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The Falkland Society
Scottish Registered Charity SC017201
www.falklandsociety.org.uk
www.historicfalkland.scot
news@falklandsociety.org.uk

Falkland Society Newsletter, March 2022

Dear <<First Name>>,

I am haunted by two matters at the moment, one minor, the other major. A friend living near us in Falkland said to me, seemingly apologetically: 'I don't come to the Falkland Society meetings because it's all about archaeology'. I do not know how she came to have such an idea but I did my best to explain that the Society exists to promote architecture, architectural history, art history, archaeology, garden history, craftsmanship, the creative arts and conservation. All these areas of knowledge and activity are closely connected, and they are all capable of being seen through the prism of Falkland itself, our locality in 'Cupar & District', Scotland more widely, the rest of the British Isles, and internationally.

I remember with pleasure the very full house we had in the Chapel Royal at Falkland Palace when Professor Axel Klausmeier came to speak to us about the history and part-preservation and interpretation of the Berlin Wall. He is Director of the Berlin Wall Memorial Foundation (which owns two lengths of the Wall including the horrific aspects of it) and meets, daily, family members of men and women who were killed trying to escape from 'the East'. We all understood this as something very special, and deeply moving.

By strange coincidence he was the first friend to write to me about the invasion of Ukraine, by President Putin's Russia (I put it like that because it is reported that there are many Russians who are as horrified by this invasion as we are in the rest of Europe). His message simply says: 'It is war in Europe. Unbelievable. We could expect it, but now it is reality. I am speech-less'. I know Axel has been many times to Ukraine and values his colleagues, friends and acquaintances there. I deeply regret that I have not. I now long to go, whenever it is possible. At the time of writing the horror of this invasion has yet to sink in, for many of us. It is still too early to know and understand the consequences of what is happening there. We can see and empathise with the countless tragedies that are happening to both individuals and families. But, so far, little has been reported in the media about the damage or threats to Ukraine's heritage, to the cathedrals, churches,

monumental and domestic buildings and artistic treasures. The history of war shows that aggressors quite deliberately damage cultural heritage, in spite of the Hague Convention, as they realise that it is a relatively easy way in which to wound national pride as well as the feelings of citizens.

Let us spare a generous thought for our fellow citizens here in Britain who were originally from the Ukraine and are desperately worried for their relatives and friends. And let us hope that, somehow, there will be a cessation to the carnage and to the anguish which we are witnessing on our television screens and in the press.

Please join us for Ben Tindall's talk on Wednesday, 9 March, at 7.00 p.m. Everyone who has visited The Hub, permanent home of the Edinburgh Festival, or The Queen's Gallery, Holyrood, or Springfield church on the way to Cupar, will know what a 'transformative' architect he is.

Peter Burman (Chair)

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March Meeting

Our Falkland Society meeting for March will feature **Ben Tindall**, on **Working collaboratively with clients, artists and craftspeople,** including Bonnington House and the wonders of Jupiter Artland.

As usual, the meeting will be held by Zoom, at 7 p.m. on Wednesday 9 March. You're invited to join us from 6:45 onwards at https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83666412324 ready for a prompt start at 7. There's no charge. Please note the meeting will be recorded.

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.**



Our speaker for March is the Edinburgh architect Benjamin Tindall, renowned for:

- converting the former Church of Scotland Assembly Hall into The Hub, the permanent home of the Edinburgh Festival (the Hall was initially known as the Victoria Hall, before the CofS amalgamated with the Free Church in 1929; after that it was known as the Highland Tolbooth, after two of the congregations who used it as a church)
- knitting together a former church and a former school to become The Queen's Gallery which stands, literally, mid-way between Holyrood Palace and the Scottish Parliament
- his witty design of the Fringe Festival headquarters in the Royal Mile
- the part he has played in the evolution of Bonnington House, Edinburgh / West Lothian ('1858, in the Jacobean manner of Heriot's Hospital in Edinburgh, with fretted quoins, corner bartizans and strapwork', but with elements of a house of 1622 surviving), into a house with side pavilions, like a Palladian house, one of which contains a ballroom which one could easily believe to be the most beautiful room created in Scotland in the early 21st century, especially for its decorative plasterwork
- and much more.

