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# The Falkland Society

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# Falkland Society Newsletter, November 2023

**Dear <<First Name>>,**

Our speaker for November is our Chair, Dr Peter Burman, talking on "Stories of Remembrance". As usual (at least during the winter months) this meeting will be held online only – please use the link below to join the meeting – and if you have friends who might be interested in the topic, please encourage them to sign up using the form at www.falklandsociety.org.uk/contact.shtml so they can receive their own invitation.

***Ross Burgess (Secretary)***

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## November Meeting

Our next Falkland Society meeting will be on Wednesday 8 November, starting at 7 p.m., when the speaker will be **Dr Peter Burman**, talking about **Stories of Remembrance**.

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Please join us by Zoom from 6:45 p.m. onwards on the 8th, at

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84199270349

You can also join by phone on **0203 481 5240, 0131 460 1196**, or **0208 080 6591** quoting the meeting ID: 841 9927 0349

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# Stories of Remembrance

November is pre-eminently the month of remembering. In the Christian tradition it begins with the feast days of All Souls and All Saints. In many countries the feast of All Souls is a time for tidying graves, placing fresh flowers or plants on the graves of loved ones. It is inevitable that we find ourselves, in the chilly and sometimes misty days of November, remembering the beauty of past Spring, Summer and Autumn days, and perform rituals of 'letting go', so that we can approach the coming of the New Year and begin the cycle all over again. Not just in Europe it is a global time for remembering those who died in the two World Wars and, alas, in countless wars and disasters since those Wars.

We have a number of friends who love visiting churches as much as we do. At the beginning of October, we stayed with two such friends, Sue Taylor and Jeremy Pursglove, who had prepared for us a rich programme of such visits. One of those churches is called Exton, which is famous for its church monuments (we belong to the Church Monuments Society), including a late 17th-century masterpiece by the sculptor Grinling Gibbons. We admired it hugely but then something else caught our eye, in a remoter corner of this noble church: a relatively recent tablet to someone called Montague Wriothesley Noel (Noel is the surname of the local noble family), who had died in 1941. It is in the idiom of such marvellous letter-cutters as Eric Gill and his followers, and I am trying to find out if anyone knows who the master-carver was. But the letters forms are simple, classical and dignified and they are beautifully laid out on the 'page' of the tablet.




*Contrasting memorials in Exton Church*

The inscription on the Montague Noel monument – 'In thankful memory … joyful,

courageous and loving of heart' – set us thinking just how important such memorials are. They record stories and make them available to everyone in public places, which churches are or should be, and without them the quiet heroism of this man (for example) would scarcely be known to anyone.

The Polish forces in World War 2 are very much remembered here in Falkland with the inscription 'Dziękuję' (thank you) on the War Memorial on Brunton Green, and the icon of Our Lady of Ostrobrama in the Chapel Royal in Falkland Palace. But when we were walking in the Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh the other day we came across another memorial to Polish involvement, this time commemorating a story we'd not been aware of before: Wojtek the bear, adopted by Polish soldiers as a cub in Iran, who served with a Polish regiment, helping them move heavy equipment, and yet ended his days in Edinburgh Zoo.



*Wojtek the bear in Princes Street Gardens*

So this is going to be a talk which will range from Roman times to the present day. It will touch on aspects of archaeology, art history, literature, social history and craftsmanship. It will be a conscious celebration of 'Remembrance'.

***Peter Burman***

# 'Trees for our Times'

## An exhibition of drawings and paintings by artist Peter Jones

The Gallery at the Stables, Falkland Estate

Saturday 25 November – Friday 22 December. Open daily 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

www.peterjoneshouseportraits.co.uk

Falkland Society members are warmly invited to the Preview on Friday 24 November 2–4 p.m.



Many of us enjoy trees. Their slow growth, quiet strength and immense beauty are just the beginning of a story that, for some trees, can span a lifetime of more than a thousand years. They are a reminder to take the long view. Today we need trees more than ever, and they need us. Over the past year artist Peter Jones has taken time in the presence of trees, seeking them out, looking closely, and drawing and painting them.

