaiting confirmation.**
- 10 November: **Peter Burman on 'John Ruskin's Guild of St George'.** The Guild of St George, in its 150th year, is an educational charity for arts, crafts and the rural economy. Peter is a Director of the Guild, as well as Chair of the Falkland Society.
- 15 December: **Josh Davie's 2021 film *Voices of Falkland*.** To be introduced by Ninian Stuart and Helen Lawrenson.

- 12 January 2021: **Kieran Allan on 'The Tricolore and the Saltire'** The story of the Italian community in Scotland.
- 9 January: **Rory Young on his life and work.** Rory is a stone sculptor and 'artificer', one who makes things, always well-considered and beautiful. He has been called the 'Prince Charming of the 'Lime Revival in Britain'. He carried out the lime-based works to the Sea Captain's House in Kirkcaldy. The West Doorway of York Minster is probably his most famous work.
- 9 March: **Ben Tindall (Benjamin Tindall Architects).** On working collaboratively with clients, artists and craftspeople at Jupiter Artland, a contemporary sculpture park and art gallery at Bonnington House, 7 kilometres west of Edinburgh.
- 13 April: **Ninian Stuart, Helen Lawrenson and Joe Fitzpatrick, 'The Unfolding Future of the Falkland Estate'.** The Estate plays an important role in the lives of our local communities and of all who visit here. Its future management is a matter of burning interest to us all.
- 11 May: **'Woodlands, their history, management and vital role in achieving sustainability (to be confirmed).'**
- 15 June: **Marietta Crichton Stuart on John Patrick Crichton-Stuart, Third Marquess of Bute, and his impact on Falkland and St Andrews.** A major lecture by his great-granddaughter, who has been studying his life and work for many years. This talk will be held at the Stables, Falkland Estate, by kind invitation of the Falkland Stewardship Trust.

Any changes to this programme will be shown on the '[coming events](#)' page on our website.

Flax and Linen Festival

Scotland's first Flax and Linen Festival is being held this month (3 September onwards) in Fife, celebrating the industry that was a mainstay of our town in days gone by. It will feature a range of displays, walks, talks and workshops showcasing linen and flax heritage and contemporary design.

Flax is the grass plant from which fibres are extracted to make linen. Just as yellow rapeseed is commonly seen across the countryside today, 200 years ago the people of Fife would have been familiar with the ubiquitous blue flax flower.



The Festival is being organised by Dr John Ennis of Journeys in Design, a series of initiatives exploring where design meets well-being and sustainable futures, engaging local communities, reaching out internationally, and setting Scotland's contemporary design talent in context.

The festival's main exhibition will be in the former Stocks Linen Mill in Linktown, Kirkcaldy, now Stocks Carpets, with an exhibition of artefacts and stories including contemporary designs in flax fibre and linen from Scotland and beyond. There will also be linen-themed walks around Fife towns (the Falkland and Dunfermline walks are already fully booked, but there may still be tickets available for Strathmiglo on 4 September and Markinch on the 11th).

Full details on Eventbrite at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/journeys-in-design-6652164461>.

Cupar Celebration Weekend, 17–19 September

At the end of 2020, a group of community groups – steered by [Cupar Development Trust](#) – met to discuss the damage caused by the cancellation of so many community events throughout lockdown. All agreed to work together to ensure that events would be a core focus for the year ahead. Further restrictions at the start of 2021 threatened cancellations again – but the dozen organisations have worked hard, collaborating to create what is hoped to become an annual event – a weekend of celebrations to mark Cupar's re-opening.

Cupar's **Celebration Weekend 2021** combines a whole host of events and activities that will run throughout the weekend of Friday 17 to Sunday 19 September; and on Sunday 26 September we hope to be showcasing the Falkland Society in the **Societies' Gathering** in Haugh Park, Cupar (1 p.m. onwards).

See <http://www.cuparnow.blog/2021/08/23/cupars-celebration-weekend-2021/> for more information about these and other events.

Falkland Book Festival

We've been in discussion with Falkland Community Development Trust about a possible Book Fair (title to be confirmed) in Falkland Library, 16/23 October. More about this in our next issue.

