



The Falkland Society

Scottish Registered Charity SC017201

www.falklandsociety.org.uk

www.historicfalkland.scot

www.falkland.wiki

news@falklandsociety.org.uk

Committee for 2023–2024: **Peter Burman** (Chair), **John Smith** (Depute Chair), **Ross Burgess** (Secretary), **Robeena Dhar** (Treasurer), **Alan Graham** (Archivist), **Marietta Crichton Stuart**.

We urgently need additional Committee members as some of the above will be standing down at the next AGM! Contact peterburman@btinternet.com if you think you could help.

Falkland Society Newsletter, June 2024

Dear test,

Our final meeting before the summer break will be a bit later in the month than usual, but I'm sure Phil Thomas's talk about the wonderful work he and his partner have done in restoring a very special house will be well worth waiting for. And in August we will be holding our two-day *Celebrating Falkland* event – more about this below and in our next issue.

Ross Burgess (Secretary)

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June Meeting

Our next monthly meeting will be on **Wednesday 26 June**, when **Philip Thomas** will be addressing us on the subject, ***A Small Phoenix Rising***: how he and his husband have

rescued and conserved Knedlington Old Hall (1649–1660), returning its integrity, adding contemporary beauty, creating a suitable setting and adding layers of new significance for our own day.

Please join us from 6:45 p.m. onwards on the 26th, at **The Stables, Falkland Estate, KY15 7AF** (what3words: [///dressings.destroyer.football](https://www.what3words.com/#!/en/dressings.destroyer.football)) – or online by Zoom at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82271919980>

You can also join by phone on **0203 481 5240, 0131 460 1196**, or **0208 080 6591** quoting the meeting ID: **822 7191 9980**

Philip Thomas, *A Small Phoenix Rising*

If you have ever wanted to hear a rattlingly good and insightful talk on a historic building and its restoration then this is likely to be one of your best opportunities!

Phil Thomas and his partner Michael Thomas have spent more than half a decade restoring to its former glory (and adding yet more glory to) a rare mid-17th century manor house – Knedlington Old Hall (1649–1660) – near the small but historic and attractive town of Howden in the East Riding of Yorkshire.



Phil (left) and Michael

I first met Phil in the small North Yorkshire town of Kirkbymoorside, on the edge of the North York Moors, in August 1991. I was crossing the market place to post some letters

when he asked me if there was anywhere he could get a cup of tea. There was no café there and I thought of all the occasions when people have been kind to me, in Britain and further afield, so I said 'Come and have tea with me, I have the kettle on the Aga'. I had noticed that he had jumped out of a van marked 'Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society' and so I thought he was bound to be an interesting person. And I was not wrong!



Knedlington Old Hall today

Over tea he told me 'I have taken a week's holiday and I'm spending it drawing buildings of the North York Moors National Park of the Arts & Crafts period.' I could hardly believe my ears, as this was my special subject too. Over the teacups Phil spotted our 1862 Broadwood piano and said 'May I play it, please?' I said yes, of course, and from the kitchen I heard the most ravishing sounds, somewhat in the manner of the English 20th century composer Gerald Finzi. 'Who wrote that?', I asked. After a while he admitted that it was one of his own compositions.

I had a rambling 18th-century house and it was easy to offer him a bed for the night so we could go on chatting over supper. The upshot is that we have had a wonderful friendship for almost thirty years. Phil came to Falkland to attend and make the Big Speech at our wedding reception on 8 June 2019. Many Falkland friends were there and may remember that he began by saying: 'I have known Peter for thirty years, and I love him: I have known Ross for three hours, and I already love him too.' In short, he is a man with a big heart and a pyrotechnic way with words. He is also Welsh and knows how to use his beautiful voice. He sang two unaccompanied pieces of music at our Humanist wedding ceremony in the Memorial Chapel on the Estate and you could have heard a pin drop.



Ross, Michael and Phil at the Old Hall

His degree is a BMus from Cardiff University and for twelve years he was a freelance composer with three community operas to his credit. Among his employers at that time was the organisation *The Arts in Fife*, so he had been this way before, staying at Lathrisk and running a music festival from there. Like a number of people I know he was professionally engaged in one sphere, music, and yet much of his heart was elsewhere, in architectural history, especially Arts & Crafts, Welsh as well as English or Scottish. He also has a specialist knowledge of the music of Gerald Finzi, to which he has over the years introduced me.