The charcoal drawings and watercolour paintings in this exhibition are tributes to some remarkable trees at Inveresk Lodge Garden; Dr Neil's Garden in Duddingston Village; the Old Oak Wood at Dalkeith Country Park; and here on Falkland Estate.

## The new Scottish Galleries

For some time, we have been looking forward to the opening of the new Scottish Galleries at the National Gallery of Art on The Mound in Edinburgh, which finally opened after numerous delays at the end of September. We had read a favourable review in the *Guardian* and concluded we should go sooner rather than later as we felt fairly confident that this would be a case of repeat visits, over a long period to come. So it was that we had a glorious afternoon there on Saturday 15 October, on an autumn day of incredible autumnal sunshine and sweetness.

My first image shows, in the foreground, a group of terracotta sculpture by George Anderson Lawson (1832–1904).



*The Bard, a group in terracotta (fired clay) by George Anderson Lawson, 1867*

Lawson had studied at the Trustees' Academy, the forerunner of the Edinburgh College of Art, at which so many of our Scottish artists have studied. The sculptor seems likely to have had in his mind the celebrated poems published in 1760 by James Macpherson, said to be his English translations of Gaelic verse attributed to the third-century warrior poet, Ossian. At the left is the poet, singing, and accompanying himself on a Scottish harp; and at the right is a Highland chieftain, on a throne-like seat, with a young woman, presumed to be his daughter (and making the composition somewhat reminiscent of King Lear) who is ecstatically listening to the performance. But I start with this image also because it shows the basic form of the new galleries, a broad concourse (which makes for pleasant social encounters, as we found) off which is a series of smaller spaces. There are wide windows on the east side with exciting glimpses of Princes Street Gardens, the railway hotel with its sensational clock-tower, and Calton Hill. At the southern end is a change of direction, so the whole ensemble of spaces is L-shaped on plan.

The new galleries aim to provide the visitor with a journey 'through nearly 150 years of Scottish art … These galleries celebrate the richness and variety of Scottish art made from around 1800 to 1945. When "The 'National" (as it is now to be known) first opened in 1859, there were few Scottish works of art in the national collection. It now forms the largest group of Scottish artworks in the world, numbering about 60,000 objects. Built up over many years, this collection reflects the interests and concerns of past generations.'

I was very taken by two works by one of our greatest and earliest Scottish landscape painters, Alexander Nasmyth (1758–1840). The first is of a modest country house in the Lake District called Elleray, painted 1807–1808, for a wealthy young Edinburgh poet and essayist called John

Wilson. Elleray is near Bowness, with spectacular views of lake Windermere and the Langdale Pikes, a landscape which I know well. Apparently, John Wilson had commissioned Alexander Nasmyth to design his house as a picturesque composition intimately related to its landscape, and it appears that the purpose of the painting was to celebrate that achievement. The caption says that 'In 1808 Nasmyth showed this picture in the first public exhibition ever to be held in Edinburgh.' So, with this picture we are right back to the origins of public art in Edinburgh and at the beginning of the period marked by the choice of pictures and works in other media (e.g. photography, sculpture in marble and terracotta, embroidery), as well as oil on canvas, for this brilliant new space.



*Elleray, a painting of a house in the English Lake District by Alexander Nasmyth, 1807–1808*

The second painting by Alexander Nasmyth, *Edinburgh Castle and the Nor' Loch*, was painted in 1824. The painting deftly expresses the context in which the National Gallery of Art stands. Against a background of turbulent clouds, the castle on its rock stands for the immutable strength of a mighty historic fortress, its eastern and northern aspects (which today look to Princes Street) laid out in a kind of panorama; close to the bottom left-hand corner a group of men is working; perhaps they are engineering specialists working on the project to drain the Nor' Loch and then start construction of the infrastructure for the New Town of Edinburgh. So Nasmyth was looking backwards in time by 70 years or so.



*Edinburgh Castle and the Nor' Loch, by Alexander Nasmyth, 1824*

Unexpectedly, there is an old label on the bottom of the frame which declares that the painting is part of the 'Ruskin Collection'. To me as a Director of John Ruskin's Guild of St George this is very intriguing. It will be interesting to enquire when it became part of the Scottish national collection of art, but it does seem like a painting which might have belonged and given great pleasure to John Ruskin's father, John James Ruskin, born in Edinburgh in 1785.




