



The Falkland Society

Scottish Registered Charity SC017201

www.falklandsociety.org.uk

www.historicfalkland.scot

www.falkland.wiki

news@falklandsociety.org.uk

Falkland Society Newsletter, October 2023

Dear Ross,

Our 2023–24 season continues with an online talk by Lily Barnes, about what once was a major industry in Falkland and in Fife generally. We hope to see you all there. Please tell friends and neighbours who might be interested in this fascinating and essentially local topic, and encourage them to sign up to receive our notifications.

Peter Burman (Chair)

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October Meeting

Our next Falkland Society meeting will be on Wednesday 11 October, starting at 7 p.m., when the speaker will be **Lily Barnes**, talking about her project **Flooring the World**, exploring the history of the Fife linoleum industry.

Please join us by Zoom from 6:45 p.m. onwards on the 11th, at

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87161056097>

You can also join by phone on **0203 481 5240**, **0131 460 1196**, or **0208 080 6591** quoting the meeting ID: **871 6105 6097**



Lily Barnes has an MA in the History of Art from St Andrews. She has worked for the Oxford Natural History Museum, the National Trust for Scotland and the University of St Andrews Special Collections. Since February 2022 she has been Engagement Curator with OnFife, a registered charity and Fife's leading cultural organisation.

In February this year Lily hosted a group of Falkland Society members on a very informative trip to the Fife store and archives at Glenrothes, seeing many important artefacts, mainly about the linoleum industry, but including the Falkland Provost's Chain.



Fife has been a centre for **linoleum** production, ever since it was invented in the 1860s. At its peak there were lino factories in Kirkcaldy, Newburgh and of course Falkland, where the nine-acre site of the former St John's Works, empty for five years, awaits its new use.

Lily will be talking about her project **Flooring the World**, exploring what in its day was one of the major industries of Fife. She will give an introduction to Fife linoleum, outline the work done during the project, and share images of the wonderful and everyday objects in OnFife's collections.

Peter Burman

Doors Open Days

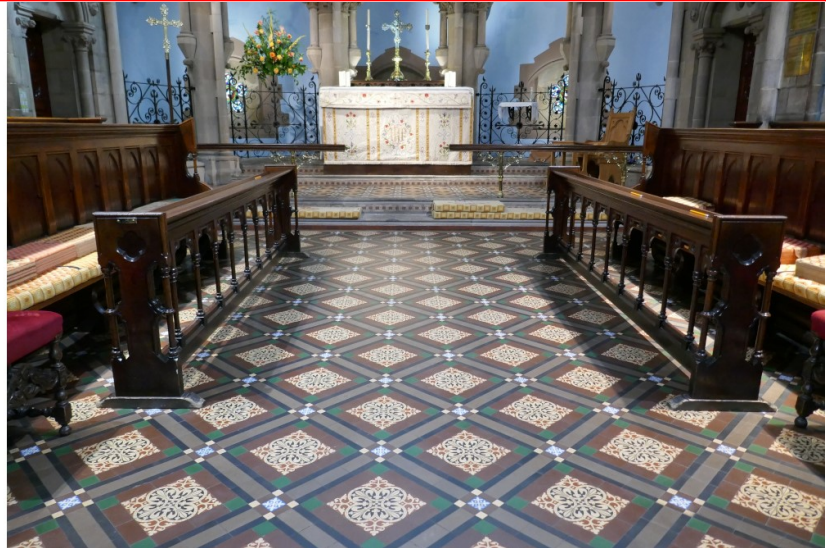
We have been enjoying the annual pleasure of Doors Open Day.

In Edinburgh, Doors Open extends over a whole weekend, 23–24 September this year, and we decided to embark on our own personal voyage of discovery from mid-morning until 6 p.m. on the Saturday. On Sunday afternoon we focused on Riddle's Court, a remarkable pair of 16th century houses in the Lawnmarket which have been beautifully restored by the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust.



Doors OpenDays (known as Open House or Open Days in some communities) provide free access to buildings not normally open to the public (and some that are). The first Doors Open Day took place in France in 1984. I participated for the first time in Flanders, in 1992, having been invited by a Belgian architectural historian and friend. All day we visited beautiful buildings, of all ages and purposes, and in the evening we formed a mighty procession that wound its way through the town ending up at the Town Hall where speeches were made and a buffet supper provided for invited guests. It struck me that for the 'heritage' of a community to become visible like this was an imaginative way to bring beautiful experiences and greater awareness of the rich heritage of buildings to everyone.

