

[View this email in your browser](#)



The Falkland Society

Scottish Registered Charity SC017201

www.falklandsociety.org.uk

www.historicfalkland.scot

www.falkland.wiki

news@falklandsociety.org.uk

Committee for 2024–2025: **Peter Burman** (Chair), **John Smith** (Depute Chair), **Ross Burgess** (Secretary), **Robeena Dhar** (Treasurer), **Alan Graham** (Archivist), **Marietta Crichton Stuart**, **Robin Bell**, **John Fletcher**.

Falkland Society Newsletter, May 2025

Dear <<First Name>>,

Our Society meeting this month features a talk by Robin Evetts (originally planned for March, but postponed for technical reasons) which will be followed by our Annual General Meeting.

And we're also now announcing the Society event for June, a trip to the beautiful seaside village of Culross - an interesting contrast in many ways to Falkland.

Peter Burman (Chair)

In this issue:

- [May Meeting: Robin Evetts and our AGM](#)
- [June Meeting: a visit to Culross](#)
- [Last month's meeting: Robin Bell at the organ](#)
- [Scotland's Churches at Risk](#)
- [Future Events](#)

May Meeting

Our next monthly meeting will be at 7 p.m. **next Wednesday, 14 May**, when Robin Evetts will be talking about **Continuing development at the Cambo Estate**. This will be a hybrid meeting: online via Zoom, and in person at the Stables, Falkland Estate, and will be followed by our **AGM**.

Please join us from 6:45 p.m. onwards on the 14th, at
The Stables, Falkland Estate, KY15 7AF,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



Robin Evetts is a long-standing member of the Falkland Society, and was a highly informative guide for our visit to the Cambo stables on 22 February. He is a former Senior Inspector, Historic Scotland, and Trustee of the Cambo Heritage Trust.

Robin's principal role at Historic Scotland involved dealing with listed building consent casework: working closely with applicants, architects and planning authorities, and advising on applications, Local Plans, Conservation Area designations, and all manner of questions relating to the historic environment. He advised on grant applications, on listing proposals and on policy issues. He also represented HS on various bodies such as the Fife Environment Trust, and the now defunct Church of Scotland Committee on Artistic Matters. At various times he was the HS Inspector in North and South Lanarkshire, Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Angus, and latterly Fife, but also had line management responsibilities for other council areas.

Robin's talk is entitled "Continuing development at the Cambo Estate" and will cover the rehabilitation and re-purposing of the Georgian Stables, and future projects including the dovecote, and bridges over the Cambo Burn.



The dovecote and one of the bridges

Robin's talk will be followed by the Falkland Society's **Annual General Meeting**, which will include reports on the past year's activities, discussion of future plans, and the election or re-election of office bearers. Please come, if you can, and give us your support.

Falkland Society study day to Culross

Wednesday 11 June 2025

Limited places: Booking required

Culross is a heritage village, larger than Falkland, but with several parallels including the presence of the National Trust for Scotland (NTS). One difference is that **Culross Palace** was envisaged as the 'merchant's house' of George Bruce, whereas Falkland Palace was a favoured royal residence for several generations. In Culross the NTS owns twenty-five attractive vernacular houses of the 17th and 18th centuries, whereas in Falkland the NTS refurbished several houses under the 'Little Houses Scheme' and sold them on; its Falkland property now consists solely of the Palace, with its gardens, Real Tennis Court, and orchard.



Culross – a beautiful ensemble of 17th and 18th century village houses

Aims of the visit

- (i) To have an enjoyable and interesting day together in which we shall 'dig deeper' than would be possible if we were visiting Culross on our own or in a small group of family and friends.
- (ii) To compare two architecturally and historically rich sites where ownership and management by the NTS plays a critical role, for example: preservation and conservation of buildings, gardens, historic interiors and works of art; impact of carbon-neutral policies; challenges of providing meaningful interpretation; pressures, problems and opportunities of tourism; relationships with neighbouring estates; and relationships with local village communities.



How to interpret Culross Palace, merchant's house or palace?

Programme for the day

8:45 Depart from Falkland by mini-bus or private car

9:45 Arrive at the East Car Park, Culross KY12 8HW (<https://w3w.co/installs.hairpin.lists>) and walk together to the NTS Culross Education Room above Bessie's Café, Culross KY12 8JQ (<https://w3w.co/smiling.page.obliging>) in the centre of the village, close to the entrance to Culross Palace. There will be coffee and tea to welcome us.