*The label identifying the painting of the Castle and Nor' Loch as from the Ruskin Collection*

The purposes of this article are two-fold: first, to encourage members of the Falkland Society and their friends to go and see the exhibition. The second is to provide some context by way of preparation for a visit and some 'landmarks' so that when you go you will say to yourself 'Ah – those are the embroideries by Phoebe Anna Traquair that I have already heard something about and seen some images of – they are indeed wonderful!' It is very much a personal choice, however, embracing some of those objects to which I personally responded warmly on this, the first of many hoped-for visits.

I would have been surprised if there had been no references to Sir Walter Scott and in fact there are at least two, the one a masterpiece of marble portrait sculpture by the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844), whom Scott had met in 1831 when staying in Rome for the sake of his health.



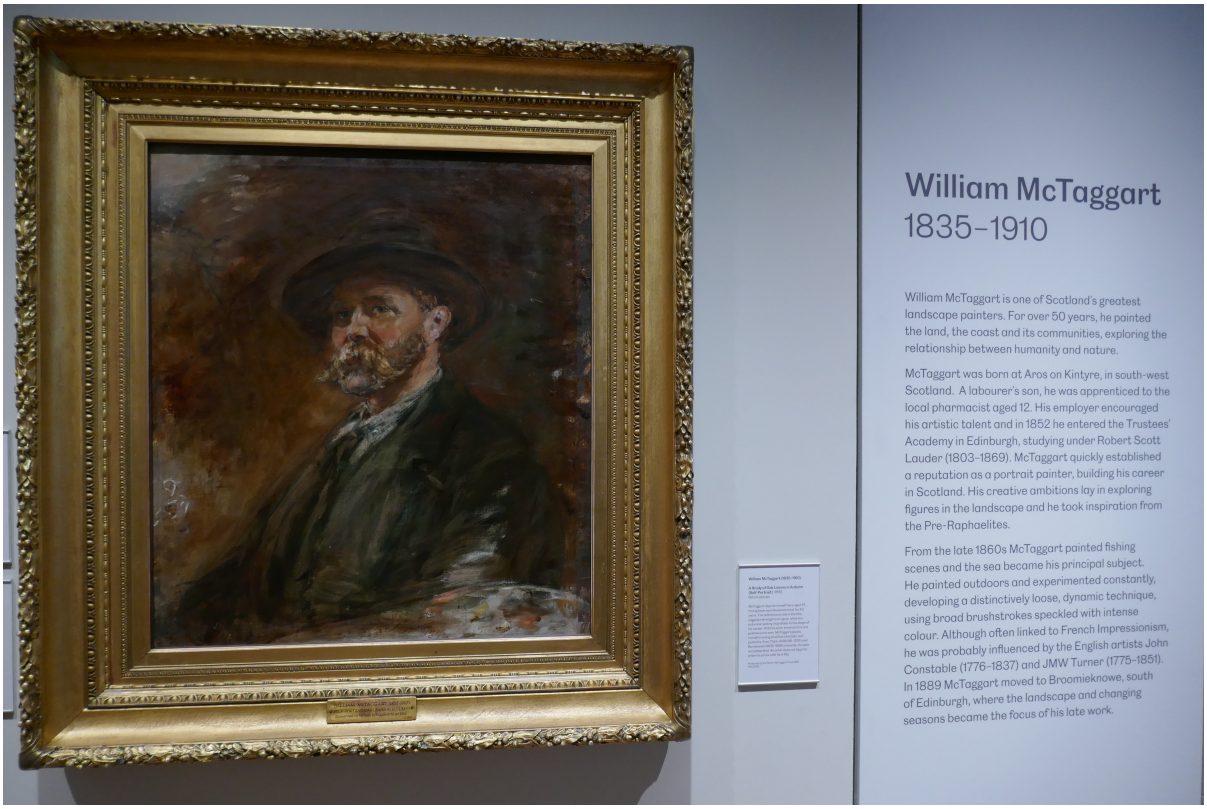
Sir Walter Scott, 1833–34, by Bertel Thorvaldsen. shown both from the front and from one side, an effective positioning of the sculpture in the display

The other is an engaging characterisation of Bailie Macwheeble, a character in Scott's novel *Waverley* (1814), marking Scott's arrival as a writer of historical fiction which would not only lead to an enthusiastic world-wide audience for his novels but have an influence on later Scottish and other writers which still continues.



