



NEWSLETTER

Saltire Society Edinburgh Branch

Dear Member,

The dismal weather of the past few weeks may have made you think Autumn has arrived early this year but, theoretically, we are still in Summer! And, as we all know, it wouldn't be summer in Edinburgh without the numerous Festivals which have been bringing to the city in August for many years such a variety of performers and great crowds of tourists. This year in particular has been very special. The **Edinburgh International Festival has celebrated its 70th anniversary** with a programme which reconnected to that first edition in 1947 when, in the words of Sir John Falconer, the then Lord Provost of Edinburgh and International Festival first Chairman, the ambition was "to provide a platform for the flowering of the human spirit" in the aftermath of the II World War. If you are a Festival devotee we hope you have enjoyed some of the events on offer. However if you still find yourself eager to add to your knowledge the **Edinburgh Branch Autumn/Winter programme** is packed with expert speakers and interesting topic, really something for everyone. For a full list of events please go to page 4 of this Newsletter. We do hope you will enjoy reading this issue and that you will continue to support the Branch by attending some of our future events. **Do bring along friends and guests!**

Laura Scott
Editor

Report from Saltire Council and HQ Update

At HQ **Ashley Stein** has replaced Cameron Foster who left the Society back in May. **Mary Slessor and Maggie Keswick** were chosen as National Wallace Monument heroines as a result of the Scotland's Heroine Project. Working in partnership with the artist himself the first **Alasdair Gray Inspiring Scotland Bursary** was established to support new emerging creating practitioners and the first recipient will be announced in November. Celebrated artist **Alexander Moffat** has produced a major new painting – *Scotland's Voices* – a complementary work to go alongside his iconic *Poets' Pub* painting of 1980 currently hanging in the National Galleries of Scotland. The painting was unveiled by Dolina MacLennan at HQ at an event on 11 August. A special screening of **Douglas Eadie's** documentary *Hamish* was held at HQ on 1st of September. The **Society's Annual General Meeting** will be held at Dundee Contemporary Arts on **Saturday 16 September**. A new series of **Saltire Pamphlets** is in the pipeline which will see the Society working with Edinburgh Makar **Christine de Luca** and will be launched later in the year. Details of all Autumn/Winter HQ events are on page 4 of this newsletter.

John Yellowlees, Branch Representative

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Due to rising costs of printing and postage the decision has been taken to send future issues of the Branch newsletter only to members who are up to date with their subscriptions. This, therefore, will be the last issue to be sent to all, paid and unpaid members. If you have any queries about your subscription please check directly with Saltire HQ. Thank you.

Report from the Branch AGM on Friday 19 May 2017

MESSAGE FROM THE CONVENOR

It's a little more than a year since I succeeded Mary Fleming as Convenor, and I should like to thank you for all for your friendship and support throughout that time. Mary of course has continued to be active in her promotion of our link with the City of Edinburgh Primary Music School. Laura has informed and educated us with her news-filled and entertaining newsletters, while in his new dual role as both Treasurer and Events Coordinator Kenneth Stewart has kept us focused and organised. My thanks go also to Rina as Vice Convenor and to other committee members including Neville who in his first year has also joined the Society's Council, and it has been a pleasure to see Eric Wishart's recovery from the ill-health that had beset him a year ago. A special debt of gratitude goes to the Royal Overseas League for their continuing excellent service.

John Yellowlees

An appeal to Branch members!

Since last year Annual General Meeting the Branch has been looking for one more member to join our Committee. We very much hope that some of you may find this invitation attractive and decide to come on board. The Committee meets four times a year, usually in the late afternoon. The workload is not at all demanding and you will be able to contribute to the running of the Branch programme. If you think you could be interested please get in touch with our Convenor John Yellowlees (0131-5386866) or the Newsletter Editor Laura Scott at the number shown at the bottom of page 4. Thank you!

