

Senior Fellows Club - Summer Newsletter 2024

This newsletter will be my last as Honorary Secretary, as my 3-year term will end at the AGM in October. It has been an interesting period, as we have gradually recovered as a club following Covid, and we now have a regular in-person attendance of about 40 in addition to those attending online.

One of the main tasks of the Honorary Secretary is to organise the lecture programme for the Club. This is planned long in advance; thus, the programme for next year 2024-25 (link attached below) was planned in the autumn of 2023. I became worried about my predictive powers following our first talk in January on the Natural Environment by Roger Crofts CBE. He talked about the impact of climate chaos on many aspects of the natural world. It was a talk that stunned all the audience with the breadth of potential impacts we might expect if there is no major urgent turn-around in energy policy. This talk was followed by the wettest spring we have had in the 200 years records have been kept! I do not think that one of our lectures has ever had such immediate relevance.

I was educated in the north of England and our history curriculum never really covered much of Scottish history or the Act of Union. I had a vague knowledge of the Darien expedition but was blown away by the actual events as described by Bruce Jamieson in February. The talk on the Disaster at Darien was a reminder of how little knowledge there was in Scotland in the late 17th century of the world of South America. For example, Scots Bonnets were taken in their hundreds as trading items to a country with average temperatures in the region 24-25 degrees! The crops the colonists planned to grow were also totally unsuited to the climate, even if the colonists could have cleared the jungle in the heat and climate of disease.

I was also unaware how the English Government sanctioned Scotland for its temerity in trying to set up a colony, forbidding any cross-border trade, and also preventing its colonies supporting or trading with Scots. In today's world of rapid communication, it was also rather shocking to realise that further fleets were sent to Darien, only to find an abandoned settlement. The whole of Scotland had invested in the expedition and no money was ever recovered, contributing to the economic and political situation that resulted in the Act of Union. A salutary history lesson all round.

Some of you may be familiar with the BBC programme Antiques Roadshow. I was watching a programme filmed in Glasgow in early 2024 when up popped Ron Fergusson, a member of the SFC Committee. He was showing some of his late father's collection of old pharmacy bottles. He tells us about this experience in an attached piece. He also kindly came and showed a selection of his collection at the Guest Lunch. This was a really well attended event this year with nearly 90 attendees, comprising members and guests. Stefan Slater again organised a most enjoyable exhibition and also had organised a new event where non-medical books written by club members were available to buy, and other books available for free. This was a very popular new part of the exhibition; I came away with several volumes. We also had a selection of paintings, craft work and personal collections of rare books and jewellery. The lunch in the Great Hall was followed by an excellent musical wind concert from the Five Doctors (Philip Welsby, Paul Cormie, Kath Cormie, Simon McCann, and Peter Hutchison). As part of the concert, we were also treated to a unique virtuoso performance by Niall Finlayson, a former College President

and Chair of the SFC, on the wooden blocks in Walton's Popular song from Façade Suite No. 2, 5th Movement. Sadly, we have no recording to share.

Below are some photographs kindly taken by Iain Milne.



David Boyd, Sadie Walsh and Myrtle Peterkin (one of our lecturers) in earnest discussion in the exhibition



Jean Keeling's impressive display of bimetallism jewellery



Two eminent art critics in action?



Keen attention to the Presidents address at lunch

Our third lecture of 2024 was from Simon Welfare, a distinguished TV producer and author. He told us a tale that shocked the Victorian world when the corpse of peer of the realm was removed from its grave and put up for ransom. The deceased's widow refused to pay up, and a Scotland Yard detective duly dispatched to find the culprit behind the theft. This was unsuccessful and the culprit never apprehended. Simon, as one might expect knowing his TV history, has his own theory, but the answer, as in all good mysteries, will be eventually revealed in the book that he plans to publish.

Our final 'home match' of 2024 featured our Heritage Manager and Librarian Daisy Cunynghame who told us of the available medical care and local remedies that were used in the Highlands and Islands in previous years. This revealed some interesting therapeutic approaches and, at least for me, new facts. Everyone is aware that vaccination with cowpox was introduced by Jenner in the late 18th century. Prior to this it is widely thought that the use of exposure to mild cases of smallpox as a prophylaxis was introduced into the UK by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in 1721, following her time in Turkey as wife of

the ambassador. Daisy showed us how this was untrue, at least for the Highlands and Islands, where the practice was well established before this date.