Everywhere we went this year we were made welcome by knowledgeable and enthusiastic volunteers, as in **Christ Church, Morningside**, a church by one of the ablest late 19th century Gothic Revival architects, Hippolyte Blanc (1844–1917). He was responsible for a major restoration of parts of Edinburgh Castle in the 1880s. Christ Church was one of his earlier projects, won in competition.



The images above show the richly carved stone pulpit by William Beveridge (with behind a glimpse of the Peter Conacher organ with its decorated pipes at two levels, most unusual) and the chancel, a splendid example of the striving after 'the beauty of holiness' typical of the 19th century Ecclesiological Movement. Carved wooden furniture, stained glass, encaustic tiles and embroidery all have their part to play in this ensemble.

In Scotland, Doors Open Days are organised by the Scottish Civic Trust. Alongside Scottish Archaeology Month, the open days form Scotland's contribution to European Heritage Days. This initiative aims to give people a greater understanding of each other through sharing and exploring cultural heritage. Forty-nine countries across Europe take part annually, in September. It is reckoned that, across Scotland, more than 900 buildings now take part. It is estimated that 5,000 or more volunteers give their time to run activities and open doors for members of the public. There is a considerable impact on the Scottish economy, plus the intangible benefit that many if not most of us feel when we enjoy a visit to a beautiful interior that we might not otherwise have been able to see.

One of the most generous openers to the public this year has been the **University of Edinburgh**.



Old College, the historic heart of the University, contains the spectacular room shown above, designed by William Henry Playfair as the Library of the University. We were encouraged to see so many young people on all the visits we made. Many of them were clearly undergraduates just arrived to take up their places at the University.



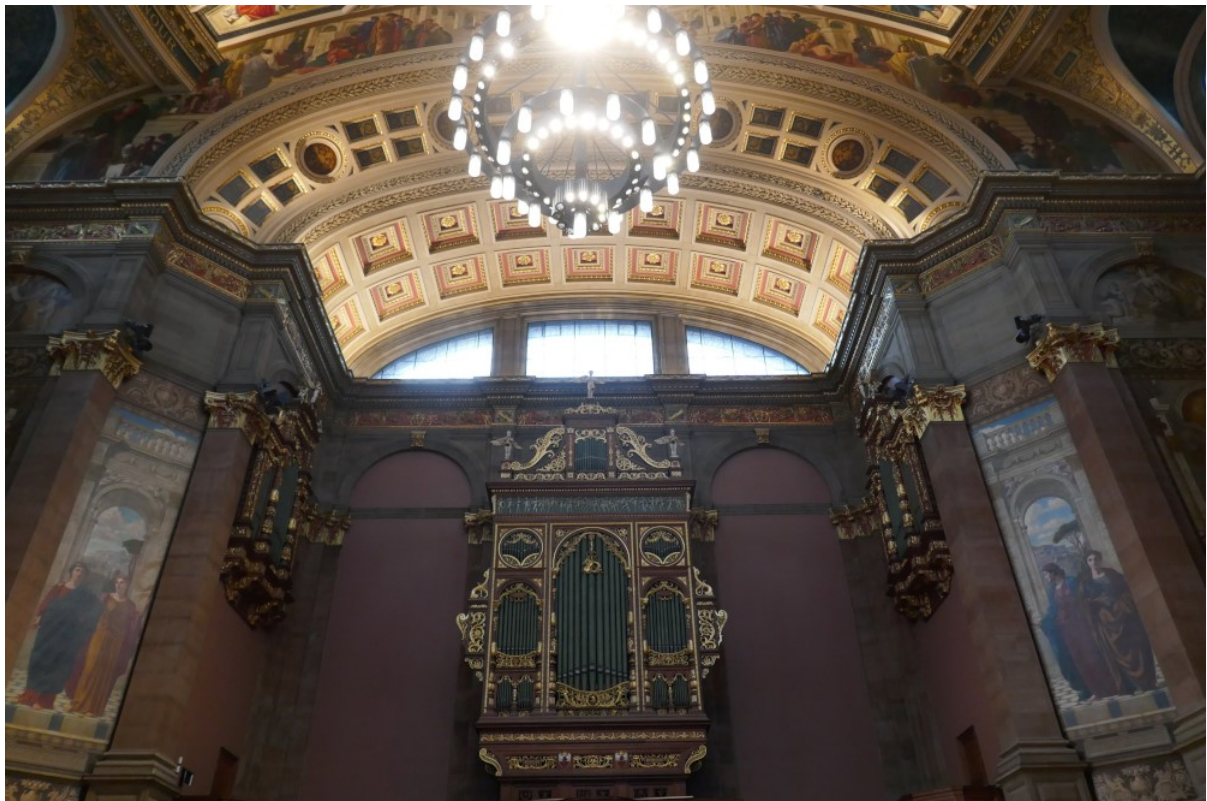
Along the long sides of the Playfair Library Hall is a series of portrait busts of distinguished 19th century academics. One that particularly caught our eye (shown left) was Thomas Charles Hope (1766–1844), Professor of Chemistry 1795–1842, by Sir John Steell, sculptor of the statue of Onesiphorous Tyndall Bruce in Falkland High Street. Sir John Steell was Sculptor-in-Ordinary in Scotland on the appointment of Queen Victoria and his work is always worth looking at with attention.

