



The Falkland Society

Scottish Registered Charity SC017201

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Falkland Society Newsletter, March 2024

Dear Ross,

Our Annual General Meeting comes up this month, and it's time to reflect on the past year and think of the future. As Peter's Chair's report for 2023 (later in this Newsletter) lays out, we made significant progress last year, in particular with our lecture programme and our ongoing publications programme. But to keep going in future years we will need:

- members, to support our activities with their interest, subscriptions and donations
- volunteers, to join our Committee and take part in running the Society

If you have a little time to spare, and would like to join our Committee, please email me at secretary@falklandsociety.org.uk. It would be helpful if you could be present in person at the AGM.

And if you're able to help us by becoming a member or renewing your membership for 2024, please go to our [Contact Page](#) and download a membership form.

With best wishes from

Ross Burgess (Secretary)

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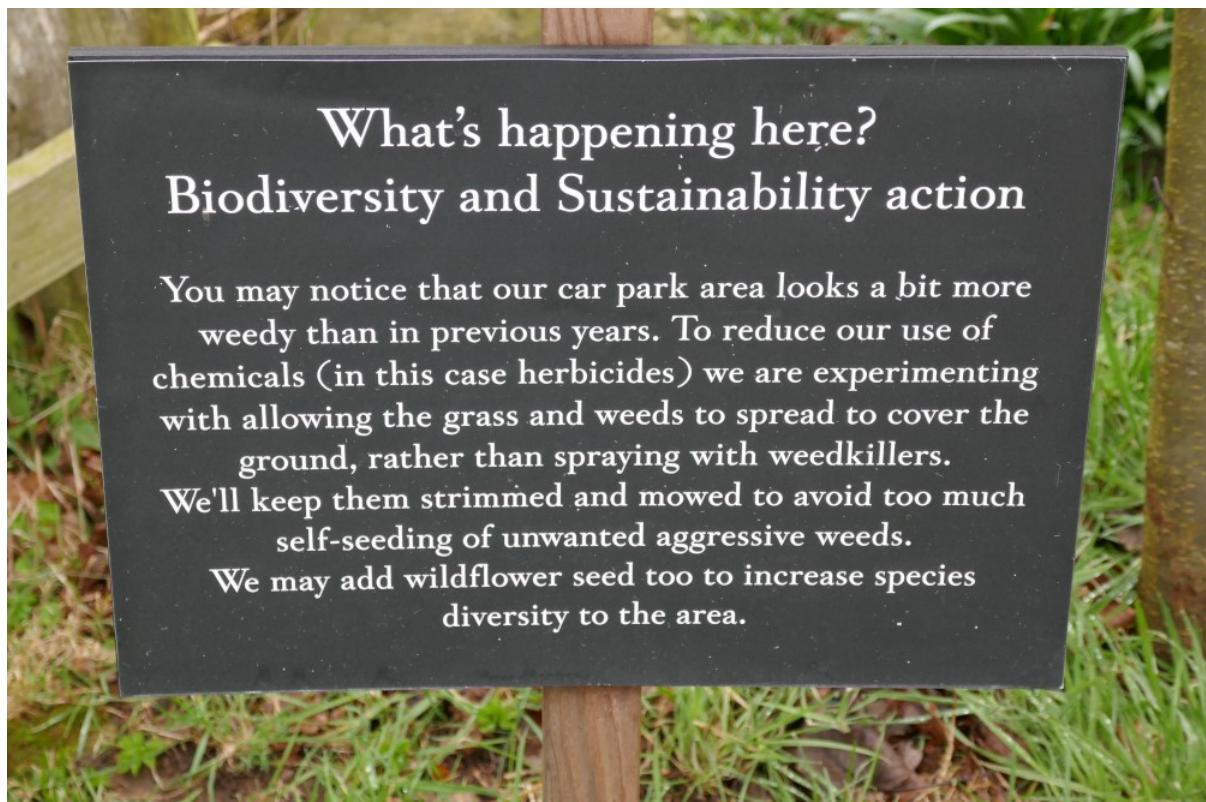
March Meeting

Our next monthly meeting will be a hybrid event, held at the Stables on the Falkland Estate, and also online by Zoom, at 7 p.m. on **Wednesday 13 March**. We will be having a talk by **Catherine, Lady Erskine**, on "**Cambo Walled Garden and new life for the 18th century Stables**", followed by our brief **Annual General Meeting**.