In May we had a special 'outing'. Following an invitation from Dr Frank Armstrong (member of University Court) and Prof Kevin Dhaliwal (Head of the Edinburgh Futures Institute, University of Edinburgh) to visit the new Edinburgh Futures Institute on the old Royal Infirmary site. Both are FRCPE's.

This University venture is a redevelopment of the 1875 Royal Infirmary site involving the old Accident and Emergency Department and Surgical Block at the northeast of the hospital buildings. This building is Grade 1 listed but had not been touched by the developers since it was vacated by the NHS in 2003. It was in a terrible state of neglect when the University bought it and they have spent very significant sums stripping it back to the Victorian shell. It has now been completely refurbished and we were fortunate enough to see this before it was opened to the public in early June. The building is extremely high-tech with the old surgical wards all having desk space with computer docking facilities, and some infill study and seminar areas on the corridors. The Institute aims to foster cross faculty working between the University Colleges (Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences; Medicine & Veterinary Medicine; Science and Engineering) and government, police and industry. It offers huge potential to deliver a new level of scholarship in Edinburgh and attract students and staff internationally.

The old building now feels alive again, with the original stonework and brick roof visible on every level, including the basement. Our visiting group included many who had trained or worked in the building. Many memories were shared. Niall Finlayson showing us the old transplant unit in the roof of the building, and I was able to recount my time at the Royal on New Years Eve 1999, when Derek Bell and I watched the Fireworks at the Castle from the hospital roof, as we were both on duty to cover any unexpected issues at the Millenium celebrations. For those interested the Edinburgh Book Festival will also be sited there from 2024 and a licensed restaurant will be open by the time you read this.

Our last lecture of the season was an 'away fixture' at the College of Surgeons, as our joint event for this year. The lecturer was Prof. Murray Pittock FRSE whose talk was entitled "The Professional Aristocracy and the Making of the Scottish Enlightenment". He talked in part of the concept of a 'smart city', showing how Edinburgh fitted the brief at the end of the 17th century. It was the largest city in Scotland but had an area of only 900 x 500 metres, with very dense housing juxtaposed to more luxurious dwellings with gardens at the east of the Cannongate. Some facts about Edinburgh at that time are worth repeating. There were 90 Sedan chairs in Edinburgh, but only 300 in London at that time, which had a far bigger area and population about 10 times larger. Edinburgh was also egalitarian with 36% of merchants being women. Despite the density of population, it was relatively safe, with violent deaths being 9-10/100,000 (about 30% of the murder rate in 1920s Chicago). Edinburgh was also wealthy and had the majority of Dutch imports to Scotland and about 60% of wine coming through the Port of Leith.

Two salient differences from England were described. First Scotland had a far higher number of 'aristocrats', but they were mostly quite poor in comparison to those south of the border. Secondly the Scottish approach to divorce. The vast majority of applications (83%) ended in divorce and of those 36% were petitions by women. The development of learning in English in the University and its extensive contacts with Europe via Leith made it a centre of academic excellence, all contributing to the Enlightenment.

The last event of this season was our Summer Outing, this year to New Lanark World Heritage site. This museum has many highlights and some interesting mechanical relics of the spinning and weaving done there over 200 years ago. The mills were owned by Robert Owen, a social reformer who developed the ideas that lay behind other industrial sites that aimed to benefit the families who worked there,

including Bournville. The school room relics show a most interesting display of charts that showed working class children in the early 18th century the developments of civilisations across the world over many centuries. The young students there knew much more than many of the visitors on this trip!

The mill has the largest roof garden in Scotland and owes this to the last owners, the Gourrock Rope Company, who used it to test sails for completeness.

The mill site is adjacent to the Falls of Clyde, a beautiful 25-minute walk along the Clyde from the museum. Several of us visited the falls in the afternoon, though much water is extracted for the power station that lies below the falls, which have less water flow now than Turner showed in his famous painting.

On our way home John Wilson noted the following message on the side of a prison van “We are recruiting now, join us for a secure future”. We wondered if this referred to the staff or the inmates?



The Falls of Clyde



Some of the group questioning our guide on the Roof Garden (On Mill Two)



View of Mill One, the workers houses and Owen's house (hidden in part by trees) from the roof of Mill Two, New Lanark



The College aims to provide a holistic approach for us all from 'cradle to grave'. Philip Welsby was recently visiting the College when he found an important new addition to the College Library, (photo below) possibly of interest to Senior Fellows although it was intended for young families whose parents attend the College to receive their MRCP(UK). Experienced advice on usage is no doubt available if required!

With that I will conclude this missive and remind you all that the next term starts on October 7th with our AGM and lecture. Please watch out for notices in due course.