*Bailie Macwheeble at Breakfast, by James Eckford Lauder (1911–1869), 1854*

William McTaggart (1835–1910) is celebrated as one of Scotland's greatest landscape painters. His career is a paradigm of someone who, in spite of having a humble rural background on the Mull of Kintyre, was early recognised for his talents and was enabled to study at the Trustees' Academy, Edinburgh, under Robert Scott Lauder (1803–1869). He had a long career as an acknowledged painter, beginning in his early twenties. However, the painting by which he is represented in the gallery is towards the end of the middle period of his life as a painter (1892),




*A Study of Oak Leaves in Autumn (Self-portrait), by William McTaggart, 1892*

McTaggart admired the work of the English artists John Constable (1776–1837) and J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851), and was to a degree influenced by them. He frequently painted coastal scenes and paintings in which the sea was a prominent subject. He is often mentioned in the same breath as the French 'Impressionists' but no direct influence has yet been identified. He experimented constantly, often painted out of doors, and developed a rugged style of his own using broad brushstrokes speckled with intense colour. He was also appreciated as a portrait painter and this example, a self-portrait, is a fine example of his skill in that direction.

I found myself wanting to spend as much time as possible with the paintings and embroidery of Phoebe Anna Traquair (1852–1936). This was partly no doubt due to having heard a magnificent lecture on her by her greatest champion, Elizabeth Cumming, at the National Gallery of Art, which encouraged us to see and understand the scheme of mural paintings by her in the former Catholic Apostolic Church in Mansfield Place, Broughton, Edinburgh, now known as the Mansfield Traquair Centre. We also made an effort in early October to see the smaller but still significant scheme of mural paintings by her in the chancel of the church of St Peter, Clayworth, in Nottinghamshire.



*Mural painting by Phoebe Anna Traquair in St Peter's Church, Clayworth*

The Scottish Galleries house several works by Phoebe Anna Traquair, beginning with *For so he giveth his beloved sleep*, which unusually is painted in oil on plaster, the plaster being attached to lath and then brick.



*For so he giveth his beloved sleep, fragment of a mural painting by Phoebe Anna Traquair (1852–1936)*

This is historically of great importance as being a fragment of a mural made in 1886 for the first Mortuary Chapel of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Edinburgh. The composition and even the hair of the angel seem clearly to have been influenced by the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), one of the leading Pre-Raphaelite painters and a great friend of William Morris. The title of the painting is from Psalm 127, verse 2, and the subject is a craftswoman 'received at death into the arms of an angel'.

There were other paintings by Phoebe Anna Traquair in the Galleries, but what really drew me back time and time again were the four tall embroidered panels which follow the journey of the human soul to heaven and are collectively known as The Progress of a Soul, executed in 1895.



*The suite of four panels comprising The Progress of a Soul, silk and gold thread embroidered on linen, Phoebe Anna Traquair, 1895*

They are undoubtedly one of her absolute masterpieces, beautiful (though a little disturbing in their fatalism) in design, and astonishing in their exquisite craftsmanship. Miraculous is the lowest quarter of the third panel showing the disintegrating harp which had earlier looked so splendid.



*Detail of the lowest quarter of the third panel from the left showing the disintegrated harp*

Apparently, the theme was inspired by a performance of Richard Wagner's opera *Parsifal*, which premiered in Germany in 1882. There were passionate enthusiasts in Britain for Wagner's music in the late 19th century, including the composer Sir Hubert Parry. From left to right the panels tell the story of a confident androgenous youth representing a human soul, initially full of hope and enthusiasm, but gradually going to pieces in the second and third panels, and then in the fourth

panel being drawn up to heaven by a powerful angel figure. There is a hint of eroticism in all four panels, as is quite frequent in Symbolist art of the 1890s, and for me an echo of the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley.