Please join us from 6:45 p.m. onwards on the 13th, at **The Stables, Falkland Estate, KY15 7AF** (what3words: [///dressings.destroyer.football](https://www.what3words.com/#!/en/dressings.destroyer.football)) – you may wish to bring a torch to light your way home – or online by Zoom at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88912786587>

You can also join by phone on **0203 481 5240, 0131 460 1196**, or **0208 080 6591** quoting the meeting ID: **889 1278 6587**



Biodiversity and Sustainability (sign on the Cambo Estate)

Catherine, Lady Erskine



Lady Erskine in the Stables Café on the Cambo Estate

Our speaker on Wednesday 13 March is Catherine, Lady Erskine, of Cambo Estate, Walled Garden and Stables. She is well known as one of the ablest and most inspiring gardeners of Fife. Many of our members will have visited the Cambo Estate, enjoying the walks down to the sea, and especially the Georgian Walled Garden in all its teeming variety of fruit trees, shrubs and plants. The Visitor Centre in the Stables has been restored with a restrained and sure hand, so that its worn surfaces are still largely the original surfaces and there is a rare beauty about the place. The food is exceptionally delicious, with a strong ethical bias, and has been described as “creative vegetarian”. Whenever we have friends staying with us in Falkland and want to take them on an outing they are likely to enjoy, we head for Cambo!



Benign restoration of the Stables – original surfaces and atmosphere preserved

The Cambo Estate came into existence no later than the 13th century. An estate, in the traditional sense, is an area of territory, of land, in the ownership of an individual or a family, but it was also the home of a multi-generational and diverse community who were all, in a certain sense, inter-dependent on one another. As the centuries passed, many of the owning families were caught up in local or national government, in politics, in the law, in the arts and in culture more generally. They called into existence castles and country houses, gardens, orchards and designed landscapes, villages and churches. This heritage is in so many instances still with us today. But, as at Cambo, the heritage of the past is being shared more widely and in countless different ways.

But first a little more history. In 1668, Sir Charles Erskine, Lord Lyon King of Arms, brother of the third Earl of Kellie who died in 1677, purchased the estate from the creditors of Patrick Merton. After a choppy period of history which included the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745, the estate was bought back in the 1790s by Thomas Erskine, ninth Earl of Kellie, who had been a successful merchant in Sweden. He, like so many new owners of estates at that time and since, invested heavily in physical and agricultural improvements, building the picturesque Georgian farmhouses and steadings which still mostly survive today, and carrying out fundamental infrastructure projects such as extensive land drainage.



The 18th century Doocot – awaiting restoration and a new use



Cambo House on 2 March 2024

A traditional estate almost always had a castle or a country house as its focus, from where the estate was run, on behalf of the owning family. Thomas Erskine commissioned the Fife architect, Robert Balfour, to remodel the “big house” in 1795. His descendants lived on in the house, adding to and improving it and the surrounding landscape and garden, until in 1878 the house was destroyed by fire. Almost immediately a new house was commissioned from a sound Edinburgh architectural practice, Wardrop & Reid, who designed and oversaw the execution of the present house between 1879 and 1884.

Incidentally, the fire happened during a “somewhat raucous” staff party while the family was away, which would have made a fascinating episode in a television series about life in a country house.



