



## friends newsletter Issue 87 Winter 2021

### Note from the Editor: Priscilla Barlow psbarlow@sky.com

A new year and we still cannot meet. But Duncan and I have striven to hold your interest in matters bibliographic in this issue.

We regret we have no items for *Dates For Your Diary*; no visits or live lectures to report and as yet no AGM. The committee however is exploring the possibilities afforded by Zoom. We have in fact had our first Zoom committee meeting. The lockdown reading item proved popular so we are repeating it. Contributors are Jeremy Smith,

Professor of English Philology, English Language and Linguistics, Jean Gilmour Anderson, former convenor and Gerry Cassidy, who designs the newsletter.

We are sure *The Reading Room* will trigger many happy memories.

Sadly we have to record the deaths of two of our most stalwart committee members; Dr Helen Cargill Thomson who had been our convenor for a spell and Dr Peter Davies who gave invaluable service for many years as our Honorary Secretary. In this issue

we devote space to many tributes to Helen and we shall do likewise for Peter in the Summer issue. The committee is discussing fitting memorials.

On a happier note we are pleased to report that Dr David Fergus, who many years ago served briefly as co-editor, has been welcomed back on the committee. Remember if you wish in future to receive the FGUL newsletter electronically, please let us know. (See enclosed). We send our good wishes for a safe and healthy year.

# Our new honorary president

2020 saw the appointment of Dame Katherine Grainger as Chancellor in the University of Glasgow - the first woman ever to hold that office. The Friends are privileged to have her as our Honorary President.

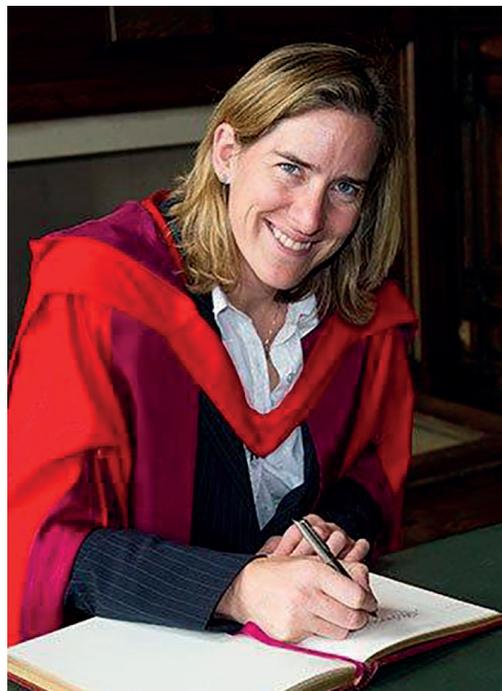
## Message from: Dame Katherine Grainger

There are many honours that accompany the role of Chancellor, but the Honorary President of the Friends of Glasgow University Library certainly holds a special place in my heart.

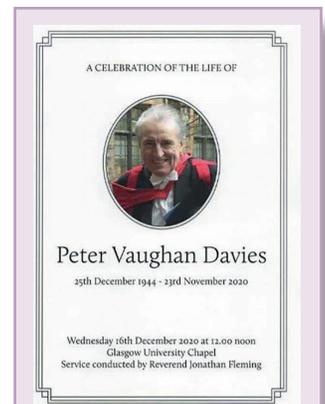
I grew up surrounded by books and from a very early age developed a deep love for them, acquiring an ongoing admiration for the endless knowledge, adventures and wonder they contain. When my big sister and I were growing up in Glasgow we couldn't wait to go along to our local library every week to choose new stories to take home with us. Ever since then, as a student and now as a working adult,

I have turned to the library in moments of need and hope, and also pleasure.

Every library is a place of exploration, safety,



inspiration, comfort, ideas and, of course, learning. I couldn't be happier to accept this honorary role to support our own wonderful University Library and hope the Library continues to bring both joy and support to all our students, staff and wider community.



### Dr Peter Davies

On 16 December 2020 the funeral service for the late Peter Davies was held in the chapel at the University of Glasgow. It was conducted by the Rev. Jonathan Fleming. Professor Laurence Grove gave the eulogy and there was a reading by Dr Jim Simpson. Priscilla Barlow represented *The Friends*.

## PROFILE 29



Lucy McCormick

Lucy grew up in Yorkshire and completed her undergraduate and MRes studies in French at the University of Warwick, where she first discovered the work of the interwar avant-garde and became particularly interested in Georges Bataille and his circles.

