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The Falkland Society

Scottish Registered Charity SC017201

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Committee for 2025–2026: [Peter Burman](#) (Chair), [Ross Burgess](#) (Secretary), [Robeena Dhar](#) (Treasurer), [Alan Graham](#) (Archivist), [Marietta Crichton Stuart](#), [Robin Bell](#), [John Fletcher](#).

Falkland Society Newsletter, February 2026

Dear <<First Name>>,

May we remind you that membership subscriptions for 2026 are now due! Please see our '[contact](#)' page for details including a link to the membership form and note that we've now added the ability to pay by PayPal.

You don't have to be a member to come to our events (in person or online) but your subscription would be very welcome, as members' subscriptions and donations are the main source of the funding that keeps this Society going.

Our programme of events continues with a talk by John Fletcher on Wednesday 11 February, to be followed by a brief Annual General Meeting.

Once again, to view this Newsletter the way we intend it, we strongly recommend clicking the "View this email in your browser" link above.

Peter Burman (Chair)

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February Meeting

Our next meeting will be at 7 p.m. on [Wednesday 11 February](#), when **John Fletcher** will be talking about **Reediehill Deer Farm – past, present and future**. This will be a hybrid meeting: online via Zoom, and in person at Falkland Parish Church.

Please join us from 6:45 p.m. onwards on the 11th, at
[The Craig Room, Falkland Parish Church, KY15 7BU](#)
what3words: [///wooden.backpacks.recipient](#)

All welcome, no charge, donations very welcome.

Or you can join us online by Zoom at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82463519345>



Often praised as the first commercial deer farm in Britain (if not Europe!) John and Nichola Fletcher started to farm deer there in 1973, and are still at it.

John will describe his work with wild red deer on the Isle of Rum prior to establishing the deer at Reediehill, above Auchtermuchty. He will explain the reasons that prompted this commercial venture. During the ups and downs that followed he started the Scottish Deer Centre, received the Queen's Award for Export for the many deer farms he set up in Europe, North America and

Asia, and wrote books on the history of deer parks. His deer were used in the making of many films.

On the small farm wide hedges were planted and ponds were dug through the 1980s and 1990s. In this talk John will explain how these early projects have stimulated him to develop an ambitious plan to increase the biodiversity and the beauty of the farm for his successors over the next thirty years.

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Falkland Society will be held on Wednesday 11 February, following a short break after John Fletcher's talk. We aim to keep the AGM fairly short (and in any case for the meeting to be over by 9 p.m.)

The AGENDA is as follows:

1. Welcome; apologies; adoption of draft Minutes of the AGM on 14 May 2025
2. Chair's Report for the year ended 31 December 2025 (Peter Burman, Chair)
3. Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2025 (Robeena Dhar, Treasurer)
4. Reports on Publications and Archives (Alan Graham, Archivist)
5. Questions to the Committee and Office Bearers
6. Election of Committee and Office Bearers

In Celebration of John and Nichola Fletcher

On Wednesday 11 February we shall have a talk by Falkland Society committee member John Fletcher on the deer farm which he and his wife Nichola established in 1973. They are a remarkable couple with interests and skills which seem perfectly fashioned to complement and support one another.



John is from the industrial West Riding of Yorkshire, and has the doughty independence which seems to come from that part of northern England. He did his first degree in Glasgow, qualifying as a vet. Immediately afterwards he had the opportunity to do a PhD at the University of Cambridge, Magdalene College, focusing on the breeding behaviour of red deer on the Isle of Rum.

Nichola originates from Glasgow and trained as an artist-craftswoman at the Edinburgh College of Art, where her outstanding skills won her a Royal Society of Arts bursary, the Johnson Matthey Silverware Award, and a travelling scholarship. Following a graduate year, she has worked as a bespoke designer and maker of jewellery. Her work can be seen in the National Museum of Scotland and in one of the most prestigious of all

museums of design and craftsmanship, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. As if that were not enough, she developed a hugely successful venison business, “Fletchers of Auchtermuchty”, which ran until sold in 2012. The business was complemented by extensive writing about food, cookery demonstrations and teaching workshops.



A necklace made from meteorites

John’s talk will cover the whole development of Reediehill Farm from 1973 onwards, including the story of the deer and the impact on the landscape of a most beautiful

part of Fife.

The farm is reached by driving up the hill to the north of Auchtermuchty, until you meet a distinctive sign, part stone and part steel, a work of art by Nichola's brother, Tim Chalk, a painter and a sculptor.



Turning left on to the territory of the farm you almost immediately encounter one of the eight large ponds which John had created by his neighbour Andrew Swan, an artist with a digger.



The house viewed from the garden

Straight away, a visitor begins to notice the generous tree coverage: every year's development plan has included the planting of trees, especially traditional Scottish species. When John and Nichola took over the farm in 1973 there were at most 25 trees.

The farmhouse is called Harthill, the 'hill of the hart', a hart being a term for a male deer going back to the Middle Ages. On the farm they have a small number of the precious white deer, a white variant of the red deer species. The personal badge of King Richard II was a white hart, remembered in pub names all over Britain and in the *Wilton Diptych*, one of the great surviving examples of medieval British painting, now curated by the Society of Antiquaries of London, at Burlington House, Piccadilly.