10:15 Introductory talks by:

- Elaine Strachan, Visitor Service Manager
- Lesley Scott, Regional Conservator
- Kirsty Redmonds, Regional Collections Care Supervisor

11:30 Palace Tour with Dr Fiona Morrison, Palace Guide

12:30 Lunch – we will have booked lunch for up to twenty at The Red Lion inn. (01 383 880 225)

13:30 Village of Culross – an exploratory walk with Tara Crooke, Head Conservation Surveyor, explaining many aspects of building conservation

15:00 Culross Abbey Church and the ruins of the Cistercian Abbey (led by Peter Burman, Chairman of Falkland Society)

15:45 Free time to explore, take tea, shop or simply enjoy the beauty of the village and its setting

17:00 depart for return journeys



*The romantic and beautiful abbey ruins with the abbey church behind
The transept was reconstructed by Sir Robert Rowand Anderson in 1905-6*

Practicalities

The committee has decided that 20 is the maximum sensible number for the group but if demand is high we will look to arrange a second visit by members of the Society.

If you're a member of the NTS, please **bring your NTS membership card** with you. Non-members will have to pay for entry to the properties, and everyone will need to pay for their lunch on the day.

If you'd like to take part, email your names to Ross Burgess, our Secretary (ross@foxeath.net) as soon as possible. Two Committee members have indicated they would be prepared to offer a lift, so please tell us if you would like a lift, or we could offer a lift to others.

Study notes will be circulated by email with the final version of the programme a day or two before the event.

Peter Burman (Chair)



Culross Abbey - the carved effigy of Sir George Bruce of Carnock attended by his eight children.

Inset: the characterful but crude lettering cheerfully records the identity of the deceased.

Unusually, the sculptor records his own name in a prominent place.

**Last month's meeting:
Robin Bell at the organ**



Upwards of 40 people, seated in the gallery at Falkland Parish Church, were the very appreciative audience for Robin Bell's lecture recital on 8 April, in conjunction with Church Music Scotland. Robin performed short musical items by French and Scottish composers, on the Kirk's historic pipe organ, interspersed with short talks about various aspects of organs.

Attendees commented that the organ had sounded splendid, the musical items were well selected and well played, and Robin's comments were informative and appropriate. Thanks to the church authorities for allowing the use of the building, and to Peter Cawkwell for opening up and seeing to the lighting and heating.

We certainly plan to hold similar events in future.

Scotland's Churches at Risk

(A version of this article by Peter Burman is being submitted for publication in *Scottish Field*)

Architectural, Cultural and Historic Background

In his prose poem 'A journey along the Oka', Alexander Solzhenitsyn ruminates on what made the landscapes along the river Oka so special – it was their churches: 'Our ancestors put their best into these stones and these steeples – all their knowledge and all their faith.'

From 1559 onwards the Scottish Reformation wreaked a furious havoc on the churches of the Middle Ages, destroying the vast majority of their beautiful furnishings and works of art, and often

abandoning the slighted medieval fabrics to their fate. Scandinavia and the north of Germany experienced less drastic Reformations, replacing Catholic with Lutheran theologies and ways of worshipping. Our Scottish Reformation was strongly influenced by the French-Swiss theologian, John Calvin (1509–1564), through the immediate agency of John Knox (1514–1572), both of them ‘root and branch’ reformers.

From the early 17th century onwards we have a rich heritage of Presbyterian places of worship, more or less doubling in number following the Great Disruption of 1844.



*Cromarty East Church, early 17th century with 18th-century fittings,
now preserved intact by Historic Churches Scotland*

From the mid-19th century until the first World War there was, as in England and Wales, an astonishing period of church building, often employing specialist architects and craftspeople who produced some of their best work for churches. Some, like Sir Robert Rowand Anderson (1834–1921, a keen member of the Scottish Episcopal Church), were happy to design churches for denominations other than their own. Indeed, a single street in Dunfermline has an Episcopal Church and a Catholic Church, both designed by him.