After qualifying as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language, she worked for several years in public and private schools across East Asia, and as a teacher and teacher trainer in the Tibetan refugee community, northern India. This time allowed her to pursue a long-held interest in Buddhist practices and traditions, and she was lucky enough to learn directly from teachers in the Korean Seon (Zen) and Tibetan traditions.

She was struck by the parallels between the art, ideas and practices she encountered over this time, and those she had studied in the context of 1930s France.

Lucy returned to the UK in 2016 to have her son and founded a tuition agency specialising in Modern Foreign Languages. Snatching time between clients, tutors and childcare, she pieced together a research proposal on Buddhist traditions in the French interwar avant-garde, crossed her fingers and hit send. Acceptance to the MPhil/PhD at Glasgow saw Lucy and her family up sticks to the city in 2018, where she is currently in her second year of PhD studies under Dr. Ramona Fotiade, Prof. Stephen Forcer and Dr. Saeko Yazaki. In spite of all the pandemic has thrown at us, she remains overwhelmingly pleased and grateful to be pursuing her twin loves of research and teaching.

## Message from the Convener

In all conscience, 2020 was a sad enough year before the Friends were dealt a double hammer blow in the passing of Helen Cargill Thompson and Peter Davies, two Trustees whose names are writ large in our history.

Helen was Convener from 2003 to 2011 and, inter alia, provided crucial financial acumen in dealing with the Mackenna and Wyley bequests and the consequent development of a discretionary investment strategy. Her contributions on other matters were always considered and well regarded. She remained a regular at our events until very recently. This issue carries a substantial tribute to her.

Peter also devoted himself to FGUL. He was absolutely central to our programme of talks and outings by virtue of his charming ability to involve speakers and others. His monument will always be *Friendly Shelves, a History of the Library*, funded by the Friends and for which he led the Editorial Team. We

By DAVID BAILLIE

intend to say much more about him in the next Newsletter.

On a more positive note, we are delighted to have the agreement of Dame Katherine Grainger, the new University Chancellor, to become our Honorary President. A quite delightful message from her, as you may have seen, is on our front pages. She replaces Sir Kenneth Calman, to whom we are grateful for taking the position during his Chancellorship.

A more familiar face also rejoins us. Freda Tuck has agreed to take on yet again the Membership Secretary role, as the disruption to Lucy's studies caused by Covid 19 has forced her to step down. We are thankful to both for their contribution.

I sincerely hope that 2021 sees the Friends return to a more active role. The Trustees remain in contact, ready to spring into action as soon as conditions permit.

## Meet the college librarians



The University of Glasgow consists of four colleges, bringing together areas of excellence. They are: College of Arts; College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences; College of Science & Engineering; College of Social Sciences.

Each of these colleges has its own library corresponding to what used to be known as subject libraries.

Each library has various sections.

The College Librarians actively lead and manage the relationship between the Library and their respective Colleges and their students and staff. They provide support for a wide range of

College teaching and research activities.

Pictured above, left to right are: The College of Arts librarians Richard Bapty [Richard.bapty@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Richard.bapty@glasgow.ac.uk); and Morag Greig [Morag.Greig@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Morag.Greig@glasgow.ac.uk); College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences librarian Paul Cannon [paul.cannon@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:paul.cannon@glasgow.ac.uk); College of Science & Engineering librarian Roma Thompson [Roma.Thompson@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Roma.Thompson@glasgow.ac.uk); and the College of Social Sciences librarian Lynn Irvine [Lynn.Irvine@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Lynn.Irvine@glasgow.ac.uk)

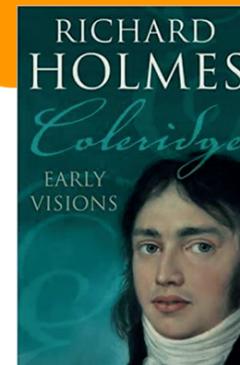
All the librarians are pleased to make appointments.

### Friends of Glasgow University Library

## AGM

It has not been possible to hold our AGM in the traditional way but we hope to be able to invite you soon to a virtual meeting.