Harthill appears on arrival to be single-storey but, by making the best of a steep slope in the ground, the house is actually two-stories, the lower ground floor being reached by a wooden staircase which is a masterwork constructed of different



woods by local joiner and furniture maker, Jim McKeen.

Jim is another local man who deserves to be celebrated in and around Falkland, many of us having beautiful pieces of furniture or joinery by him in our houses. The throne-like seats outside the Stables on the Falkland Estate are by him, much beloved by children and adults alike. He had been apprenticed to the late Tim Stead; for some years after Tim's untimely death he carried on Tim's workshop at Ancrum in the Scottish Borders for his widow before coming back to Fife.



Jim McKeen making the staircase

John and Nichola's kitchen is a complete work of art by Jim McKeen, made using a single ash tree from the Falkland Estate. The detail and subtlety are remarkable. It is a thrilling experience to eat lunch in that lovely room. Like all good patrons of art and craft John and Nichola have the gifts of empathy which encourage other creative people to do their best for them.



Tim Stead (1952 - 2000)

John has written a chapter called "Collecting Tim Stead" for the book *With the Grain, an appreciation of Tim Stead*, published by Birlinn in 2005 to coincide with an exhibition of Tim's work at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. John tells the story of how he first saw Tim's work at the Scottish Craft Gallery during the 1975 Edinburgh Festival. He came

home and said to Nichola that he had "seen the chair that he wanted to sit in for the rest of his life". He is still fulfilling that noble ambition!

John's chapter for the book explains that "Tim continued to revel in the furniture. Perhaps we both felt a slight guilt that our opportunities had their roots in something materialistic and exploitative, because we had strangely similar origins in families that had created their wealth in the northern English textile industry. Yet neither of us could escape the deep-seated distrust of the purely aesthetic and preferred our sculpture to at least seem functional: the chair."





John also takes great pride in a beautiful curvaceous late-nineteenth-century chair which had been his great-grandfather's. The upholstery is of deerskin, still in remarkably good condition.

In March 2009 John became the first man in Scotland to take advantage of the new Human Tissue legislation when he donated one of his kidneys to a stranger. It is feasible for most of us to give a kidney without danger to our own lives and thereby to save the life of another human being.

I was pondering this fact, and John's generosity of spirit, when my eye fell on a letter in the *Guardian* on Saturday 31 January from the Chief Executive of Kidney Research UK, Sandra Currie. Here is one paragraph of her letter:

"Kidney failure is devastating, and the shortage of donor organs costs lives. About 7,000 people in the UK are currently waiting for a kidney transplant, and six people die every week while waiting. It is therefore concerning to read an argument that implicitly accepts continued late diagnosis of kidney disease and progression to kidney failure as an inevitability, rather than recognising the urgent need to raise awareness of kidney disease and prioritise its prevention before lives reach crisis point."



John has told me that giving that kidney has given him a deep feeling of contentment that it was within his power to make such a donation: "I hope to help Scotland become the first country in the world where no-one need die waiting for a kidney."

Another aspect of John and Nichola's shared lives was their tower house in France where "we spent happy summer days". The new owner has said that they are always welcome still to use it when she is not using it herself, "and so now we can go in the winters to write our books."

Peter Burman

New Ways to Pay

Thanks to Robeena for getting us signed up for PayPal - you can now use it to pay your annual membership and optional donation via our 'Contact' page - <https://>

falklandsociety.org.uk/contact.shtml. We will be looking into using PayPal more widely, for instance for ordering books and publications.

Robeena has also obtained a card reader, so if you would like to make a donation or a purchase at one of our events, and have come out without any money, you can pay using a credit card or debit card.

We're still progressing the option of Gift Aid on donations, so that we will be able to claim money back from the tax people. Apparently we'll be able to do this for three years back, which will make a healthy addition to our finances.

Last month's meeting

Our Secretary, Ross Burgess, was the speaker at our January meeting, on the subject 'Falkland's Historic Buildings'.

We'd invested in some new clip-on lapel microphones, which seemed to work extremely well despite being very small. The meeting wasn't entirely free of technical issues, but most of them have been edited out in the recording: see <https://falklandsociety.org.uk/videos/2026-01-21-Ross-Buildings.mp4>.

Future Programme

Wed 11 February: John Fletcher – *Reediehill deer farm: Past, presesnt and future*; followed by the **Falkland Society AGM** (see main article above)

Wed 11 March: Robin Bell – *Falkland: its people in Music*

Wed 8 April: Carron Tobin, Director, Rural Solutions and founder of SCOTO – *Community-led tourism*

Wed 13 May: Craig Cameron, formerly Head Gardener and now Factor of Teasses Estate, Ceres. His talk on the revival of the Estate may be followed up by a visit to the outstanding gardens.

Wed 10 June: James Simpson – *Highlights of his architectural career*

July–August: Summer break

Wed 9 September: Joe Fitzpatrick – *Recent archaeological finds in Falkland*

Wed 14 October: John Gilbert – *Hunting with Mary Queen of Scots*

*Look out for more details of all these events on our website
and in our future Newsletters.*

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