During the second phase of his rich cultural life, at the time I first met him, Phil was Community Outreach Musician with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society. He was responsible for devising and facilitating a two-year Orchestra Development Programme in creative project work for professional musicians, and for developing and leading community/educational arts projects in Lancashire, Cheshire and the five Merseyside Metropolitan Boroughs.

In 1992 he moved to Yorkshire, later York, and was Head of Community Education, Opera North, Leeds. His achievements at that time were numerous and can be followed up through the link [here](#). I was at that time running the Centre for Conservation Studies at the University of York. We often saw one another and collaborated on conferences, lectures and courses. Eventually Phil became Church Buildings Adviser and Secretary to the York Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches, a body on which sat some of the most gifted architects, architectural historians and other building professionals in the Yorkshire Region.



Fitting the leading to a stained glass panel

At this heady time in 2024 when churches in Fife and all over Scotland are being closed it is refreshing to come across a man who has a passion for and a deep and practical knowledge of churches and everything about them. He is a trustee of the national organisation called Historic Buildings and Places (formerly the Ancient Monuments Society, about to celebrate its centenary); he is Chair of the Ellerton Church Preservation Trust, a medieval and 19th-century church he and his then partner rescued from the jaws of the demolition monster; he was Secretary of the Yorkshire Wolds Buildings Preservation Trust; a Trustee of The Stained Glass Trust, based in York; and he succeeded me as Chair of the York Art-Workers' Association, which I had founded with a group of friends including Phil during my time at the University of York. Meantime his eminence in the stained-glass field (in which he designs and paints as well as studies) had led to his becoming a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Glaziers and Painters of Glass.

As a researcher and writer, as a lecturer and giver of papers and talks at many levels, Phil is exceptionally experienced, thoughtful and gifted. I have never known such a witty and good-humoured lecturer. He has that Welsh gift for being emotional and passionate while at the same time lucid and thoughtful, rational and illuminating.



Phil and Michael's garden at Knedlington Old Hall

The main thrust of Phil's lecture will be how they found and how they have restored their mid-17th century manor house in East Yorkshire. They discovered that Knedlington Old Hall was for sale purely by accident as they drove to appointments with estate agents at other properties. The house was hard not to love immediately, despite its bleak setting, the loss of its historic context and its maimed condition – much had been wrecked or removed in 1964 and more recent alterations had ignored major problems and had been carried out in inappropriate modern materials – so they made an offer. They later learned that it was accepted because they were the only prospective buyers NOT to suggest adding a swimming pool or a pony paddock! Fortunately, they also managed to secure the best of the former agricultural buildings.

Most new owners of such a house would have to commission surveys, drawings and reports from many specialists, in order to achieve Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission for their repairs and alterations, but Phil was able to do almost everything himself, and to the highest level of competence.



The restored interior to Knedlington Old Hall

You can access some relevant parts of Phil's very fine study of the works to the house from the link [here](#). It is very detailed, but worth persevering with.

I can promise you a memorable and special evening, which you will heartily enjoy and yet at the same time learn something valuable which will stay with you for the rest of your life.

PETER BURMAN

Falkland Parish Church – an update



The Kirk in its context (photo by Paul Turner)

On the evening of Wednesday 6 June, 2024, the Falkland Society was represented at an 'informational meeting' at Falkland Parish Church by John Smith (Vice-Chair), Ross Burgess (Secretary) and myself (Chair). The meeting was ably chaired, as previous meetings have been, by the Interim Moderator of the Presbytery, Rev Jeff Martin.

Part of the meeting was to let all interested parties know of the formal position which has now been reached through what is called in the legislation relating to the Church of Scotland the Basis of Union. The gist of it that a new entity is being created which will bring several parishes together into the **Fife: Eden Tay Parish** of the Church of Scotland. The parishes that are being united are (together with their church buildings) Edenshead, Howe of Fife, Falkland, Freuchie and Lindores. The date of that Union is likely to be some time this autumn.

At the meeting there was quite a discussion about ownership of the assets, both buildings and land. The transference of property clause in the Basis of Union says that 'The property and funds belonging to or held on behalf of each congregation shall belong to or be held on behalf of the united charge and any transference necessary shall be duly effected'.