Every visit we made had its special interest but one visit we had been wanting to make for a long time was to the McEwan Hall of the University, a masterwork of the late 19th century architect Sir Robert Rowand Anderson. He was a prolific designer of churches, including St George's West, St James's Goldenacre and above all the Catholic Apostolic Church at the bottom end of Broughton Street, now known as the Phoebe

Anna Traquair Centre. But to him also we owe an important body of work for the University of Edinburgh and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Queen Street.



The McEwan Hall is one of the architectural treasures of the University. A recent makeover costing millions of pounds has not only put the building and its services into good repair but has made great improvements to the setting of the building. In the image above, the pavilion to one side of the Hall provides safer and better access via an underground passage; the forecourt has been given a labyrinth pavement; and the somewhat daunting scale of the Hall has been better connected to its wider setting.



Inside the building, closing the main axis, is an organ in a case of exquisite craftsmanship, said also to be one of the finest organs in one of the finest acoustics in Edinburgh, a city with many

notable organs.



The main Hall is D-shaped, recalling the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford, which was probably some sort of prototype for the McEwan Hall, and a plan which recalls some of the Renaissance theatres of Italy and London.



Over the central portion of the building is a breathtaking display of virtuoso paintings, all cleaned and conserved.



Adjoining the McEwan Hall is the extensive courtyarded Medical School. We remember that the University of Edinburgh has been for three centuries famed for its medical studies and the training provided for young doctors and surgeons. It seems only right that they should be splendidly accommodated. The courtyard could be that of a magnificent urban palazzo in Italy, France or Spain. The standard lamps in Renaissance style, originally powered by gas, could easily be mistaken for splendid 16th century candlesticks in some great cathedral.



Robert Rowand Anderson was a master of the telling detail. Let us just ponder for a moment

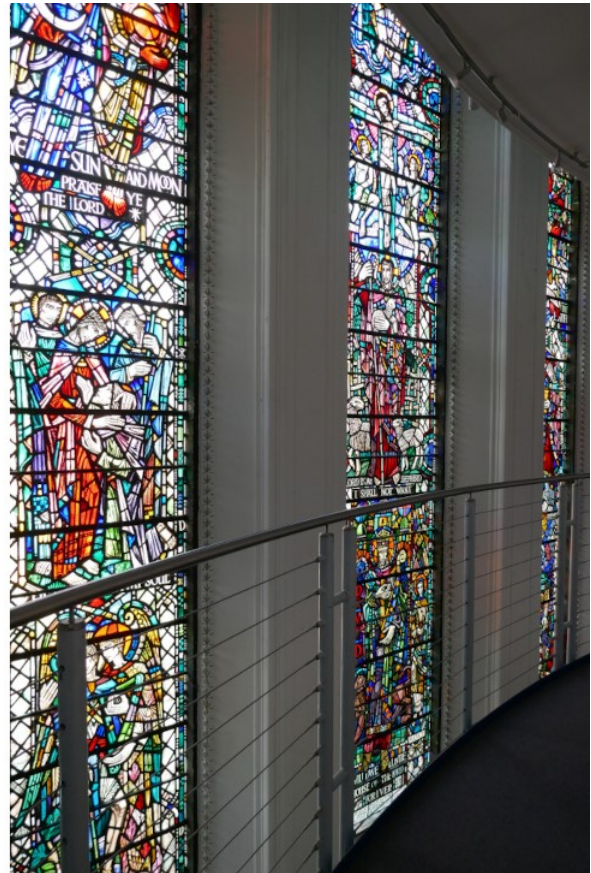
these two superb examples of craftsmanship (left from the Medical School, right from the McEwan Hall). One of the definitions of an Arts & Crafts work of architectural or artistic craftsmanship is where the designer/architect and the craftsperson/artist feel themselves at a deep level to be equals. On Anderson's buildings you feel that, having chosen a craftsperson to work with him, Anderson gave him or her all his trust and all his support. He was in the vanguard of that precious Arts & Crafts moment in Scotland and the trainer of others such as Robert Weir Schultz, well known in Falkland for his work for the 3rd Marquess of Bute, and Robert Lorimer.