An eye-catching pair of paintings by a contemporary Myanmar painter

Today the house is listed at Category B, and the grounds, including the Walled Garden, are included on the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland. The house is lived in by a younger son of Sir Peter and Lady Erskine, James Erskine and his wife Jasmine Burnley, and their three sons, who in 2020 moved back to Scotland after seven years living in Myanmar. James has a passionate interest in the contemporary art of Myanmar and there is currently an exhibition of art entitled *Hope for Myanmar* in the front hall of the house, until 10 March. Today Cambo House is a popular wedding and events venue, while the estate and its gardens are a visitor attraction, currently hosting their fifteenth annual snowdrop festival. James is enthusiastic about the new life pulsating through the house on account of him and his family living there, and all the visitors and events coming and going: “The house feels happy, it’s almost like it’s got a smile on its face,” he is reported as saying.



The Walled Garden in winter

The Walled Garden and the Woodland Gardens are open to the public all year round. The woodlands have a significant collection of snowdrops, including over 300 varieties and species of *Galanthus*, accredited with the Plant Heritage organisation as a 'National Plant Collection' which, as Fifers, we should surely take great pride in.



Visitors can buy the legendary snowdrops to plant in their own gardens

The archive contains receipts for the purchase of snowdrops going back to 1801. James

Erskine's grandmother, Lady Magdalen Erskine, cultivated great drifts of snowdrops in the 1930s. So the collections have a fascinating ancestry and are still continuing to be developed. James has an amusing story about Lady Magdalen and her husband: "She was prolific in spreading the snowdrops through the estate and he planted ivy to provide cover for fox hunting. I love the idea that even now, beyond the grave, the two of them are still bickering with one another". The present generation of Sir Peter and Lady Catherine Erskine has introduced Tamworth pigs which feed on ivy, and so the snowdrops are able to survive.



The Edible Garden is an important educational tool

Sir Peter and Lady Catherine have established a trust, the Cambo Heritage Trust, which has involved all their children in its governance directed towards the wise management and long-term preservation of the estate. This is different from the conventional framework in which the eldest child or son generally got to inherit the estate. James is quoted as having said that "it is a pretty nuts system" to place the burden of protecting properties like Cambo on one person by virtue of their birth: "When you have something that is beautiful and precious and needs to be looked after, you want a resilient system that ensures it is looked after in perpetuity for the benefit of everyone ... Choosing somebody who just happens to be born first isn't a resilient system it's a crazy system."



The repurposing of numerous historic estate buildings is one side of the coin; another is embracing new ideas such as the well-equipped lodges for short-stay visitors

Other insightful things said by James in a recent (February 2014) interview with *The Courier* included the thought that: “As you get further from that moment in history where the disparity of wealth was such that people could build a house like this, with its 60 rooms – and we’ve moved away from that, thankfully – there comes a need to share the responsibility.” Moreover, “Historically a place like this was so fundamental to a community: the village of Kingsbarns wouldn’t exist if it weren’t for this house and vice versa ... We feel that it should be a community asset and it needs to pay its way ... We need people to fall in love with it and we need it to be part of the community.”



*A visit to Cambo is rewarding at any time of the year:
our Secretary and Vice-Chair deep in conversation last summer*

Clearly, our speaker is a member of a remarkable family, breaking much new ground.

Please do come, either in person or by Zoom, to share in what is sure to be a fascinating and inspiring talk and evening.

PETER BURMAN

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Falkland Society will be held at The Stables and by Zoom, on Wednesday 13 March, immediately following Lady Erskine's talk.

Agenda:

- Minutes of last AGM
- Chair's report for 2023 (see below)
- Treasurer's report
- Secretary's report
- Publications Sub-committee report
- Election of office-bearers and Committee

Chair's report for 2023

The Falkland Society is a registered charity, reporting to the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator, Charity Number SC017201.

Our original brief, as approved by OSCR, reads as follows:

- *To generate an interest in our town by encouraging the preservation of historical features and promoting interest in the cultural, social, and working life of the community in the past and in the present.*

We have also been using a different summary of our aims:

- *The Falkland Society exists to promote knowledge and understanding of the archaeological, architectural, historic and artistic heritage, past and present, of Falkland and its wider context in Fife and Scotland.*

Activities

There have been two main activities during 2023: a meetings programme and a publications programme.

