



The Falkland Society

Scottish Registered Charity SC017201

www.falklandsociety.org.uk

www.historicfalkland.scot

www.falkland.wiki

news@falklandsociety.org.uk

Falkland Society Newsletter, May 2023

Dear <<First Name>>,

May I warmly commend to all members and friends the talk which will be given on Wednesday 10 May, details of which are given below. As with the September and October meetings last year the May (Catherine Rice) and June (Ross Burgess) lectures will be given in the fine Workshop room at the Stables on the Falkland Estate. They will also be available online as these will be hybrid meetings.

See you there!

PETER

Peter Burman (Chair)

In this issue:

- [May Meeting](#)
- [Lake District Travels, April 2023](#)
- [Coming events](#)
- [Last Month's Meeting](#)

May Meeting

Our next Falkland Society meeting will be on Wednesday 10 May, starting at 7 p.m., when the speaker will be **Catherine Rice**, on **"Fife cottage gardens and gardeners 100 years ago"**.

This will be a hybrid meeting, conducted both live and on Zoom. So please join us at The Stables on the Falkland Estate. If you can't make it there in person you're invited to join us from 6:45 p.m. onwards at

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84336630585>

ready for a prompt start at 7 p.m.

You can also join by phone on **0203 481 5240**, **0131 460 1196**, or **0208 080 6591** quoting the meeting ID: **843 3663 0585**.