Dunfermline churches: St Margaret (Catholic, 1889) and Holy Trinity (Episcopal, 1891), both designed by Robert Rowand Anderson

The church heritage of Scotland encompasses not only the buildings but also the furnishings and works of art they contain, not least in the Catholic and Episcopal churches. The 'parish churches' of the Church of Scotland, inheritors of the Reformation, began increasingly to commission fine stained glass, especially after the Great International Exhibition of 1862, which featured exhibits by many artists and artistic firms, including the Morris company, surprisingly well represented in Scotland.



Dunfermline Abbey Church: pulpit over the burial place of Robert the Bruce, designed by Robert Rowand Anderson

From around 1880 the Church of Scotland increasingly adopted more liberal attitudes towards church music; hundreds of pipe organs began to be installed in churches, suitable for

accompanying hymns and metrical psalms and supporting a rich literature of organ music for the 'voluntaries' at the beginning and ending of the services. Some of these are very fine and unspoiled instruments, now often at risk through the drastic closure of churches.



The 1892 organ by Henry Willis in St Columba's Church, Largs, an instrument of astonishing beauty and power

Scotland today has a flourishing school of composers of church music, young and old, encouraged by the towering presence of Sir James MacMillan (b. 1959), who has written a fine body of works for the organ. and choral works for performance in sacred buildings.

Church Policy

In the first decade of the 21st century the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland (HEACS) was set up to give Scottish Ministers independent strategic advice on heritage matters. One of its reports highlighted the need for stronger support for the nation's churches, often key buildings in their communities or in the local landscapes. I was a member of HEACS, and of its churches sub-committee, which took detailed evidence from senior representatives of all the major Christian denominations. It was a fascinating experience, and we learned a great deal from it. We heard of churches with flourishing congregations and effective outreach to their local communities, and of other churches semi-abandoned; all reported the challenge of trying to keep the nation's churches in good repair.

In our HEACS report we emphasised the value of regular inspection of churches by suitably experienced architects or building surveyors, followed by programmes of maintenance and repairs. There is evidence that this has caught on in recent years: most of the Christian traditions in Scotland have realised the value of regular maintenance and the quinquennial inspection by someone who 'really knows' what is happening to a church building. We all want to be warm in churches, as in our homes, and we can never be warm in a building unless it is dry. The ingress

of water is the enemy that absolutely has to be vanquished if a church building is to survive.

Our report also stressed the value of the bodies established in England and Wales to look after churches which had already been closed: in England the 1998 Pastoral Measure established the Churches Conservation Trust which now cares for almost 400 listed churches, in effect a 'National Trust for Churches', largely funded by the Government with an annual contribution from the Church Commissioners. In Wales the wonderfully named and wonderfully active charity, the Friends of Friendless Churches, is doing very similar work.



The church of Llanfair Kilgeddin, Monmouthshire, vested for permanent preservation by the Friends of Friendless Churches, with sgraffito decoration by Heywood Sumner, 1888-1890

In Scotland we also have admirable organisations but by comparison they are tiny and lack serious Government support: something that should be tackled at the highest levels.

The HEACS report also stressed the value of the various denominations making frank assessments of the pastoral, practical and economic challenges –fewer churchgoers and fewer clergy – and addressing the question of what to do with surplus buildings. There was little movement on this question until three or four years ago, when the Church of Scotland announced that it would be disposing of many of its churches and church halls.

In the 'heritage village' of Falkland, the parish church is one of thirty-three churches or church halls slated for closure. In Fife alone!



Falkland Parish Church: its tower and spire visible from many directions, designed by David Bryce; the stained glass windows are by Ballantine & Co. of Edinburgh

Present and future opportunities

The Episcopal and Catholic Churches, with their sacramental or spiritual view of churches as places where 'prayer has been valid' (to quote T. S. Eliot), will often strive to keep their churches in use for worship and social outreach. That is certainly true of an Episcopal church I know well, St James, Goldenacre in Inverleith, Edinburgh. Its vision for the future includes a dedication to the virtues of sound trusteeship by looking after the building and its Arts & Crafts treasures (mural paintings, sculpture, stained glass), without stinting on maintenance, repairs and conservation interventions.



Wall paintings at St James, Goldenacre, by William Hole, showing the vitality of the angels intertwined with the organ case by John James Burnet, Arts & Crafts architect; the second picture shows where the painted surface, damaged by water penetration caused by inadequate maintenance in former years is being 'held' by facing tissue pending conservation.