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Branch events from the Spring/Summer

(John Yellowlees, Secretary)



At our **March lunch** Helen Scott told us that, bronchial but always energetic, Scots artist Wilhelmina Barns-Graham (1912-2004) divided her working life between Fife and Cornwall, and has left a large body of work. Her father was unhappy that her health might not be strong enough for her to go to art college, but help from her aunt enabled her to go to the Edinburgh College of Art. There she showed skill in capturing form in a process of distillation, and her love of colour was heightened by a condition known as colour synesthesia, which prompted automatic

associations between numbers, places, memories or people and specific shades of colour. She graduated in 1937, but the political shadows over Europe counted against travel to say France or Germany, so the Principal suggested St Ives where she became a founding member of the progressive Penwith Society of Arts in 1949. Climbing in Switzerland inspired an interest in light, shapes and stones, and she set about capturing these ideas in a glacial abstract theme with offset printmaking proved an ideal technique. Teaching at the Leeds College of Art during her husband's study of architecture was marked by production of powerful paintings with a mathematical quality founded on the golden section principle. Disintegration of her marriage led her to return to St Ives, and in 1960 her aunt Mary Neish left her Balmungo House in Fife which inspired oil on canvas and oil on board works using colour in line with the pop-art movement, in the 1970s returning to nature as the source of her inspiration with the proximity of the sea at both locations to inform her investigation of waves, ice and soil. A visit to Orkney inspired her to build up a series of collages based on Orcadian landscape features, and later she captured the landscapes of Lanzarote and the Olympic cityscape of Barcelona with methods ranging from paint-flicking to calligraphy, with silkscreen printmaking mixing up to fifteen colours to achieve one tone. From her death in January 2004, the Barns-Graham Charitable Trust that she had founded in 1987 has worked to foster and protect her reputation by making her works accessible, awarding travelling scholarships of the sort that had helped launch her career.



In **April** Catherine Czerkawska told us that she had known nothing about Burns until, on relocating to Ayrshire and hearing about him at school, she visited Burns Cottage and fell in love with the bard, becoming interested in him and the women in his life. Plenty of people had written about Highland Mary and Nancy McLehose, aka Clarinda but it was difficult to find even a family tree for the Armour family, but in the Belles of Mauchline where Burns describes Jean as 'the jewel of them all' he was writing about young women of consequence in the busy town of Mauchline. Poor Jean is often dismissed by the poet's biographers as the illiterate girl next door, Nancy McElhose as a

better match while Highland Mary is sanctified, but the former was already married while the latter died as a very young woman. Jean's father, James Armour, was a master stonemason who paid more than anyone else in the town for his pew in the Kirk. As well as reading and writing, she knew how to dance and more importantly, how to sing. She was the apple of her father's eye and her parents hoped for a good husband for her, which explained why they disapproved of Burns, who, by contrast, wore his hair in the Edinburgh fashion and dressed stylishly, being clearly attractive, but her parents didn't think he would be a good provider as his 'nose was always in a book'. The couple agreed to marry, as soon as Jean realised she was expecting, but her parents objected and she was sent to relatives in Paisley where her parents hoped she might marry a more suitable man, but she soon came home and should have sat on the 'cutty stool' to be publicly admonished for her sins in the kirk, but instead the minister, Mr Auld allowed her to write a letter of penitence. Burns was planning to go to the Indies, and was now determined not to marry "that woman" but in his affair with Highland Mary it is possible that both were 'on the rebound' and she died of typhus in Greenock. Jean meanwhile had given birth to twins, the boy brought up by the Burns family, while his sister stayed with the Armours. After the publication of the first edition of his poems, Burns went to Edinburgh where he met Nancy McLehose married with an absent husband. With the poet becoming more famous, Jean's parents were more receptive to the poet's visits, and he seems to have been torn between his crush on Nancy and his abiding affection for Jean. He would visit his daughter, at the Armour house, and was allowed to 'walk out' with Jean who fell pregnant again but Burns was still refusing to marry her and the little girl twin died at the age of 13 months apparently as a result of an accident since he was angered. A second set of twins were born very prematurely and died almost immediately. However Burns seems to have changed his mind, visited Jean, offered to marry her and told her of his plans to take the tenancy of a farm at Ellisland and train as an excise officer. There they lived reasonably happy together although the Bard remained congenitally unfaithful. She outlasted her husband contentedly by many years, treasured his memory and never remarried, although she seemingly had plenty of offers. She visited Edinburgh and took tea with Nancy McLehose, but remained in Dumfries where she was very well-respected.



The Branch was represented during **April** at the unveiling of inscribed stones in Makars Court to poets George Campbell Hay and William Soutar.