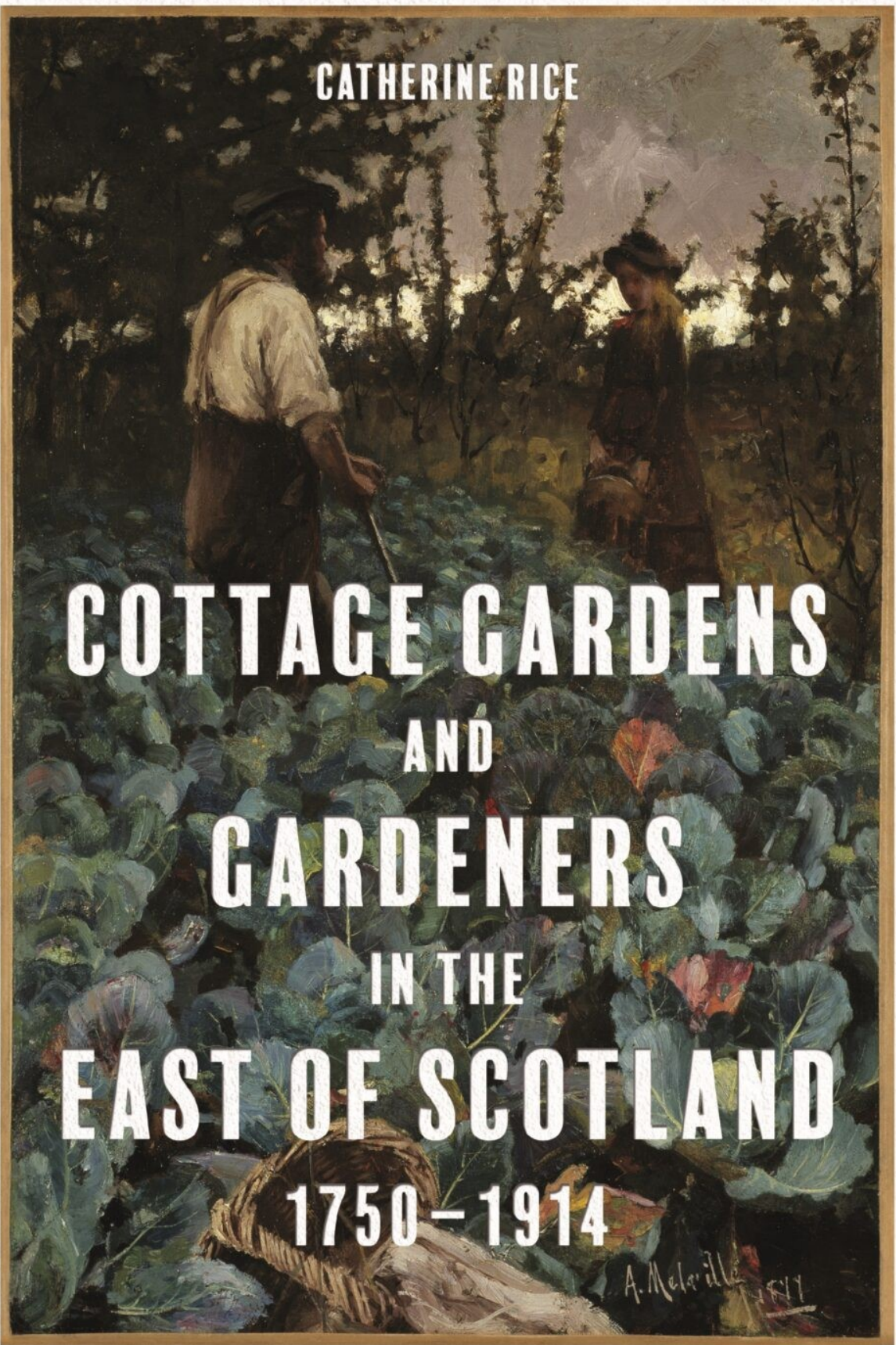
Catherine Rice

Our speaker on Wednesday 10 May is Catherine Rice who in 2022 published with Boydell & Brewer a book called *Cottage Gardens and Gardeners of the East of Scotland 1750-1914*.

Catherine came to Falkland to meet us for a chat on Tuesday 11 April. I asked her how she found such a wonderful topic and she said that it was by accident, having had as a colleague while teaching at the Montrose Academy, Matt Kerr – who was absolutely inspirational as a history teacher and introduced her to researching and writing about local history and to the kinds of

sources through which she might find information and evidence about topics which had not been extensively quarried before.

At this time, she carried out her first fieldwork and wrote about a ruined village, Burnside of Dun – belonging to a local farmer – which was on the edge of the National Trust for Scotland's House of Dun Estate. Her study of that village was published by the Abertay Historical Society as *"All their Good Friends and Neighbours" The story of a vanished hamlet in Angus*, Dundee 2014. I discovered to my delight that this publication is still available through the website of the Abertay Historic Society at a very reasonable price. This worthwhile and enjoyable project gave her a thirst to do yet more research and writing for publication. Meanwhile, she practised as a teacher of English Literature in Dundee, where she now lives.



CATHERINE RICE

**COTTAGE GARDENS
AND
GARDENERS
IN THE
EAST OF SCOTLAND
1750–1914**

She spoke of her discovery that the extensive reports of the various Royal Commissions, published after wide-ranging enquiries from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, were invaluable resources because the Deputy Commissioners travelled around hearing evidence from people who were close to the challenges of working-class life, every word of which was written down and eventually printed verbatim in the reports. There were Royal Commissions on every

imaginable topic related to the condition and advancement (or lack of advancement) of human beings. Topics such as: agriculture and the production of food; the role of women; and education.

She summed up her overriding interests as: the east side of Scotland; the countryside; and working-class history. She recognised that the study of gardening, gardeners and cottage gardens was a focus which could unite those interests.

She received much interest and inspiration, as many garden historians have done, from the writings of John Claudius Loudon (1783–1843), Scottish botanist, garden designer and author who came from a farming background in Cambuslang in Lanarkshire. He wrote *An Encyclopedia of Gardening* in 1822. Following its success, he published *The Encyclopedia of Agriculture* in 1825. He was the first to practice as a 'landscape architect' in the modern sense. Another highly influential work of his, published at the end of his life, was *On the Laying Out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries; and on the Improvement of Churchyards* (1843). Above all, Catherine paid tribute to Loudon's *Gardener's Magazine*, the first periodical devoted solely to horticulture, founded in 1826, and continuing until his death.

"All their Good Friends and Neighbours" The story of a vanished hamlet in Angus



Catherine Rice

I know that Catherine is writing this lecture especially for us: and so it would be marvellous if a good number of us turned up to hear her, either in person at the Falkland Estate Stables, or by Zoom.

Peter Burman

Lake District Travels, April 2023

We want to wish everyone who reads our monthly Newsletters a very happy Spring season. As I write this, it feels too cold to be Spring, though for several days we have had gentle April rain – not likely to give us a soak, but mildly inconvenient all the same, and the skies are grey and dull.

There follows a short light-hearted piece with reflections on our travels last week when the weather was beautiful and sunny and definitely a tad warmer (though with a keen wind) than it is now.

By happy chance we were in the English 'Lake District' for four nights, staying in Coniston in one of a row of cottages managed by the Copper-Miners' Cottages Association, in itself a good idea for collaboration between different owners. We figured out that the week after Easter Week was likely to be much less crowded than over Easter, and so it proved. We booked our charming Victorian cottage at the last minute without any difficulty at all. The village of Coniston rises up quite steeply and our cottage was No. 7 in a row of ten cottages on a ridge, so with marvellous views over Coniston Water.