Like all truly creative people Ben takes as much trouble over relatively minor works as his major commissions, and one that we could easily go and see is his transformation of the barn-like 1861 listed church at Springfield, close to Cupar, which he has rejuvenated by very simple but effective means – bold use of colour and a decorative lettered frieze.



Springfield Church

My best-loved architectural book is *Philip Webb and his Work* by William Richard Lethaby (1857–1931), published in 1935. I have had my now slightly battered copy for almost thirty years. Philip Webb (1831–1915) was the architect partner of William Morris, active in the founding of the Morris firm, and his close partner in founding the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) with its deep respect for traditional building materials and craft skills and its innovative idea of 'repair by building'. Webb was the revered proto-architect of the Arts & Crafts Movement and the architect friend of the leading Pre-Raphaelites, especially Edward Burne-Jones. I mention Lethaby's book because I have often recalled Webb's advice to a young man called Alfred Powell (1865–1960) who wrote to ask his advice about how to go about becoming an architect. Webb replied on 17 March 1894 that:

> It would be good fortune for you if you could so arrange things as to have a year's continuous work at carpentering in its various kinds. Of course, I know this may be impossible, but if so I should say that would be a misfortune. As you would be keeping your eyes wide open to all collateral things, you would pick up much general knowledge of the various other crafts connected with building and would gain much more help to your after work than in any other way.

The amazing thing is that Alfred Powell took this advice seriously; as a young man Ben Tindall also did so, working as apprentice to a very experienced carpenter (Carl Jensen) at the Open-Air Museum at Aarhus in Denmark, an experience which has naturally remained with him all his life. Not only did he develop skills as a carpenter but he developed an empathy for all the different craft skills which may be needed on a building which is intended to be beautiful as well as useful.

Ben had the opportunity of studying at the School of Architecture at Aarhus and then later at the equivalent in Edinburgh. I asked him why, having felt so happy in Denmark, he had decided to come back to Scotland. 'It was the mountains that brought me back', he said, and one can imagine that many other Scots men and women must have felt the same over the centuries. He

spent his ‘year out’ working on the Great Hall of Stirling Castle – one of the great restoration projects of the late 20th century, admired internationally – and there he invented his own surveying machinery. Gradually he found his niche as an architect with a fresh and original understanding of the role which honest good design and materials could play in the historic environment, and wherever new buildings needed to be sensitively situated and detailed in their landscape context.

Ben is a wholehearted admirer of the writings and example of William Morris, and had a spell as Chair of the Scottish branch of the SPABs. At the University of York, we felt honoured to have him as one of the External Examiners of our MA in Conservation Studies: Ben gave his time generously and I know that the students especially enjoyed his kind empathy and his wise advice after reading their dissertations. He also made us tremendously welcome in Edinburgh, on our annual Scottish study visit in early March, guiding us over the work in progress on his wonderful projects.

Ben is married to one of Scotland’s outstanding figurative sculptors, Jill Watson. They live in one of the most handsome Georgian houses on the south side of Edinburgh, deliciously called Hermits & Termits, the childhood home of William Bell Scott (1811–1880), who through his friendships with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Arthur Hughes became a link between Scotland and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement. Jill and Ben have collaborated on a number of major projects including both The Hub and The Queen’s Gallery in Edinburgh. You can sense the great empathy between them when you see the aptness and beauty of the sculpture Jill has created for those two commissions, the tiny figures of musicians on the staircase of The Hub and - my special favourite – the gilded hinges on the massive doors of The Queen’s Gallery, showing the Lion and the Unicorn beneath a cornucopia of flowers and leaves, and two silhouettes, one of Holyrood Park with the distinctive shape of Arthur’s Seat, the other of the Royal Mile between the two royal palaces, from Holyrood Palace up to Edinburgh Castle.



Deeply moving is her *Widows and Bairns* sculpture at Eyemouth which commemorates the tragedy of 14 October 1881 when 189 fishermen were drowned after being caught in a storm on the Berwickshire coast, leaving 78 widows and 182 'bairns’ fatherless. It is a model of how a tragedy can be remembered as Jill has included the exact number of women and children. Each is a figure in bronze – her preferred medium – and a real person, with their name and age recorded.