I end with two examples of ecclesiastical buildings very different from one another.



The first is a church (architect David Robertson, 1879-81, in 'ponderous neo-Norman style') that is no longer a church, though it is one of four church buildings in Morningside that give that collection of fine buildings the soubriquet of 'Holy Corner'. Its former name was the North Morningside United Presbyterian church, but it is now the **Eric Liddell Centre**, commemorating the famous local athlete.



The building has been dramatically altered inside by the insertion of four floors of accommodation for meetings and activities of many kinds. When I asked the friendly young man in the café on the ground floor what happened in the upper storeys he said: 'Well my brother does judo up there somewhere'. Later we saw a class of young people doing what seemed to be an advanced computer course. Elsewhere there were children playing games. It seemed and clearly was wonderful that the building was working in a kaleidoscopic way to continue to serve the community but in new and inclusive ways. There is a lesson to be learned from that example. There is some superb 20th century stained-glass in the building, much of it high up, which can now be enjoyed from close to in ways never possible before the adaptations to the building took place. This stained glass is by William Wilson, 1957.



Finally, at the end of the day with dusk falling, we came across the most magical building we had seen all day, the **Chapel of St Albert the Great**, belonging to the Dominican Order, set in a garden behind one of the surviving Georgian houses of George Square.



This is also the chapel of the Catholic Chaplaincy of the University and it commanded our attention and respect for the beauty of the space and the way in which, behind the altar, the wall is completely glazed so that the eye of the beholder is carried into the world of nature. John Ruskin would surely have appreciated that. The architect who designed the building, Stuart Allan of Simpson & Brown, Architects of Edinburgh, has written: 'The generator for having the sanctuary at that end was the trees. We wanted to go as close as possible to connect with them

and maximise the size of the building. Behind the glass, we removed the concrete completely to elevate what was there.'



In every other building we were in that day we were dazzled by excessive light. I was reminded here, at the other end of the spectrum from high dazzle, that the poet and Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, John Donne, had once said in one of his sermons: 'Those places are most apt for prayer that have least light'. Quite so. We were also impressed by how the architect and the spiritual community here have worked together with artists and craftspeople. The furniture is in a modern idiom but it is well detailed and substantial and looks as though it would fit well in any fine building.



There is a beautiful and devotional sculpture of the Blessed Virgin Mary, superbly and dramatically well lit, and outside is a new sculpture of St Dominic, quite close to the entrance into the garden, but viewable also from the inside through an ingenious placing of one of the windows on the liturgical south side of the Chapel. This is by the Scottish sculptor, Kenny Hunter, and recently installed. The following words are taken from the leaflet which explains so much and so well what was desired and what has been achieved: 'Our St Dominic holds out his hand towards the viewer affirming the unique goodness, value and dignity of each person, who is created, as we firmly believe, in the image and likeness of God. We hope you can sense not just the energy with which Dominic once preached the gospel but also the compassion in his eyes'.