Below are 2 pieces, one from Ron on the Antiques Roadshow and one from the Walking group, who like a well-known Scottish Whisky Blend icon, keep on walking! There is a link to the next years SFC Lecture Programme attached below, please add the dates to your diary.

Wishing everyone a healthy and happy summer.

Best wishes,

Nick Bateman

Hon Sec RCPE SFC

Appearing on the Antiques Roadshow

I've always enjoyed the Antiques Roadshow. It is full of really interesting human stories related to articles owned by ordinary people. It's also nice to hear a real expert talk about a subject they love.

The programme usually visits a Scottish venue once a year. I attended the programme at the Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh a number of years ago. My memory was of queuing for hours with like-minded people in the bright sunshine clutching my wife's pewter Arts and Crafts clock. When I got to meet the clock expert, he was very polite and seemed interested but said "this is the eighth one of these I've seen today." Covid has changed the way the programme works. In an attempt to avoid the queues, you are invited to submit photos of your prized possessions with a short account of the background story. The production team then select the ones they want but you can still turn up on the day (with a ticket) and join the back of the now shorter queue.



I inherited a collection of pharmaceutical memorabilia from my father, who worked for a well-known High Street chemists for 45 years. When a branch was being refitted, he would rescue interesting items that were being discarded, all of which he had used in the dispensary between the wars. Most of it was in tea chests in his garage.

I sent in my pictures and story for the programme being filmed at Pollok House in Glasgow in June of last year. Happily, they wanted to use it and were planning to film 3 full episodes in a day. I set off on a showery day with a car full of bottles, balances, suppository moulds and pill machines.

Some of Ron's collection receiving close scrutiny from the BBC film crew. The large yellow container was for rhubarb, the green bottles with red labels were for highly toxic contents.

Thankfully the weather improved, and I was eventually filmed in bright sunshine in the late afternoon. My expert was the Welsh redhead Lisa Lloyd who was delightful. She was most keen on using the bottles I had brought especially a large, decorated jar which held rhubarb sticks! We talked about my father for a while and did the whole segment in one take. She realised quickly that I was medical and asked me to explain what I thought some of strange remedies (arsenic, creosote and rhubarb) were used for.

The programme was shown on January 4th 2024, and I've lost count of the number of people who have told me they saw me on the Antiques Roadshow. A most enjoyable day which my father would have liked too.

Best wishes,

Ron Fergusson



Ron with some of his collection at the Guest Lunch

SFC Walking Group

The RCPE SFC's active 'Walking Group' includes partners and colleagues from the RCSE Senior Fellows Club. Monthly walks occur on a weekday from April through to November with a minimum number of participants around 4 or 5 and a maximum around 25 although the usual number is around 16 – 18 assuming that the weather is sympathetic. Details of access to the location and the

walking route are circulated in advance – and the organisation almost always includes the identification of a location to have a picnic lunch and plenty of time for chatting together.

Most of the walks take about four hours and, from the start, the total group almost always divides spontaneously into wee groups of around 2 to 5 walkers who start chatting together about a huge range of possible topics - the beautiful countryside that is being walked through; current political issues – or other ‘big’ news items; holiday adventures; and, almost always part of the time, memories of individual ‘health care working lives’. Importantly, because the wee groups mix and match completely spontaneously throughout the walk - it is possible by the end of the walk to have chatted to all the other participants and caught up with all their news.

In the past year, three of the walks involved significant routes through woodland and hillsides – two in the Pentlands and one in the Borders near Traquair. Others included walks through the countryside with interesting historic buildings and memorials – Dalmeny Estate linked to the River Almond near the Forth Estuary; the Antonine Wall near the Forth Clyde canal; Edin’s Hall Broch way down in the Borders near Abbey St Bathans and the Whiteadder Valley; and ‘Historic Haddington’ – a gentle walk around an historic town starting by the River Tyne and later crossing the Nungate Bridge, near where John Knox lived - a bridge that was the main route from the country of the south to Edinburgh from 1282.

Many of the walks turn up unexpected discoveries that call for research and reports; old monuments, memorials and, on a recent occasion, a fine aqueduct near Penicuik with nothing at either end!

Best wishes,

Helen Zealley and Gordon Drummond



Some of the Group on a recent outing to Castlelaw Hill

The 2024/2025 Senior Fellows Club Programme is now available. To view, click the link below.

2024 - 2025 SFC Lecture/Lunch Programme

If you would like to become a member of the Club, please complete an [SFC Application form](#) and send it to sfc@rcpe.ac.uk.