Ben’s mother and father were both planners. Frank Tindall, his father, became the innovative chief planning officer for Lothian Regional Council. Long before most other professional planners, he realised the transformational impact that a firm but creative approach to conserving historic buildings and their settings could have, providing communities with continuity and a sense of place, and providing redundant or underused buildings with imaginative new purposes. The exceptional preservation of the town of Haddington is in many senses his memorial, but by no means his only one.

Growing up in such a household, but striking out his own path as an architect, it is not surprising that Ben has earned a strong reputation for skilful conservation which embraces putting buildings in good repair (and providing for their future maintenance by example and precept) and gently adapting them. You can see this immediately on visiting the office building of Benjamin Tindall Architects which occupies a steep site on Victoria Terrace, immediately below The Hub and therefore very close to Edinburgh Castle. The new staircase window over the front door, whether seen from inside or outside, is a typically witty juxtaposition of something new with something which, on closer examination, turns out to be in part extremely ancient. The plain wall in which the entrance is set is a section of the medieval town wall. The south side of the office faces one of Europe’s noblest townscape panoramas, unforgettable in breadth and detail, with Heriot’s Hospital dominating the prospect. It must surely be an inspiration to the eager young architects who are working there.





Ben's office - outside and inside

For many years Ben has been famous for declaring that, in designing and building a new building, the materials should not come from a wider radius than 400 yards (e.g. timber, stone, lime). He has also proved that it can be done. He is exceptionally sensitive to the context in which an existing building sits, or in which a new building or group of buildings is to be placed. He has designed estate cottages in a timeless astylar manner which would be perfect for the habitations of today. If only developers of new housing, such as the site currently being soullessly developed at Kinross on the edge of the motorway, would employ Ben or others of his calibre and way of thinking. He should be given the opportunity, and we should all benefit from his principled approach. Imagine what it would do for our carbon footprint as a nation if all new developments, assuming them to be necessary and not simply exploitative, were largely or entirely built of local materials. Imagine the folly of bringing stone from China (as frequently happens), or artificial slates from Portugal, delightful country though that is.

As if rescuing Hermits and Termits were not enough as a personal contribution to cherishing the historic buildings heritage of Scotland, thirty years ago Ben took on Dunglass harbour at Cove on the Berwickshire coast. It had been long neglected when he bought it, all the agencies which might be expected to be helpful were distinctly unhelpful, but little by little the money has been raised – some of it by providing a brilliant location for filming, contributions by visitors, and the rent for a holiday cottage called The Blue Cabin in a matchless situation. Little by little the repairs have been carried out, many of the tasks being executed by Ben personally with his many building skills.

I cannot speak in detail of the Bonnington House/Jupiter Artland sculpture project as I have only seen the book about it and heard Ben's account. It is the family home of a remarkable couple, Robert and Nicky Wilson, who bought the house and 80 acres, not far from Edinburgh airport, in 1999. Robert and his brother Patrick run the family business, Nelson's Homeopathic Pharmacy, and Nicky is an artist who studied at the Camberwell School of Art. The addition of the pavilions seems to enable the house to sit more firmly within its landscape: one provides accommodation for the sort of large family room which is a key ingredient of modern country house comfortable and integrated living; the other – as mentioned earlier – is a ballroom. Between May and September it is possible to visit the ballroom, the stable yard or steading and the grounds. The sculpture park is run as a foundation. All the monies raised through the admission charges go into educational projects including visits and workshops for schoolchildren for which no charge is made.

The sculptures have all been commissioned with very great care – and flair – specifically for their site. They include works by some of the best-known personalities of British art in the past half century, including Charles Jencks, Antony Gormley, Andy Goldsworthy and Anish Kapoor – but also the work of innovative younger artists such as Christian Boltanski, Tania Kovats and Laura Ford.

Two remarks of Robert Wilson about the great vision which he and Nicky have realised seem worth recording here: the first has to do with his family and business background, namely that 'there is a link in that homoeopathic and natural medicines are all about well-being, and that's also the underlying principle of Jupiter Artland'; and the other is about the intimate connexion between the art works and the evolving designed landscape: 'There's a beautiful energy and dynamism, where one enhances the other. It's like a triangle, and the viewer is the third part of the triangle'. Just so! There's a profound truth in that.