## Lockdown Reading

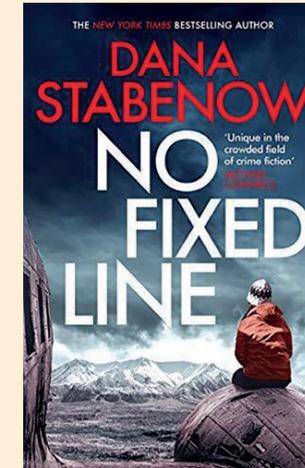


### Jeremy Smith

My great mentor, the legendary palaeographer Malcolm Parkes, distinguished three kinds of literacy: 'pragmatic' (ability to read a notice), 'cultivated' (reading for entertainment), and 'professional' (reading for one's job)

A lot of my reading during lockdown has been of that third kind, and Friends might not be interested in the more recondite volumes that have engaged me, e.g. works on medieval liturgy (a new obsession), a fine monograph called *Long-Vowel Shifts in English c.1050-1700*, and an exciting little pamphlet grimly titled *Panel Criteria and Working Methods ... for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021*. More attractive to Friends might be Christopher de Hamel's splendid *The Book in the Cathedral: The Last Relic of Thomas Becket: a Small Pendant to his Groundbreaking Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts*.

However, none of these works I fear meets the brief: what have I read in a 'cultivated' sense? My reference-point here is the pile that's accrued on my side of the bed, and it's a pretty mixed bag. I seem to have done a lot of re-reading. Several John Le Carré novels lurk there, as do histories of Antarctic exploration, of Jerusalem, and of the conquest of Mexico. But one title does occupy pride of place: Richard Holmes's astonishing two-volume life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Holmes's biography of Coleridge is filled with remarkable perceptions. We now know (sort of) the truth about the person on business from Porlock who interrupted the poet, and caused Kubla Khan to remain incomplete; we have a blow-by-blow account of the painful shipboard enema Coleridge underwent en route to Malta in 1804. But above all Holmes catches Coleridge's speech. Coleridge was one of the great talkers of all time, and Holmes's book allows us to listen.



### Jean Gilmour Anderson

My lockdown reading has been detective and adventure stories. Great escapism from the pandemic, I could claim; but actually I gave up the literary prize winners a long time ago, in favour of engaging stories and characters that I like.

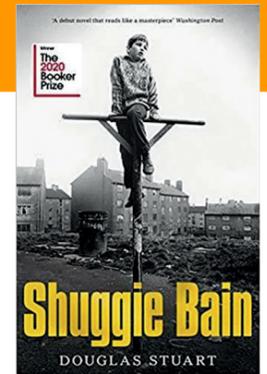
One of my favourites this year has been the Kate Shugak books by Dana Stabenow. Set in Alaska, they are full of snow, bears, crooks and mysteries, all sorted out by a diminutive Aleut. Stabenow brings the Alaskan landscape and its inhabitants to life and takes you to another world.

Another writer with a great sense of place is Michael Ridpath. His tales of an American getting to grips with a foreign culture in Iceland have engrossing crimes to be solved and an introduction to the history and landscape of the country.

I spent time with Viveca Sten in Sweden and loved the islands she describes so vividly. Good stories set on Sandham island.

Taking me to a sunnier country was Andrea Camilleri. He writes of the gourmet policeman, Salvo Montalbano with good humour and a taste of Sicily. (Montalbano can be seen on BBC 4.)

I haven't spent all summer abroad, though. Tartan Noir figures hugely in my reading list: William McIlvaney, Ian Rankin, Ann Cleeves, Christopher Brookmyre, Val McDermid and Lin Anderson. I'm grateful to them all!



### Gerry Cassidy

Watching a loved one destroy their life with alcohol is a distressing, depressing, helpless ordeal. I speak from experience. And yet, Douglas Stuart's Booker Prize winning debut, *Shuggie Bain*, which has that issue as its central theme is a joy.

As the youngest of three children, Shuggie forms the closest of bonds with his alcoholic mother, Agnes, despite her frequent emotional attacks on the boy, a relationship which becomes increasingly dependent as her condition progresses.

Unsurprisingly, large chunks of the book are bleak, but the frequent laugh-out-loud moments help to create a compelling read.

I came across *Poland's August* on the bookshelf of an old friend (who sadly passed away only weeks after I borrowed it). Like me, Ron had a fascination with Eastern Europe having been a civil engineer and lived and worked behind the Iron Curtain.

Written by Scottish writer and journalist Neal Ascherson, it tracks Polish society from 1949 until 1981 – from Stalin's austere Communist embrace to the emergence of Lech Walesa's Solidarity.

Published during the period of martial law which followed the initial crushing of Solidarity, it reveals the Polish spirit which some eight years later would lead to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR.

Also among my lockdown reading was a biography by Priscilla Barlow, our esteemed editor, of Scottish actor Duncan Macrae about whom I confess I knew very little more than his name. It is clear, however that he was a formative force in the development of Scottish theatre in the earlier part of last century. It's an engaging biography of a very talented but socially awkward artist. Well worth a read.