Pathways to Traditional Building Skills

Falkland, like the rest of Fife, has a great many buildings, mostly houses, from before 1919. They are built of traditional building materials – generally as local as possible – and crucially use lime-based mortars and renders rather than Portland cement-based mortars for pointing and rendering (or harling, as we do in Scotland, harling or 'hurling' the lime-sand mix at the outside walls). At least 20 per cent of buildings throughout Scotland are constructed of traditional materials. In villages like ours and in small to medium historic towns the percentage is likely to be higher.

It might be as well to remind ourselves what these traditional materials are. Scotland is a wonderfully 'stony' country and so the most basic material of all is stone, often from relatively small local quarries. Fife also produced the kind of stone which could be used for roofing flags: it is still quite common in Fife to see roofs where the roofing material is terracotta pantiles but the three or four courses at the bottom edges are of stone flags. Brunton House in Falkland is an example of this and it is worth looking out for this combination as it adds a great deal of character and interest.

Other materials are brick (not so common as stone in Fife traditional buildings), earth or mud in earlier vernacular buildings and pavements, thatch (now a rarity throughout Scotland), cast and wrought ironwork, steel from the late nineteenth century onwards, internal plasterwork on walls and ceilings, timber for roof timbers and for doors and window frames.

It is therefore a matter of both pride and pleasure that Fife Council, Fife College, and St Andrews Roman Catholic High School in Kirkcaldy, all coordinated by Historic Environment Scotland, have been participating in a project entitled ***Pathways to Traditional Building Skills: a European Perspective***. The European partners were a school at Voss, in Norway, and a college in Torun, an attractive medieval town in Poland where I once visited a research institute for studying stone conservation. The recent conference about the project was opened by Gordon Mole, Head of Economic Development, Fife Council, and by the Chief Executive of Historic Environment Scotland, Alex Paterson.

Working with traditional materials on traditional buildings can potentially provide a young person, woman or man, with a deeply rewarding and worthwhile career. The question is, how do they find their way to such a possibility? What might be their to a career in traditional building skills and traditional materials? Maintaining and repairing traditional buildings is one of the best forms of stewardship we as a society or as individuals can undertake. Mother Earth and humankind are on the brink of a crisis of unfathomable dimensions and we have daily reminders of this. Tearing down traditional buildings, or serviceable buildings of any age, only adds to our problems. So, we desperately need a cadre of craftspeople who are valued by society for their skills and for their commitment to our homes, our built heritage and our townscapes.

It was heartening to hear Gordon Mole declare that Fife Council is committed to maintaining and

promoting traditional building skills in both education and management. Fife Council initiated the project, which has been financed through the *EU Erasmus plus* programme. Regeneration should not mean destroying what we have inherited from the past, but respecting, transforming and maintaining our built environment so that it is fit for contemporary purposes. Alex Paterson praised the partners for persevering with the project even while our societies were in the grip of a global pandemic; he stressed the relevance of the project to Green Recovery.

We heard then from Fiona Fisher, Fife Council's Built Heritage Officer, and a good friend to Falkland since 2014. She is currently managing a substantial Streetscape Project in Inverkeithing, which aims to pass on the knowledge of traditional skills and traditional materials to young people, with a view to providing them with a 'pathway' to satisfying careers and lives. The insight was to introduce this knowledge as early as possible, at High School level, which is when young people are beginning to think about their futures. Another aim was to discover more about what is happening in other European countries, at least in the case of Norway and Poland, and to share with them our approaches in Scotland.

The focus was on 'nurturing unique human skills that artificial intelligence (AI) and machines seem unable to replicate'. This is clearly a point for us all to ponder. The lesson of the Arts & Crafts Movement, still relevant to us today, is that in making beautiful buildings or artefacts the craftsperson engages eye, hand, mind and heart. To watch a wood or stone carver at work, even to have a go oneself, is to understand that there is an intangible element to skill and creativity which no machinery can ever achieve.

Listening to Fiona Fisher's talk I was reminded of just how many aspects of our world are impacted for the good by a craftsmanslike approach to maintaining our historic built environment: sustainability; climate change; retaining embodied energy in our traditional buildings; carbon capture; Covid resilience; strengthening cultural ties with other countries; building meaningful contacts and friendships; working towards social inclusion; gender balance; engaging under-represented groups in society. All these and more can gather under the sheltering shade of our traditional buildings and the skills necessary to maintain them and adapt them.