The meetings programme included monthly lectures in January, February, March, April, May, June, September, October, November and December. We are often complimented on the variety, distinction and interest of our visiting lecturers. During the pandemic we went online using the Zoom platform and we find this works well for the darker and colder months of the year. We have also held some meetings (for example the magnificent lecture in September by Sarah Brown, wife of our former Fife-based Prime Minister) on the "hybrid principle", that is to say meeting in person at the Stables on the Falkland Estate but with Zoom as well so that members and friends at a distance can still join in. Depending on what happens to the parish church of Falkland, it may be possible to have future lecture meetings there. All our lectures are also available as recordings thereafter, through the Society's website.

A programme of publications is in a state of industrious preparation by the Publications Sub-

committee which has been working since November 2022. The Sub-committee consists of Alan Graham (Convener), Marietta Crichton Stuart, and Ross Burgess, who is also Secretary of the Society. Thomas Playfair was also a member of the Sub-committee but retired from it during 2023. Heartfelt thanks to all members of the Sub-committee. Three new publications are anticipated during the course of 2024, with all three current members contributing as authors/editors. The Committee will do its best to see that the new publications are suitably celebrated and brought to public notice.

General Issues

The Committee has confirmed that our **Financial Year** should continue to coincide with the Calendar Year, as envisaged in our Constitution. Future AGMs would be, as this year, in March.

The Society has been glad to give its support to Fife Council's **Flooring the World** project. We had a most enjoyable visit to the headquarters of the Council's cultural arm, including not only a history lesson in the importance of Fife's linoleum industry but also a tantalising glimpse of the Provost's Chain, given to the people of Falkland by the 3rd Marquess of Bute in the 1890s, to mark his year of office as Provost. We have a special invitation to a private viewing of the Flooring the World exhibition, with the Curator, in the St Andrews Museum, to which it has been transferred, in May.

Special thanks are due to Ross Burgess for producing a monthly **Newsletter** which goes out to over 300 members and friends and is always full of interest in addition to promoting the monthly lecture.

We have a list of **other societies**, in or near Fife, who have collaborated with us or would like to do so. Another function of the Newsletter is to keep in touch with cognate societies and individuals.

Succession – refreshment of the Committee through new members and officer bearers – is a matter we need to take seriously. All voluntary societies find this a problem: often it is because too little time and energy are devoted to exploring the possibilities. The current members are:

- Peter Burman (Chair)
- John Smith (Vice-Chair)
- Robeena Dhar (Treasurer)
- Ross Burgess (Secretary)
- Alan Graham (Archivist and Chair of the Publications Sub-Committee)
- Marietta Crichton Stuart.

All the current members are willing to be re-elected, and would therefore normally serve until the next AGM in March 2025. But three of us will celebrate our 80th birthdays during this year and at least one of us may wish to demit office before the end of our normal term. We also need to recruit one or two additional Committee Members. A workable process for succession planning might include: a Job Specification for every role, a commitment to advertising future vacancies; and the interviewing of candidates. To replace our current Secretary, we will need one or more people with specialist IT skills, for instance in hosting Zoom and hybrid meetings, and maintaining the websites.

The Committee wishes to honour the long service of three former members by giving them

Honorary Membership of the Society. They are: Betty Gilchrist; Fiona Lawrenson; Thomas Playfair. We thank them sincerely for their long and faithful contribution to the life and work of the Society.

It has not yet been practicable to effect a revision to the Society's **Constitution**. The option of becoming a SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation) was found to be too onerous. However a more modest change, perhaps incorporating some elements of the standard SCIO Constitution, could be investigated.

The **lecture programme** is confirmed until the end of June this year and I have a long list of possible speakers for the months thereafter.