# Dr Helen Cargill Thompson: an appreciation



Photo courtesy of Iain Wotherspoon

**Dr Helen Cargill Thompson long time Friend, committee member and onetime convenor, passed away on the 28 September 2020. Dr Cargill Thompson (HCT) was a member of an eminent West of Scotland family. Her younger brother, John, was a playwright, while her older brother was a professor of ecclesiastical history at King's College, London. Helen and her family had arrived in Glasgow before the outbreak of the Second World War from Burma, where she and her two brothers were born and her father worked as a merchant trader. The family had long connections with Burma (now Myanmar).**

Dr Cargill Thompson went to librarianship at Strathclyde University, where she worked for 30 years, after 10 years as a research scientist, having earlier gained a PhD at Edinburgh University and a physiology degree at St Andrews. As a librarian at Strathclyde, one of her innovations was founding a Scottish Business Collection. The core of it is the collection assembled over years by the Cargill family of Burmah Oil fame, (and before that as merchants in Ceylon), for which HCT ensured a safe and continuing home.

Her one great passion was viewing and collecting art, and she started collecting in earnest in 1985. They include important pieces by several well-known Scottish artists. After forming a collection of almost 350 items over 15 years she decided to gift it to Strathclyde. At the time, the estimated value was at least £250,000.

In addition to her munificence and close working with the Collins Gallery, she was also active in the Strathclyde University Graduates' Association. She was a strong supporter of the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), as well as an office bearer of many societies, including being archivist/librarian of the Glasgow & West of Scotland Family History Society, which she enjoyed greatly.

Fitting tributes have been pouring in, and we are delighted to share them with the wider membership:

**Margaret Paxton (convenor 2000-2003) writes:** "Calm and self-possessed, Dr Helen Cargill Thompson was an extremely committed member of the FGUL committee up till her death (28 September). Dr CT, as she enjoyed being called, was convenor of the Friends from 2004- 2010. Always willing to roll up her sleeves and give of her time Helen sold Friends' Christmas cards at the annual Charities Fayre in the Glasgow City Chambers and in other venues in order to gain publicity and raise funds for the Society and thence the Library. Her sound advice in choosing investments proved a worthy asset to the committee. Members' summer outings to other libraries were a wonderful learning experience as were the open days at her own Edwardian house. To all who knew her, Helen Cargill Thompson was a unique lovely lady."

**Graeme Smith (FGUL Convenor 2010-2016) writes:** "Interested and interesting, she was always fully supportive. Her mischievous spirit matched her intellect. Helen was a walking library and understood the contexts of time. She encouraged the Friends and the Library to think beyond its immediate boundaries. Fittingly, it



has been ladies of her spirit who have ensured the continuation of the Tenement House in Buccleuch Street. The generous gift of her Edwardian house and contents to the National Trust for Scotland should be fully respected.... I recall her saying she was going to her keep fit classes, to remove the rust!... She was a well rounded character"

**Jean Gilmour Anderson (acting convenor 2016-17) writes:** "I met Helen when I joined the Friends committee. It was immediately

clear that she was the repository of all FGUL wisdom. Helen's word was the final one on financial investments, past events, people and more. She had an erudite and eclectic fund of knowledge and I enjoyed her reminiscences and amusing conversation as we walked part of the way home together after the committee meetings (both of us carrying bags of crisps or biscuits!)"

**Sheila Craik (former committee member) writes:** "All I can say is that she always seemed to manage to make a relevant observation or pose an interesting question following the speakers' talks. And of course I have to mention Helen's taking home any left-overs following the drinks and nibbles sessions when I was in charge."

**Ronald Singleton (former committee member) writes:** "An indomitable character. She is still remembered for attending her first year at St Andrews University in her girls' school uniform. Brought from Burma to Glasgow just before WW2 and brought up during the war made her, perhaps, the thrifty soul she was personally. But her knowledge of old Glasgow was wide and widely respected by the National Trust for Scotland and her support of young painters and newly graduating silver-smiths was generous. Her unexpected gift of a thousand paintings stupefied Strathclyde University where she was employed for thirty years finally as the reference librarian (not as she would sometimes mischievously want you to believe as The Librarian).

"She was in some ways not quite of this world; in some ways artless, happiest when showing off her 1920s home, a commodious end-terrace house in the Kirklee area of the West End, the hall stacked with paintings still unwrapped, the hall stair partly blocked by a huge roll of carpet bought in 1939 but never laid, bloomers still on the pulley in the scullery. The house is a period piece and she has left it to the National Trust.