Our visit to Coniston was timed to include the opening of an exhibition of modern 'lacework' by a friend of ours, Deirdre Kelly, who lives and works in Venice, where she is responsible for running the exhibition gallery at the International School of Graphic Art. Her own studio there looks out on a minor canal, but straight ahead is the Grand Canal so it is the sort of view which is so fascinating – with all the world passing by – that you could imagine spending an entire day there, spell-bound with the comings and goings. Deirdre is Irish by ancestry but was born in London. Her husband, Andrea, and their son, are 'true Venetians', as they were born and grew up there. I often wonder what it must be like to settle in another country, with a partner of that country, and to have to 'catch up' on the language and every aspect of local culture. If any reader has had this experience, do send us your story to share in a future Newsletter.



Ross, Deirdre and Peter at Brantwood

We arrived at our cottage on the Monday evening and immediately lit the log fire and started to cook supper, as we had brought food with us. It's a manageable journey from Falkland to Coniston, of about 200 miles. On the way we did something we often do and that was to drop in at a country house called Dalemmain, just a few miles further on from Penrith, where we come off the motorway. Some years ago, the lady of the house invented an annual Marmalade Festival, unique as far as we know, and last year we by chance coincided with it. This year we were just a few days too soon, but we had our usual hot chocolate and a marvellous cake with marmalade in it. We also stocked up on jars of different marmalades – my favourite is The Bishop's Marmalade, commemorating an seventeenth-century ancestor who was a Bishop; it's made of quinces and lemons, and quite delicious. We then continued round two-thirds of the edge of Ullswater lake, a truly delightful combination of water and mountain scenery, and on southwards through the dramatic Kirkstone Pass. At a certain point you can either keep straight on to Ambleside or, as we nearly always do, turn right on to a narrow lane of incredible steepness which is officially known as 'The Struggle'.

On our return journey, we went the other way and were able to visit a National Trust property called Townend, near Troutbeck. It had been built for a wealthy farmer, George Browne in 1626, and remained in that family until the National Trust acquired it in 1948. The house still includes a rich collection of Lakeland traditional furniture collected by successive generations of Brownes, each generation faithfully protecting and caring for what had gone before. Like many such survivals, with all its furniture intact, its history has something of the miraculous about it. A later George Browne had much enhanced the house and its furniture with wonderful carvings, sometimes adding dates to make a piece appear 200 years older than it was! Townend was one of our best 'historic house' visits for a long time: memorable not just for what we saw but for what we heard. There were several room guides, one upstairs was called Joan, and one downstairs was called Clare. We got into conversation with them and found that they were really brilliant story-tellers. They held us spell-bound so that we stayed in the house far longer than we had

intended; as we left the property manager, who had welcomed us in, said we were the 'longest-staying visitors ever'! We enjoyed ourselves so much, and of course we learned a great deal about the house and garden, the family and their history, and about the artefacts. For once it was a joy to fill in the feedback form!



A room in Townend

Always on these visits we keep a close eye and ear open for 'interpretation', and we are often so impressed by the standard of interpretation: something similar happened on the Wednesday when, completely by chance, we stumbled upon Eskdale Mill, in a village with the intriguing name of Boot. The mill machinery is all in working order and was demonstrated to us, although it no longer grinds corn. We met the property manager and one of the site's trustees; between the two of them we were again held spell-bound. The mill is owned by a small local trust of people specially interested in water mills and their local heritage: in 2022 they had won a national prize for interpretation in a contest where the runner-up had been the British Museum! This in a tiny village, though a delectable one, with very few buildings ruined by over-restoration or unsuitable modern materials conflicting with the old.



Inside the mill

We had decided to spend Tuesday in a spirit of pilgrimage visiting the places intimately associated with John Ruskin (1819–1900), who is definitely the hero of the place. We have done this many times but it could never pall. So we went first to the Ruskin Museum, founded just after 1900 by the archaeologist and historian William Gershom Collingwood, who had been Ruskin's secretary and confidant. It is the kind of museum where being 'old-fashioned' is a compliment. There are portraits and photographs of Ruskin, there is 'Ruskin lace' and 'Ruskin pottery', and everything is genuine, authentic, and homely but somehow very special. At the end is a fine modern addition in homage to Donald Campbell, who lost his life in 1987 in a final attempt on the world water speed record. The display includes the extensive remains of Campbell's boat, *Bluebird*, raised from Coniston Water in 2001.

Then on to Ruskin's home from 1872 to 1900, Brantwood, on the further bank of the lake, where we were able to invite Deirdre and Andrea to a delicious lunch at Brantwood's café, the former stables and carriage house (Ruskin's splendidly appointed carriage still survives), on a terrace overlooking the waters of the lake. I was once there with John Smith and Helen Lawrenson, when we had been invited to visit a charity in the neighbouring village of Bray.