The achievements of the project seem already to have been considerable and have involved both the St Andrews High School in Kirkcaldy and Fife College (impressively represented by Marc Fleming), for example: development of new course materials at Fife College and the schools at Torun and Voss; delivery of a Training the Trainers course so that the teachers could deliver a course which was new to them, and to which they seem to have responded with enthusiasm and pleasure; the creation of a training video, at Fife College; increasing knowledge and awareness of how traditional buildings are being maintained in other European countries (this is surely a knowledge that should be grown and developed through contact with other countries as time goes on).

The exchange visits themselves will also have been of immense but intangible value. Throughout my life I have found it enormously interesting and inspiring to see, feel and experience 'how other people live'. There are many different ways of living and working, and it is salutary and helpful to understand that our sheer variety is one of the joys of being human.

An engaging presentation by Chuck Jones of Historic Environment Scotland highlighted comparative research between Scotland and the two mainland European countries. Each country represented – and it will be true of all others – has a rich traditional built heritage which is

grounded in centuries of traditional skills. Norway has a population very similar to Scotland. Tradespeople make up half of all those employed. Timber looms very large in Norwegian culture as stone does in ours. Journeymen, that is tradespeople with recognised qualifications in their trade skills, have a high status culturally. That is a crucial difference, I believe, between Scotland and other European countries and it is something we should try to do something about. There is an emphasis in Norway on small companies with an average of 4 employees.

In Scotland the construction industry represents 8 per cent of the total workforce which means that it is one of the strongest career paths. Unfortunately, the training is focused almost exclusively around new build. A considerable refocusing seems to be necessary. This seems already to be happening to some extent in schools where the Curriculum for Excellence, implemented in 2014, aims to make learning more flexible and more responsive to the students' actual needs.

Three points particularly attracted me towards the end of Chuck's presentation:

1. we need to fight for the cultural status of craftspeople
2. because the population of Scotland is very unevenly spread, we need to seek ways in which to overcome geographical limitations;
3. we need to provide earlier and more meaningful exposure to vocational subjects such as the traditional building trades.

Also engaging were the presentations by Claire Mayne, teacher at St Andrews Roman Catholic High School in Kirkcaldy, and Marc Fleming, responsible for Construction Crafts & Built Environment at Fife College, which amplified the earlier presentations but vividly explained what the project had meant for them and their colleagues. Marc Fleming asked how such themes as the following can be included into student training programmes: innovation; digital; new zero; meta-skills; inclusion.

I hope that these paragraphs have whetted the appetites of members of the Falkland Society. Providing a pathway to careers in traditional building materials and skills is incredibly important for our built environments. There is much more that could be said, both about the conference and about the issues as they affect our young people and our societies as a whole. We should meantime express our congratulations to all the partners, in Scotland, Norway and Poland and hope that the project will encourage many more fruitful contacts, to which we might – perhaps – contribute. Above all, we should thank Fife Council, for having the idea of such a worthwhile project.

Members of the Falkland Society and our friends will have an opportunity during our lecture programme to listen to speakers who have incredible insight into craftsmanship in our contemporary world. The first of these, on 9 February 2022, will be Rory Young. Rory lives and works as a sculptor, carver and conservator working principally with stone. He calls himself an 'artificer', someone who makes something. His house is full of artefacts which he has made himself, many with beautiful lettering. He has sculpture in any number of prestigious places including the cathedrals of Southwell, St Albans and York Minster (where he designed the new Great West Doorway in 2000). I have nicknamed him, long ago, the 'Prince Charming of the Lime Revival' because he is extremely charming and articulate as well as being a brilliant 'maker'. One of his important early projects was the Sea Captain's House in Kirkcaldy, just over twenty years ago. It is still widely admired as a superb example of lime-based conservation-orientated repair.



Rory Young with his painted stone sculptures at St Albans Cathedral

Rory is also a superb teacher. But what made him the very special person that he is, working with traditional materials and skills? I have asked him to tell us his story, to share with us what his 'pathway' was to enable him to become a 'maker' with head, heart and hands.

Peter Burman

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