The most eye-catching consequence of the Basis of Union is that the following churches will remain in use as churches: Edenshead (Auchtermuchty); Freuchie; and Lindores, while the other churches (including Falkland) will be closed, and be 'sold, let or otherwise disposed of'. The 'free proceeds' of sale or letting will be 'credited to the benefit of the congregation in the Consolidated Fabric Fund'; or 'held and applied for fabric purposes in connection with the properties of the congregation'. For the time being all the churches, including Falkland and those in the Howe of Fife, will continue to hold services 'at times to be decided by the Minister and Kirk Session, subject to the approval of Presbytery'. Meanwhile, it is intended to proceed with the appointment of a new Minister 'on the basis of unrestricted tenure' which means that the Minister will be able to remain in post until he or she decided to retire or move on. The manse relating to Edenshead

parish will become the manse of the united charge while the other manses (including Falkland) shall be 'sold, let or otherwise disposed of'.

The first purpose of the meeting on 6 June was to make sure that everyone with an interest in the matter – the elders and members of the congregation of Falkland parish church and interested members of the local community – thoroughly understood the Basis of Union. Questions were asked related to ownership of assets and what would happen to any monies produced by sales or lettings of buildings. Jeff Martin agreed to convene a meeting with appropriate officials of the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland and of the Legal Department. He will ask that the meeting should be held in Falkland, so that the officials can see the situation for themselves, and not in Edinburgh. We were reminded that the proposal to close particular churches was a decision of the local Presbytery which included in its Presbytery Plan provision for the better use of resources, both human resources and buildings. However, it was difficult not to feel that the decision could easily have gone another way. Falkland Parish Church is superbly situated to be a beacon of mission and hope owing to the huge number of visitors and to the affection in which the village of Falkland is held all over the world.

Many other valuable points were made at the meeting, such as: the need for vigilance and maintenance of the building during the 'waiting period' while discussions about the future continue; the need for planning through the medium of well-tryed mechanisms such as a Master Plan (incorporating a vision for the future of the building), a Business Plan (no solution will succeed unless it produces an income stream sufficient for the management and care of the building), an Audience Development Plan (who will be the people who will use the building in the future), a Conservation Management Plan; and so forth.

The meeting followed three well-attended public meetings, also chaired by Jeff Martin, and thoroughly prepared for by Revd Susan Thorburn. So we have been laying foundation stones for a collaborative attempt to find an alternative way of using and financing the parish church.

The meeting ended with Jeff Martin proposing the formation of a **Steering Committee** to discern and plan for a way forward. Several of us expressed interest by lesaving our names and email addresses and I'm sure Jeff (JMartin@churchofscotland.org.uk) would be welcome contacts from those who were unable to be at the meeting.

Meanwhile, the Falkland Society Committee is being very active in preparing an event called *Celebrating Falkland* (described elsewhere in this Newsletter) which is being organised collaboratively and with the active support of Jeff Martin and Rev. Susan Thorburn and which will be held in the church on Friday and Saturday, 2 and 3 August, addressed both to residents of Falkland and to our many summer visitors who will hopefully catch some of the history and present flavour of our historic church and place.

Addendum

I attach here, as a contribution to debate, a 'Vision Statement' which I prepared for one of the three earlier meetings. There will be other visions, I am sure; but here is one which could respond to the fact that the community of those who live and work in Falkland has traditionally included craftspeople and artists, often of distinction, as is evidenced by the popular local

'Studios Open' weekends. Each bay of the north and south aisles of the church could be studios for let to artists or craftspeople. There would be a central space for performances and exhibitions; and so on. It is a vision which could be explored and developed, as could other visions. There will come a time when we shall all have to coalesce around one 'big idea', and then give it all our energy and commitment, raise funds, seek permissions, and so forth. But that point has not been reached yet.

The Vision: Falkland Parish Church re-born as the Falkland Centre for Arts, Crafts and Spirituality?

In the welter of church redundancies and closures that is happening throughout Scotland it is highly desirable to evolve a new purpose for the building which is unique to its location; which somehow comes out of its past; is related to our present longings for places of spiritual and physical refreshment; and will provide a focus for that creative spark which is present in all of us but most vividly amongst artists and craftspeople.

In the circumstances of Falkland, where the Palace attracts tens of thousands of visitors a year, and where Falkland Estate and the village of Falkland also attract visitors in substantial numbers, there is a space for a purpose which is both attractive to many local people and to many of our visitors.

Precisely how the building would be used to fulfil this vision is best imagined by an architect and we envisage choosing an architect for this project who would be one of the most talented and innovative architects currently working in Scotland, chosen from a short list.