Falkland Parish Church, now scheduled for closure, has increasingly become an issue during the past year; we have had a number of meetings with Rev. Susan Thorburn, in which we have endeavoured to give her our support. Our February 2024 Newsletter ([still available on our website](#)) contains a magisterial article by Marietta Crichton Stuart which presents all that is reliably known about the church, and the little that is known about its predecessors. On 17 February a broadly representative meeting was held in the church at which the Society was represented by John Smith, Ross Burgess, Alan Graham and myself. Confirmation was given that all the churches identified for closure in the local cluster of parishes need to have found their new futures by, at latest, 31 December 2027. This means that we should become really active and dynamic now! There are encouraging precedents for the imaginative re-use of churches. Europe as a whole has been, for a variety of reasons, over-churched in ways that are no longer sustainable. Our aspiration for Falkland Parish Church, a building of high quality by one of the leading Scottish architects active in the mid-19th century, should be a solution appropriate in terms of enriching the lives of residents and visitors, and outstanding in terms of design and conservation. We are invited to think deeply about new uses for the church, to propose experiments to evaluate what would work and what would not; and to consider such questions as appropriate governance and how to produce an income such that maintenance and management would not be a burden into the future.

I offer heartfelt thanks to everyone whose efforts have contributed to a successful year: to all of our visiting speakers, many of them of great distinction in their fields; to the members of the Committee, with their portfolios; to the staff of the Falkland Stewardship Trust at the Stables on the Falkland Estate; to all of you who attend lectures or other meetings and who appreciate what the Society has to offer, and who remember to recruit and enthuse family members or friends to join the Society and attend our lectures.

It has been a pleasure during this past year to be able to welcome new residents of Falkland to the Society: we hope they will enjoy their membership as well as enjoying being part of our community. 'Falkland' by the way means more than the several communities who live in the village. Many people care about Falkland who do not necessarily live here, and we seek to serve all those who do in any way care about our archaeology, our history, our architecture, the talents of past and present residents, our opportunities and our responsibilities to past and present.

PETER BURMAN, Chair, Falkland Society, 4 March 2024

Stephen Couling and rewilding

Stephen gave a passionate talk at our February meeting about Trees for Life, the Dundreggan Estate, and the rewilding of Scotland. If you missed it, or would like to see/hear it again, there's a recording at <https://falklandsociety.org.uk/videos/2024-02-14-Stephen-Couling.mp4>.

Stephen has suggested some Online Resources for further reading – there is so much to find but this is a start ...

Trees for Life and the Rewilding Centre:

- www.treesforlife.org.uk
- www.visitdundreggan.co.uk

Other places of interest:

- Knepp Estate – Rewilding Pioneers: <https://knepp.co.uk/>

Books:

- *Feral* by George Monbiot (Rewilding in theory): <https://www.monbiot.com/2013/05/24/feral-searching-for-enchancement-on-the-frontiers-of-rewilding/>
- *Wilding* by Isabella Tree (the story of the Knepp Estate) (Rewilding in practice): <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jun/28/wilding-isabella-tree-review-farm-return-nature>
- *Rebirding* by Benedict Macdonald: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/may/18/rebirding-rewilding-britain-and-its-birds-benedict-macdonald-review>

Youtube sites

- Trees for Life: <https://www.youtube.com/@Dundreggan>
- Knepp: <https://www.youtube.com/@kneppflix2180>
- Mossy Earth: <https://www.youtube.com/@MossyEarth>
- Leave Curious: <https://www.youtube.com/@LeaveCurious>
- Beaver Trust: <https://www.youtube.com/@beavertrust>
- Scotland – the Big Picture: <https://www.youtube.com/@scotlandthebigpicture931>

Youtube videos:

- [Restoring the ancient Caledonian Forest](#) – TEDx talk by Alan Watson Featherstone, founder of Trees for Life
- [How trees talk to each other](#) – TED talk by Suzanne Simard, Canadian forester
- [Finding the Mother Tree](#) – TED talk by Suzanne Simard, Canadian forester
- [Man spends 30 years turning degraded land into massive forest](#) – Fools & Dreamers
- [How wolves changed rivers](#) – George Monbiot
- [Rewilding – a call to action](#)



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