On the Wednesday we first had a spectacular drive through Eskdale, wild and beautiful, and no settlements – just scattered farms – until we reached the village of Boot, already mentioned. Boot was slightly too late for mid-morning coffee and slightly too early for lunch, so after the water mill we went on to visit our next objective, Muncaster Castle. It is a privately owned house and estate of great interest and beauty but what remains in the memory from this visit is, first of all, the extensive grounds around the house which contain exotic and beautiful trees, many in flower, including the largest magnolia I have ever seen, a veritable forest tree, beautifully situated. I could not take my eyes off it and kept on returning to windows in the castle to see if it was still

there and as huge as I had remembered! Then, once again, we were blessed by the two ladies whom we met as room guides: one was at the desk just inside the entrance and clearly had a very deep knowledge and love for the castle and everything about it; and the other was 'tickled pink' to be the librarian – the library is a vast octagonal room, with a gallery at an upper level – and together we looked at some of the more interesting books. I was delighted to find a first edition of one of Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin's illustrated books, of about 1840, one of the sources for the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival. Also delightful were the two young men who were running the restaurant: nothing was too much trouble for them, and they allowed us later to stay out of the cold for our hot chocolate at the end of the afternoon when the café was theoretically closed. Such kind acts tend to remain in the memory.

The final visit on this outing was to a great church which neither of us had visited before, St Bees Priory. Although it was by that time around 6 p.m. there was a notice outside which said 'This church is open all day and every day', which made us feel very welcome. As a Norfolk laird once said to me while researching an exhibition called *Change & Decay, the Future of our Churches* (V & A Museum, 1977), 'there is nothing so discouraging as a firmly closed door to a church'. The Priory church is essentially 'Romanesque' of the twelfth century, with a famous (but much decayed) west doorway, but between 1855 and 1888 it had a major restoration under the direction of one of my favourite architects, William Butterfield. Under his guidance, the church had commissioned a whole sequence of stained-glass windows by William Wailes of Newcastle. We reflected that if the same painter had painted them on canvas they would be celebrated as early Pre-Raphaelite masterpieces (which they are), but because they are of stained glass and in a church they are hardly remarked upon. But, happily, they are still there to be enjoyed by the curious, by the congregation, and by all those who visit and have eyes to see. It was sobering, though, to read of the church's financial problems and the real threat of closure for such a place of pilgrimage – it is so much more than the buildings – that still has such power to move and speak to us. I am haunted by that beautiful place, and by concern for its future.



St Bees Priory

I must tell of the next day speedily. Essentially, we devoted the morning to William Wordsworth, one of the two major Lakeland poets, the other being his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Wordsworth lived in Dove Cottage, with his sister Dorothy – a fine writer in her own right, famous for her Journal - and later his wife, Mary Hutchinson. Again, the interpretation was just perfect: after a short introductory film, which was very good (and we are all grateful for a chance to sit down), the guide left us to explore cottage and garden by ourselves, which allowed us to meditate on the significance of what we were seeing. Then in the more formal museum next door (a beautiful modern building, making effective use of Lakeland building materials) we gazed at hugely important manuscripts and could read the explanations for ourselves – though this is an approach which nowadays I find quite tiring, and would prefer the companionship of a guide's voice.

Our final visit was to the house and estate called Mirehouse, seat of the Spedding family for many generations, which I first learned about through Simon Jenkins's book *The One Thousand Best Houses in Britain*, where he conjures up brilliantly its very special atmosphere as a house better enjoyed for its literary connexions than for its architecture. House and park have a picturesque relationship with the waters of Bassenthwaite lake nearby: and closer to hand looms Skiddaw, celebrated by Wordsworth in his long poem *The Prelude*. The final pleasure was to find, in the Drawing Room, an elderly lady playing music by Chopin really well. It is amazing how music brings a historic room to life. We sat down and listened, spell-bound and full of thankfulness for all the experiences of our few days break from routine.

But then we scampered back to Coniston, to attend the opening of Deirdre Kelly's exhibition at Ruskin's Brantwood, and to welcome her – in Ruskin's Drawing Room – as a fellow Companion of the Guild of St George, founded by Ruskin in 1872, and still going strong.

Coming events

Future Dates:

- 10 May, **Falkland Society meeting: Catherine Rice**, a local author who lives in Perth, on Fife cottage gardens and gardeners '100 years ago', which promises to be a fascinating insight into our garden culture.
- 14 June, **Falkland Society meeting: Ross Burgess** on 'Reflections of the ancient world in Scotland'.

The May and June meetings will both be hybrid, that is we can attend them in person (at The Stables) or join with our computers.

Peter Burman

Last month's meeting



Tom Addyman

If you missed last month's talk by Tom Addyman, "A tale of a few grottos: archaeology of Scottish garden buildings" or would like to see and hear it again, you can view the recording at:

<https://falklandsociety.org.uk/videos/2023-04-12-Tom-Addyman.mp4>

[Back to top.](#)



Copyright © 2023 Falkland Society, All rights reserved.

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