Ben speaks with great animation about the decorative freehand plaster ceiling of the ballroom. The chosen plaster-workers were Naomi Jobson and Bob Moore, based in Carlow, Ireland. They lived in a cottage on the estate for nine months while they were working on the project. It is difficult to imagine that they had executed anything of quite this scale and elaboration before. But their virtuosity is apparent, vibrant even, from the photographs I was shown. Happily, the ballroom is used for temporary exhibitions and available to visitors.

I will end by quoting what is said on the website of Benjamin Tindall Architects:

> Our clients vary from community groups to institutions of international renown, from sole traders to multi-national companies and from tenements to country houses. For all these, the breadth and depth of our experience offers unique solutions. For us, style is not an issue, modernist to vernacular, what matters is the sensitivity and effectiveness of the solution … All is done with an emphasis on environmental, economic and social sustainability.

Peter Burman

Voices of Venice

The fourth and final event in the series (organised by our Chair, Peter Burman) of readings about Venice and its problems, from the works of John Ruskin, is being held on **Friday 11 March**.

It will be introduced by **Rachel Dickinson**, Master of the Guid of St George, and the passages from Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* will be read by **Dr Emma Sdegno** and **Sarah Quill**.



Emma Sdegno

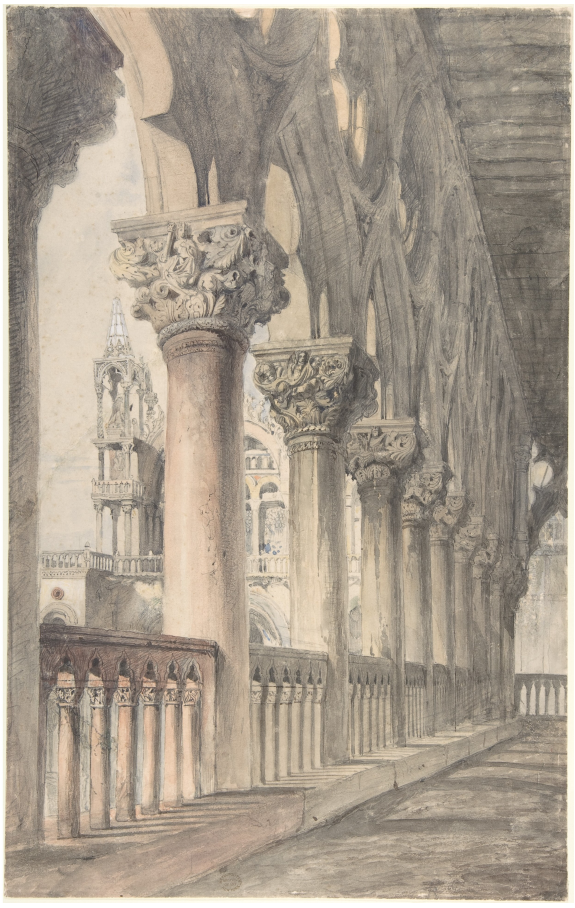


Sarah Quill

Emma is a Companion of the Guild of St George, Consorella of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, and Professor of English at Ca' Foscari University, Venice.

Sarah has worked between Venice and London for many years to create a photographic archive of Venetian architecture, sculpture and daily life. Her book, *Ruskin's Venice: The Stones Revisited* has been translated into Italian. She lectures regularly, principally on Venetian subjects, and is a trustee of the Venice in Peril Fund, the British committee for the preservation of Venice.

This talk will briefly present *Fors Clavigera* as a work, and then concentrate on the way Ruskin refers to Venice in his letters to the labourers of Great Britain. The reading and comment will deal with Ruskin's idea of work, starting from his provocative question, 'Why haven't you a Ducal Palace of your own in Sheffield?', and considering the examples he provides by contrasting old and modern Venetian values.



John Ruskin, Loggia of the Ducal Palace, Venice

All are welcome to attend this event, but you will need to book in advance (no charge).