But the ingredients which would make for success would be likely to include the following:

1. Retention of the historic furnishings with the probable exception of the fixed seating as we consider that the building would need a great deal of flexibility. However, the brief could include re-using the timber of the pews for screens and other purposes within the building, any excess being sold off to local people for use in their houses.
2. Before any changes are made there would be a full photographic recording of the church, possibly by the Recording Division of Historic Environment Scotland.
3. Musical instrument making would be one of the crafts that we would specifically attract to the Centre. The organ would be retained, honoured and used frequently for teaching and for concerts, on its own or with other instrumentalists and singers.
4. There would be a need for small workshops/studios which perhaps could most conveniently be housed under the north and south galleries.
5. There would be a need for a reception area close to the main entrance.
6. There would be a need for flexible space for receptions, break-out groups and either a formal shop or an informal shop where publications could be sold.
7. There would be adequate lavatories.
8. There would be an office or offices, one of them for the Centre Director, and for the small management team which would be necessary.
9. There would be an exhibition space for the various craftspeople, artists and conservators whose rent would be an important income stream.
10. The office below the sanctuary would be used for teaching purposes, for retreats and courses where silence would be a valuable commodity.



Peter Burman

Souwne of Organe

A history-making lecture-and-recital session at St Columba's Church, Largs, on Saturday 1 June 2024



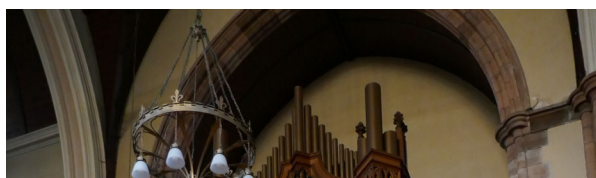
Sowne of Organe is a charity that surveys and records Scotland's organs.

To the atonis lord welcum all we cry...
Wyth sowne of clarioun organe song and sence.

William Dunbar: *The Ballade of Lord Bernard Stewart*
(c.1508)

On the most beautiful day of the year so far, 216 of us gathered at 3 p.m. in St Columba's Church, Largs, to listen to and celebrate the Henry Willis organ of 1892 (pictured below) which is rare in that it has not been tonally or structurally changed since its installation. All too often organs are 'rebuilt', when they surely should be conserved or repaired. It is an awesome tribute to the standards of design and craftsmanship of leading late 19th-century and early 20th-century organ builders that an instrument well looked after is as satisfying as musical and cultural heritage today as it was when dedicated 132 years ago.

We were bowled over by the beauty of the building, cathedral-like in its scale, proportions and superb mason-craft, and with stained glass of a high artist order by designer-makers



such as Daniel Cottier and Douglas Strachan. It is greatly to be regretted that the church has now been closed as a parish church, but one can understand the pressures which face the Church of Scotland, with so few men and women and men offering themselves for the ministry, and with congregations dwindling in many parishes. On the plus side, these closures are doing a great deal to focus attention on Scotland's ecclesiastical heritage, one aspect of which is the existence of so many excellent organs, which deserve to have a continuing life one way or another.

That being so it is admirable, and so much deserving of our support, that the organisation **Sowne of Organe** has instituted a model way of proceeding. The core team of Chris Bragg,

Matthew Hynes, Andrew Forbes and Stephen McIntyre, sometimes assisted by other knowledgeable experts, first makes a thorough survey – measured, drawn and photographic – of the organ in question and then presents the results in a lecture-recital. There is also always thorough research into archival sources and the historical and cultural context of the organ being studied. The same careful process could and should be applied to other aspects of church heritage, for example, stained glass, metalwork, furniture, Communion silver, and so on.



Chris Bragg playing the organ in Falkland Parish CHURCH, May 2019

On 1 June, at St Columba's, Largs, it was impressive how many organisations and civic leaders (MP, MSP, Provost, Deputy Lord Lieutenant) were present among the large and enthusiastic

audience. There was a good balance between short informative and enthusiastic talks, arising out of the research and survey process, and music. I could have done with one of the 'big' Johann Sebastian Bach preludes and fugues but, otherwise, I found the selection of music varied and imaginative. For example, there was a piece of music by the composer Albert Lister Peace (1844–1912), who composed the well-known tune for the hymn 'O love that will not let me go'. It was he who had drawn up the organ's specification and played its opening concert. I was struck by the delicacy and beauty of some of the quieter stops but, nevertheless, we all like to hear how an organ sounds when 'all the stops are pulled out', and we experienced that in Steven McIntyre's superb rendering of Léon Boëllmann's *Deuxième Suite* of 1896 which ends with a rumbustious movement called 'Final-Marche', in which the organ could sound out in all its glorious tones. Hearing the organ being put through its paces we could appreciate that it is an instrument at the highest level of British organ building.