Guest of Honour at our **Annual Dinner** was Dr Robyn Marsack, who left her native New Zealand at 20 to study at Oxford, but found herself taking a sudden detour from the road to an academic life when she noticed that Michael Schmidt - founder of the Manchester-based Carcanet Press - was not publishing the works of her favourite war poet, Edmund Blunden. When she asked why not, he invited her to edit a selection of Blunden's poetry and thus she joined the firm, placing publishing and poetry at the core of her professional life, in which the greatest joys are to read and to have the sense of internationalism that is key to the institutions with which she is involved. In 1999 the position of Director of the Scottish Poetry Library had been advertised shortly after completion of its new building off the Canongate. Asked in her interview what she knew about new buildings, Robyn claimed no knowledge but said that she could learn. The ensuing sixteen years were to be much taken up with snagging items and with other related issues - flooding, archive accommodation, an extension - which meant that she ended up learning rather a lot about buildings! Other highlights of her term had included publications such as 'Tools of the Trade' containing verses aimed at bringing hope and purpose to junior doctors and, inspired by Edwin Morgan, 'Whatever the Sea' which offered poets' reflections on the impact of ageing. She concluded by reading Kathleen Jamie's 'Here Lies Our Land', which she helped commission for the refurbished rotunda at Bannockburn.



In his **Edinburgh Philosophical Institution lecture** after our Branch AGM, Lester Hillman recalled that 1917 had been a particularly momentous year in the life of John Buchan's hero Richard Hannay, for in "Mr Standfast" he met his fellow spy and future wife Mary Lamington and visited what was to become their home at Fosse Manor. A Brigadier with a DSO, he emerged from arrest masquerading as a private to become a Major-General heading a division and in meeting Field Marshal Haig was clearly on his way to a knighthood. And he found time to stay in the Pentland Hotel, which Buchan located on Edinburgh's Princes Street. Four film versions of The 39 Steps were made, in 1935, 1959, 1978 and 2008, the first one directed by Alfred Hitchcock and starring Robert Donat being hailed the 21st greatest British film of all time. Hitchcock gives Hannay Canadian links and was perhaps a nod to Buchan's Governor-Generalship. Modern admirers have included Rolling Stone Keith Richards, who in September 2016 selected the film for his Lost Weekend on BBC4. Today Buchanology is alive and well, and the John Buchan Society has about 450 members with some 65 attending a recent Perth weekend with a visit to Kirkcaldy where Buchan and his sister Anna (also a novelist writing as O Douglas) were brought up - and there was time to descend the local steps which many link to Buchan's iconic tale. The Society supports the John Buchan Story Museum in Peebles, with other activities that include book exchanges. This October Robert Harris hopes to bring out a new story "The Thirty-One Kings" in the style of John Buchan.



Our thinly-attended **Summer Outing** hosted by Roger Kelly was to Penicuik where the Community Development Trust has set about revitalising the town centre by converting the former Coop into a craft centre The Storehouse which is due to open soon showcasing local food producers, supporting a cafe in the Town Hall, running its own shop and helping sustain the former Pen-Y-Coe commercial printing press which but for its intervention might have been sold for housing.

News Digest

Scotland First Concert Hall



Originally built in 1763 **St Cecilia's Hall** is the oldest purpose built concert hall in Scotland and the second oldest in use in the British Isles. The Hall has undergone a lengthy period of renovation and restoration and has re-opened to the public in August in time for this year 70th Edinburgh International Festival with a series of concerts tailor made for this venue and performed on period instruments. After many year of underuse the venue now also hosts a much expanded museum with nearly 500 historic musical instruments spanning more than four centuries brought together for the first time under one roof.



A successful campaign by a long-standing Branch member

John Rae was an Orcadian doctor and Arctic explorer who, among other achievements, explored parts of Northern Canada, found the final portion of the Northwest Passage (*Rae Strait*, named after him) and reported the fate of the Franklin Expedition. There is an English Heritage blue plaque in London on the building where he lived and died. But although he was buried in the kirkyard of St Magnus' Cathedral in Kirkwall he was never properly recognized in his own birthplace until 2013, when after many years of campaigning by **Branch member Margaret Street**, a memorial was unveiled at Stromness Pierhead. The statue by North Ronaldsay sculptor Ian Scott has the following inscription: "*the discoverer of the final link in the first navigable Northwest Passage*".



A taster of our October lunch topic

Angela Hunter, a figurative artist, who sculpts both the human figure and animals will be our first guest speaker of our Autumn programme. Her topic for the day will be *From Inspiration to Installation – The Making of Bronze Sculpture*. One of her latest achievements is *The Boy* (seen here on the right) on display at Wemyss Bay Railway Station which complements *The Girl* (left) to be seen in Gourrock. Do come to the lunch and hear more!