For more information, and how to book, go to:
https://www.eventbrite.com/e/voices-from-venice-4th-of-4-readings-from-ruskins-writings-about-venice-tickets-201012091577

The series of readings will be followed by an all-day conference on Saturday 2 April. More details on the Guild of St George's website.

Millfield in snowdrop time

Many members and friends of the Falkland Society will have recently enjoyed the garden at Millfield, which Sarah and Rob Marshall generously opened for the four Sundays of February. The entry charges were donated to Scotland's Gardens Scheme 'established in 1931 to raise funds to support the Queen's Nurses in Scotland', but now helping something like 250 charities doing worthwhile work in Scotland. The Gardens Scheme is an excellent modestly-run organisation which encourages owners of beautiful gardens to open them to the public on a certain number of days a year. It's worth looking regularly at their website to see which gardens are open on particular days, usually at weekends, providing a focus for a happy and rewarding outing. Auchtertool House garden will, for example, be open on 6 March.

We were fortunate, along with many other visitors, to go to Millfield on Sunday 27 February – the last possible day – because the sun came out and gave us a day which really did seem to herald the coming of Spring, even though we know that the final weeks of winter have plenty of capacity for freezing cold and stormy weather.

This is the first time that Sarah and Rob have opened the garden in snowdrop time, and we must hope they consider making it an annual tradition as the collection of snowdrops continues to expand and thrive. Sarah explains as follows: 'Originally there were two small groups of snowdrops in the garden. Sarah became obsessed with creating a snowdrop garden. Winters were spent digging up clumps and replanting single snowdrops … Aaron (their son) did a second degree in horticulture at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. He spent time at Branklyn NTS garden in Perth, and is now part of the alpine team at the RHS garden at Harlow Carr in Harrogate. Aaron has added an extra dimension to the garden with his knowledge and passion for rarer plants.'

In addition to the snowdrops we saw tiny cyclamen, hellebore, early primroses and iris reticulata, all in flower. Amazing!



Peter admires the snowdrops

Close to the centre of the garden stands the handsome Late Georgian Millfield House, sensitively conserved. There are strong axial routes either side of the house which lead both the eye and our footsteps from north to south, gradually ascending the foothill of the East Lomond Hill. The northern features include a serpentine walk, a glade between mature trees, and a curving bed conveniently at waist height where the collection of snowdrops is labelled so you can note and enjoy the subtleties of the different varieties. The box garden is a special favourite of mine.



The box garden

South of the house, towards the hill, is the original early 19th century walled garden with attractive subsidiary buildings – which the French call by the beautiful word *dépendences* – and there is plenty to entertain the eye as you gradually ascend the steps southwards. We paused at the summer house where we glimpsed with pleasure a pile of the Falkland Society's publications. A doorway in the south-facing wall provides a marvellous vista up the agreeably long hazel walk, beyond which is a superb pair of steel gates commissioned from our local artist-blacksmith, Jim Shears, who has done so much to enrich the entire neighbourhood with his beautiful gates and fences.



Ross at the gates

Finally, there is a stone bench which provides a breath-taking view over the whole garden. The walled garden is unusual in having its open side facing north, but here the body of the house gives it shelter against the harsh winds.

In the south-east corner of the garden is a choice orchard. We were intrigued by the fact that many colourful apples were still on one particular tree (or scattered around on the ground), while the rest of the orchard had been harvested. We loved the good humour of the stained glass artwork which proclaimed, wisely, 'The cock crows, but the hen lays the eggs'.





It was an added delight that the white greenhouse and adjoining bothy were open. Volunteers from Falkland Gardening Group were serving teas, coffees and rather good chocolate biscuits; there were plants for sale; and there was a small but choice exhibition of paintings by Sarah herself and by local artists Veronica Rankin and Josephine Smith.

We so much enjoyed our visit!

Peter Burman and Ross Burgess

Climate Action

How can we support as members and friends of the Falkland Society?

Three of us who are on the Community Council for Falkland and the Newton-of-Falkland have just come off a call with other representatives of organisations in Fife (apparently there around 4,500 organisations and trusts in Fife, and we are one of them) to discuss how we can all contribute to the vital and urgent work of addressing the causes of Climate Change.