*The third panel, showing the soul in despair and on the brink of death*



*The fourth panel, showing an angel bearing the soul to heaven*

Amongst other women artists, I found especially memorable the canvas entitled *Fieldworkers*, 1883, by Flora Macdonald Reid (1860–1945), which has been generously lent by The Fleming Collection.



*Flora Macdonald Reid (1860–1945), Fieldworkers, 1883*

The scene is possibly set in northern France where men were hired to help with the potato harvest (in Scotland, more usually women). We can imagine that it was back-breaking work. But the caption tells us that the central figure ‘has a grandeur and nobility, accentuated by the way in which the light bathes his back, neck and hands’. I felt I could feel the scorching on the back of his jacket and of his neck. Miraculous is the still-life detail of the dangling sack, its rough texture and earthen tincture unnervingly palpable.

In any selection of works of art it is highly advisable to provide recreation for the eye by means of variety of materials and objects, so I found it enjoyable to be faced by a folding fire screen of 1867–8, designed by the Edinburgh-born artist William Bell Scott whose home, an enchanting house called Hermits and Termits, survives in the St Leonards area of Edinburgh.



*The King's Quair Screen (1867–8), designed by William Bell Scott*

The screen depicts and celebrates a 15th century poem in Early Scots called The Kingis Quair (The King's Book) attributed to King James I of Scotland. The screen is crowded with figures and a more detailed image is needed to enable us to give some indication of this fine work of narrative art, created for the industrialist James Leathart (1820–95), a notable collector of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, based in Gateshead in north-east England. The subject of the paintings is James I himself, first seen in prison in Windsor Castle, then falling in love with his future queen, Lady Joan Beaufort, and receiving a gillyflower from her as a token that his love was reciprocated.



*A closer view of one of the panels of the screen*

One of the captions helpfully explains the construction and conservation of the screen which, as a piece of furniture, had suffered wear and tear over the years. The screen is based on a wooden framework lined, front and back, with a loose-weave canvas. Paper was applied to the canvas backing and the artist then painted on to the sheets of paper. Each panel (there are four) was carefully taken apart by conservators, cleaned, and repaired. Tears and paint losses were made good and then the leaves were reassembled. This procedure, properly and carefully described in the caption, reminds us that many perhaps most of the works of art we enjoy in the great galleries of the world have a 'conservation history' behind them and that a small army of conservators across the globe are working to clean and consolidate paintings and sculptures so that they can still communicate clearly to us.

Finally (if you go round the Galleries anti-clockwise, both directions are possible) there are two fine paintings by Sir Edwin Landseer (1802–1873). The first has a long title explaining the subject, *Scene in the Highlands, with Portraits of the Duchess of Bedford, the Duke of Gordon and Lord Alexander Russell*, painted round about 1825–8.



*A complex group portrait by Sir Edwin Landseer of the Duchess of Bedford, her brother the Duke of Gordon, and Lord Alexander Russell. Rumour had it that Landseer was the Duchess's lover.*

The second painting, magnificent in its placing so that we cannot ignore it, is Sir Edwin Landseer's *The Monarch of the Glen*, depicting a royal or 12-point stag. I was immediately reminded of the poignant encounter in the film *The Queen* between our late monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, and a 12-point stag . The painting must be one of the best-known of all the images that evoke for us the culture and landscape of Scotland, albeit it depicts an aspect mostly known to only a small segment of society. We can admire it for its sureness of technique and its magnificent depiction of an animal and a landscape which have been subtly changed by their relationships with the human race, and which speak to us of 'Scottishness'.



*Sir Edwin Landseer's most famous iconic image, The Monarch of the Glen, painted for the House of Lords in London, c.1851. How did it get away?*

## Lily Barnes

In October Lily Barnes gave us a most interesting talk about the linoleum industry and her 'Flooring the World' project. This provoked much discusion from those who remembered people who worked in the lino industry in Falkland. You can download the recording (and all the previous recorded talks) at www.falklandsociety.org.uk/recordings.shtml.

## Future events

Putting together a programme of events for the rest of the season has taken longer than usual, but we are happy to announce that the progreamme is now complete, and can be consulted at the coming events page on our website. Please note the topic and speaker for the next meeting on 13 December.

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