A complementary part of the vision at St James's is to fling the doors wide open on most days of the week, and to provide a place that can be shared with the local community, through many different activities, social and cultural.

In such situations there is surely an opportunity for Government to give continued generous support through the tax regime, in fact tax has become a critical factor in making it possible for culturally valuable churches to survive into the future.

Gordon Brown first saw an opportunity here: his time as Prime Minister saw the start of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, offered by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The scheme gave grants covering the repayment of VAT on repairs of over £1,000 to 'listed buildings used as places of worship'. Repairs to turret clocks, pews, bells and pipe organs were also included. This scheme has worked well; among its virtues was its dependability, suddenly quashed with effect from 1 April this year, with the imposition of a new annual cap of £25,000 per listed place of worship, and an extension of the scheme for just one year.

For decades now the entire historic buildings world has railed against the folly of making a tax differential between new construction work and the repair of existing buildings, especially those which are listed for their architectural or historic interest, an interest which can be seen and enjoyed by everyone. But it is not only 'enjoyment' that is at stake. It is stewardship of the nation's and the earth's resources.

In recent years we have seen a welcome change of attitude towards churches. Instead of being

locked most of the time except during services, there is a new dynamism at work. Churches are being seen more and more as a resource for their entire local communities. The *Church Times* of 4 April 2025 reported the admirable case of St Michael-le-Belfry, the medieval church close to York Minster, listed Grade I, where a current project 'combines repairs to the medieval building with the introduction of accessible and flexible space, updated facilities, and sustainable heating ... a more welcoming space that supports social action, improves our visitor experience, and provides a medium-sized venue for the city'.

What makes such projects possible? First of all, it is the very existence of these beautiful buildings, well sited to serve their local and wider communities. Then there is the pool of local people, prepared to formulate the overall vision and to engage in the necessary tasks of trusteeship and fund-raising. They will need the time and energy to engage in meaningful relationships with architects, building surveyors, quantity surveyors, conservators, craftspeople, artists and musicians.



The Baptistry at St James, Goldenacre: stained glass by Douglas Strachan and sculptures by Charles d'Orville Pilkington Jackson, two of the great names in early twentieth century Scottish art

What can Government bring to the successful fulfilment of such projects? First and foremost, by giving permanence to the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme instead of holding the sword of Damocles over its head in a year's time. Secondly, by reintroducing a degree of flexibility and removing the cap. Thirdly, by actively seeking to find ways through the tax system whereby the future of our church buildings – potentially a resource for everyone – can be achieved, to a high standard, at very little cost to the nation. Fourthly, by understanding and acknowledging the contribution being made by volunteers in bringing together such imaginative projects as those for St Michael-le-Belfry and St James's Goldenacre. I ask everyone and anyone who has ever fund-raised for a worthy project: 'How do you feel about fund-raising for an additional 20% so that we can pay a tax bill?'



I end with the words of the Rector of St James's Goldenacre, Revd Jane MacLaren, in the Foreword to the church's recently published guidebook:

'This is an audacious project, and we are grateful for the support of both individuals and grant-giving bodies. Together, we hope to create a warm, light, welcoming and environmentally friendly space in the church for celebration, so that its treasures can continue to shine and inspire us for many generations to come'.

The Rector at the opening of the St James's Peace Garden, with the Bishop of Edinburgh, the Right Revd Dr John Armes. Their, passionate shared concern is to keep churches open and their communities thriving.

Future Events

Wed 14 May: Robin Evetts on [Cambo Estate – the rehabilitation and re-purposing of the Georgian Stables](#), followed by the Society's [AGM](#) (hybrid meeting: by Zoom and in person; see main article above)

Wed 11 June: Falkland Society group visit to [Culross](#), to celebrate its stewardship by the National Trust for Scotland (see above)

July and August: [Summer Break](#)

Wed 10 September: James Simpson on [the rescue and restoration of Botanic Cottage, Edinburgh](#)

October onwards: [Our programme of talks continues](#), provisionally on the second Wednesday of October and November, and throughout 2026 except for July and August.

Look out for more details of all these events in our future Newsletters.

[Back to top.](#)