The event on Saturday 1 June was advertised, and rightly, as 'A Masterpiece in Peril'. There is peril indeed whenever a church is closed, as without proper management it can become prey to neglect or even vandalism and arson. We need to be vigilant in such situations. The Minister up to the recent time of closure gave a short but memorable speech at the end of the event in which he spoke of the determination of local church people to protect their former church during the vulnerable 'waiting period' during which a determined attempt will be made to find a suitable new use for the building. However, we should not under-estimate the challenge that that search will entail.

Sowne of Organe deserve all our thanks and all our support so that there can be many more such surveys of historic organs, many more of such lecture-recitals (we had one from Chris Bragg five years ago in our magnificent parish church in Falkland, Fife), and many strong and clear actions to cherish and save for the future our Scottish church heritage.

Peter Burman

A new home for our Archives - continued

Alan Graham, our Archivist, has procured a cupboard and a filing cabinet, and safely stowed our archive material in them in the downstairs office space at the Parish Church, by kind permission of the Kirk Session. He's been carefully cataloguing everything we have there.

Look out for a substantial article by Alan in a forthcoming Newsletter.

Some of the more interesting items will be on display for Celebrating Falkland in early August.



Our new filing cabinet and cupboard in a corner of the office space

Celebrating Falkland

10:30 to 17:30, Friday and Saturday, 2–3 August 2024, Falkland Parish Church

Entrance free, donations welcome

We can now confirm that our two-day event **Celebrating Falkland** will take place in the Kirk over the first weekend of August, by kind permission of the Kirk Session.

There will be an exhibition in the main body of the Kirk, featuring fascinating items from the Falkland Society archives, a rolling programme of short talks throughout the two days, reflecting something of our diversity and the stimulating dialogue that is possible between past and present.

Possible topics include: the archaeology of the Falkland landscape; highlights from the history of Falkland; the buildings of Falkland; the work of artists and craftspeople, past and present; storytelling through the archives and publications of the Falkland Society; and the sharing of memories.

We hope to include Heritage Walks through the historic streets of Falkland led by members of the Falkland Society, guided tours of the inside of our magnificent Parish Church, a special programme for children, and the issue of our new *Celebratory History of Falkland Church* (see next article).

Publications Sub-Committee

Publications Sub-Committee:

- Alan Graham (Convenor), Marietta Crichton Stuart, Ross Burgess.

Current Projects:

The Sub-committee is working hard on four current projects:

- a new, completely restructured, edition of *Falkland in the Reign of Queen Victoria*
- a new edition, expanded and in full colour, of *A Falkland Guide*
- a totally new book about Falkland in the First World War and its aftermath
- **and we can now confirm** that we will be publishing a *Celebratory History of Falkland Church*, with text by Marietta Crichton Stuart and illustrations by Edinburgh-based artist Paul Turner, to be issued in time for *Celebrating Falkland*.

Existing publications:

Copies of *Falkland and its People 1901–1913* are still available. £20 including postage and packing, or £10 for local deliveries or if you collect in person from Brunton House or at a Falkland Society meeting. Cash, or cheques payable to "Falkland Society", Brunton House, Brunton Street, Falkland KY15 7BQ

Last month's meeting

At our May meeting, Frank Glynn gave us a most interesting talk about George Thomson's fiddle, illustrated with some tunes on the fiddle itself, and ending with an impromptu duet. This was the first time we'd tried a Zoom meeting with a musical component, and after a number of sound checks it seemed to work fine. Thanks to John Smith, our Vice Chair, for standing in to chair the meeting in Peter's absence.

The meeting as always was recorded, and you can see and hear it at <https://falklandsociety.org.uk/videos/2024-05-08-Frank-Glynn.mp4>

Future events

Our next event, on the first weekend in August will of course be Celebrating Falkland, described above.

Details of future events can always be found on the ["Events" page](#) of our website; note that as usual we'll be having a break for July and August (apart of course from *Celebrating Falkland*, which will form the basis of the July Newsletter).

We've got some ideas for the programme from September onwards, but there's a limit to what

we can do with our small Committee. We urgently need new Committee members, to help with planning future events and then with running them. If you would like to help, have a little time to spare, and essential computer skills, please get in touch at secretary@falklandsociety.org.uk.

Ross Burgess (Secretary)

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