A message from the Flora Stevenson Primary Music School

To the members of the Saltire Society Edinburgh Branch

Thank you very much for the full and three-quarter size violin case that you so kindly purchased for the Primary Music School. They will be put to good use. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.

*With my best wishes.
Susan Emslie, Director*

**"What they say about"the High Street of Edinburgh.....
(.....long before the arrival of any Festivals!)**

"The High Street of Edinburgh is doubtless the stateliest street in the World, being broad enough for five coaches to drive up a-breast".

John Mackey: A Journey Through Scotland.....Being the Third Volume which compleats Great-Britain (2nd Edition) 1729

Branch Membership News

The Branch extends a warm welcome to the following **new members: Catriona Grindlay, Roy and Irene Beavis, Veronica Gordon Smith, Christina Anne Phillips**. We look forward to meeting them at some of our future events.

Many congratulations to **Isobel Wilkie** who has celebrated her 90th birthday back in April surrounded by family and friends. The Branch sends her warmest wishes for many more restful and serene years to come.

Regretfully, we have to report two resignations, **Maud Wilson** and **Mary Weir**.

Obituaries –

It is with great sadness that we have to record the death in May of **Dr John Forrester**, former member of the Branch Executive Committee. Unfailingly courteous and possessed of a gentle wit, John truly rose to the occasion in October 2013 when our speaker died just a few days before the first lunch of the season. Stepping willingly into the gap thus left in our programme, John gave us the attached erudite account of the three-month interaction between Italian physician Girolamo Cardano and the ailing Archbishop Thomas Hamilton of St Andrews which so restored this worldly cleric to health that he survived to become the first Bishop in Scotland to die by the hands of the Executioner.

Another loss to the Society and the Branch has been the recent passing in July of **Lord McCluskey**, Labour Life Peer and former Solicitor-General for Scotland. Highly regarded within the legal profession he played a central role in the administration of our justice system. A man of wide interests he was recently recognized with a life-time achievement award at this year's Scottish Legal Awards.

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Branch Programme 2017-2018

As always the Branch has arranged an extremely varied and interesting collection of speakers and topics for the **Autumn/Winter programme**. We do hope members will support it by attending in good numbers. The EPIL is free but lunches must be booked and paid in advance by returning the enclosed booking form to our Events Coordinator, Kenneth Stewart. **Friends and guests are always welcome!**

Lunches

Saturday 7 October 2017	12.15 for 12.30pm at the Royal Overseas League Angela Hunter on <i>From Inspiration to Installation – The Making of Bronze Sculpture</i>
Saturday 4 November 2017	Joanna Macpherson on <i>Being a Lady Laird</i>
Saturday 2 December 2017	Rosemary Goring on <i>After Flodden</i>
Saturday 6 January 2018	Timothy Neat on <i>Hamish Henderson – As the Poets Knew Him</i>
Saturday 3 February 2018	Simon Fairnie on <i>Fisherrow Fisherwomen</i>
Saturday 3 March 2018	Susan Emslie on <i>The City of Edinburgh Primary Music School</i>
Saturday 7 April 2018	Moya McDonald on <i>An Orcadian Film Pioneer</i>

Annual Dinner

Friday 4 May 2018 **6.30 for 7pm at the Royal Overseas League**

Guest of Honour Professor Jim Hunter

Branch AGM

Friday 18 May 2018 **6.30 for 7pm at the Royal Overseas League**

followed by the **Edinburgh Philosophical Institution Lecture at 7.30pm**

Our speaker will be Ali Bowden on *the Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust*

Summer Outing - Saturday 2 June 2018 - Destination to be advised

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Saltire Society HQ Autumn Programme

Annual General Meeting & Fletcher of Saltoun Awards Ceremony

Saturday 16 September 2017, Dundee Contemporary Arts, at 12.30pm

Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun Annual Lecture, The Scottish Parliament, date and time TBC, speaker Dr John Purser

Saltire Society Civil Engineering Award 2017 Ceremony

Tuesday 24 October 2017, National Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, from 6pm

Saltire Literary Awards 2017 Ceremony

Thursday 30 November 2017, Central Hall, Lothian Road, Edinburgh, from 6pm

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