There were two complementary presentations arising from the Scottish Government's decision to establish Climate Action Hubs across Scotland. There are, it seems, two already in existence, one for the Northern Highlands & Islands and the other for North-East Scotland. It seems that Fife, in all its rich diversity, would form another natural Hub. The role of the Hubs will be 'to stimulate local community-led climate action'. The tasks will be to build capacity, to engage communities in the vital work of Climate Action, to encourage collaboration, to build and extend the network of organisations and individuals, to work for greater inclusion (even more of a challenge in such a diverse collection of communities as make up Fife), to enable the role of the Fife Hub to be shaped by local needs.

I was struck by the following headings in the second presentation by Alistair MacLeod of St Andrews, ‘climate literacy’, and ‘inspiring actions of non-climate groups’, in thinking about how the Falkland Society could perhaps respond. Plainly, we are a ‘non-climate group’ inasmuch as our primary purpose is to provide through publications, lectures and seminars knowledge and inspiration in the areas of architecture, archaeology, history, craftsmanship, art and conservation. But I dare say that all of us would like to be better informed about many aspects of Climate Change. Every single one of us is taking decisions every day, almost every moment of every day, which impact on the decarbonising of our world: how we heat and light our homes; how and when we travel; how and where we source our food and clothing. Plus there are those areas, frightening in their extent, over which we as individuals have little influence, such as aviation, shipping and the *matériel* of defence. Somewhere in the middle is the phenomenon of around 25% of UK carbon emissions being caused by building construction including the creation of artificial non-traditional building materials. Against such a background, conserving and updating the buildings we already have is much less damaging than building new ones. When we have to construct new buildings there are choices which can be made about materials – the more local the better. The same is true of our food, and Fife has in many senses led the way with its Fife Diet of food and drink grown, reared or caught within and around the territory of Fife.

In the discussion Helen Lawrenson, Director of the Falkland Centre for Stewardship, drew attention to the ‘Loving Earth’ project, which we as a Society could definitely support. This is a collaborative venture, Quaker in origin, involving the Falkland and Cambo Estates and others. I made an intervention along the lines of acknowledging the contributions of local craftspeople and artists (I make no distinction between the two), of which we have a good number in Fife. Many craftspeople and artists are ‘low energy consuming’, working from home in small workshops or studios, much as writers (also well represented in Fife) work from home and are not constantly travelling between home and work. The churches and community halls of Fife represent an encouraging range of possibilities for the involvement of artists and craftspeople. The community halls I have so far visited all seem to be emotionally cold, when they could be filled with mural paintings, decorative work in many different media, beautiful textiles, etc., all commissioned by local artists. It was good to hear what is happening at the churches of St Luke in Glenrothes, and St Andrew in St Andrews, and I will study their websites and visit them to see at first-hand what they are doing.



Loving Earth images

My simple proposal (which I will shortly invite the Committee to consider) is that one of the two major themes for our 2022–23 lecture programme should be how we can as a society contribute to a greater degree of climate literacy. In addition, I will propose the holding of two half-day Zoom seminars on the contributions which architecture, archaeology, an understanding of history and the work of living artists and craftspeople can make to the urgent task of addressing climate change through the reduction of carbon emissions.

If any aspect of this proposal prompts a suggestion or a comment in your minds, please write to me at peterburman@btinternet.com and I will ensure that the committee has an opportunity to discuss what you have said.

Updates to our websites

It occurred to me that we spend quite a bit of effort on these monthly Newsletters, which are maybe viewed once, and then forgotten. So I've started providing links to them on our website at https://falklandsociety.org.uk/newsletters.shtml. So if you missed a Newsletter, or would like to view it again, or maybe it went out before you signed up, you can now see it as originally sent out (sometimes slightly corrected!).

I've also continued working, as time permits, on our Falkland Historic Buildings wiki – https://historicfalkland.scot/wiki/. It now has over 450 articles, about people, streets, etc., but mostly buildings, in and around the parish of Falkland. But many of the articles are still rather sketchy, and many of them still lack images. If you can help, by pointing out errors or omissions, or providing more information or pictures, please get in touch at ross@foxearth.net.

Ross Burgess (Secretary)

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