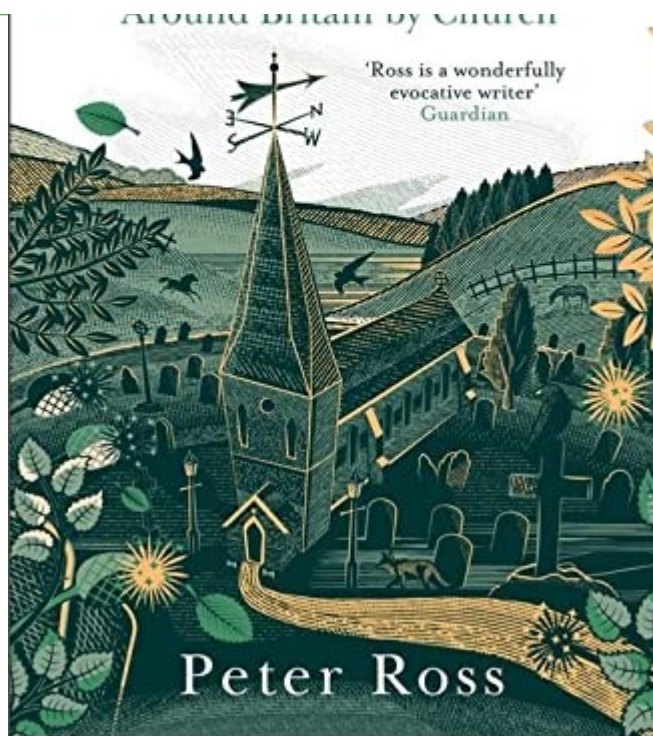
If anyone who reads these words would like to experience a truly beautiful new building, small in scale but rich in meaning, then I can do no better than lead you to this Chapel.

Peter Burman

Book review: *Steeple Chasing: Around Britain by Church* by Peter Ross (Headline, 2023) £22.00



I have to confess that I started this book in the middle as I noticed there was a section on Old St Paul's church in Edinburgh which I had attended regularly for a decade. My eye was at once drawn to an insightful evocation of Richard



Holloway, former Rector and later Bishop of Edinburgh, as 'an old man who has retained the urgent forward momentum of youth. Strikingly tall and slender, he gives the impression of being italicised, leaning into life. He has that particular air of wisdom which emanates from people who have learned to be satisfied with questions not answers.' The church itself is 'a black arrow of soot-dark stone'. Perfect!

The pages devoted to Old St Paul's focus on the commissioning and impact of the painting by the noted Scottish artist, Alison Watt, called *Still*. It is one of Peter Ross's skills that many of his stories take the form of remembered conversations between himself and his interlocutors. His

conversations with Richard Holloway and Alison seem to have been particularly memorable. He drew from Richard Holloway an argument for churches with open doors which will resonate for many of us: 'Churches that are kept open, especially if they have this kind of mystical Catholic tradition, are places of solace. You see people in corners crying, saying their prayers, or just passing the time. This church listens, it discloses, it withholds, it comforts, it challenges.'

Peter Ross is not only a skilled story-teller but an omnivorous researcher. I have found great pleasure in what I have learned through reading this book, which follows on the tail of his equally entertaining and insightful *Tombs with a View*. Speaking of tails brings to mind his chapter on 'Cats', which is a fascinating account of the relationship which the cat Doorkins Magnificat had with Southwark Cathedral. The 9th century poem known as Pangur Bán originated at Reichenau Abbey. Written in Early Irish, it has been translated by Seamus Heaney and W. H. Auden. Auden's version was set to music by Samuel Barber. On the death of Doorkins Magnificat a funeral was held in the cathedral, and this in the Covid era, which outraged some but touched many tenderly. In his sermon the Dean, Andrew Nunn, reflected on Adam naming the animals: 'As soon as you give them a name, you give them something fundamental: a character, a presence, almost a personality'. The ceremony was livestreamed. A Nottinghamshire vicar wrote online to explain that while she hadn't been able to cry at her aunt's funeral, she had cried at watching Doorkins's funeral: 'It's OK if you don't get it, it's OK if you think it's silly, but for me this helped, it really helped.' This skilful interweaving of sources from the 9th century to the Covid era is typical of the book as a whole. The author quite frequently references the Covid era, as in his narrative about the vaccine being given in Morningside Parish Church and other places of worship.

All of us who love churches should read this book.

Peter Burman

Sarah Brown

We started the season in grand style with a very memorable talk by Sarah Brown. It was really good to welcome so many people to the Stables to hear her in person, with many more viewing online. If you weren't able to be there on the night, you can see and hear the recording at <https://www.falklandsociety.org.uk/videos/2023-09-13-Sarah-Brown.mp4>.

Future events

We're continuing to put together a full programme of talks for the rest of the season – more next month, or check out the [coming events page](#) on our website.

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