"I met her first in her later years. She stayed, she told me, sitting at her usual place beside the bowl of crisps, on the committee of Friends of Glasgow University Library 'to look after the money'. She rarely made a comment nor did I know her to undertake a single task. Suddenly she would appear before me and say 'Yes, please!'. And I knew she was asking for a lift home. An indomitable character. I liked her. She always got her lift home.

**Roger Bilcliffe writes:** "Not long after my gallery in Blythswood Street opened in 1992 Helen Cargill Thompson made the first

of her many purchases. This silver bowl, by Roger Drew, set the bar for the future, its exquisite craftsmanship catching her well-informed eye. Such objects, rather than jewellery or paintings formed the core of later purchases, envisaged as part of a collection that would ultimately, she hoped, be presented to Strathclyde University.

"Helen became pretty much a fixture in the gallery; she seemed to have an uncanny ability to detect the smell of a fresh pot of coffee, and then to drain most of it over a couple of hours, often sitting quietly in a corner, occasionally engaging with other clients when she was not afraid to advise on the wisdom of their choices – not always to our benefit. We will all miss her in our different ways, myself for her views on and memories of a Glasgow society that is now fast disappearing, their houses and collections still vivid in her memory."

**Elaine Blaxter, (University Librarian & Head of Library Services University of Strathclyde) writes:** "Helen joined Strathclyde in the early 1970s. I'm not sure what her earliest role was, but by the time I arrived in 1992 she had been the Head of the Reference and Information Division for quite some time. This was the Division which was formed from all the Faculty librarians.

"Faculty librarians teach information literacy, databases searching, liaise with the faculties and deal with more complex enquiry work and research needs. Her teaching style could be a challenge for users, as she did have a tendency to treat all as trainee librarians. Loath to adapt to the use of powerpoint, she persisted with acetate overheads almost to the point she retired.

"Having said that her persistence at trying to solve a difficult enquiry was legendary and no stone was ever left unturned. She was kind and supportive of all students – frequently supporting them in unexpected ways – staggering in on the bus one morning with a large box containing a sink top hand cranked washing machine to lend to a PhD student with a small child and lots of washing to do! Trips to the opera often included taking younger work colleagues, and I certainly had many an occasion where she gave me a free ticket to an antiques fair. She could display a great sense of humour and often saw the funny side of life – she would acquire pieces of sculpture or quirky items just because she thought they were fun.

"Conversations about Burma and the long journey of travelling back by boat to the UK were always rich with historic snippets of detail and practical observations. She was definitely a unique individual, impressive, thoughtful and maddening all at the same time. Those of us who worked with her will definitely regret her passing."

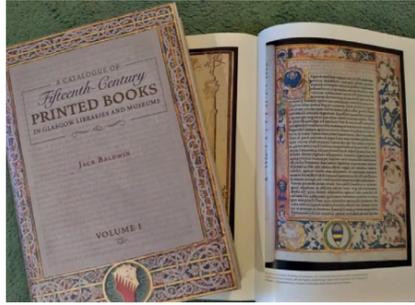
**Iain Wotherspoon (Chairman Architectural Heritage Society Scotland - Strathclyde Group) writes:** "Helen was a long-standing member of the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland and served for many years on the Strathclyde Committee—in fact, almost since its inception in the 1970s—and for a time on the National Council.

"She had strong views on many subjects and was forthright in expressing them. We had to be very careful in designing flyers, as Helen would pounce on anything that might be difficult for a colour blind person to read; a very useful safeguard. One may not always have agreed with her, but undoubtedly the Society and committee meetings will be slightly duller without her."

## The Incunabula project completed

In 2019 the Friends contributed £13,000 towards the Incunabula Project. The catalogue produced was reviewed by the respected book historian David Pearson in the December issue of *Library and Information History*, vol. 36, issue 3, pp. 210-11. We print excerpts below:

*Glasgow began work in earnest in 2009. These volumes, and the associated web version of the catalogue, are the product of a subsequent decade of work to generate full descriptions of a little over 1,100*



*pre-1501 printed books, taking in not only the University Library (very much the main player) but also the other*

*research libraries in Glasgow, including the Mitchell Library and the University of Strathclyde. The scholarship is meticulous, and the methodology is exemplary.*

*The Glasgow catalogue is also wholly online at <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/incunabula/>*

*These books help to celebrate the magisterial work of Jack Baldwin and his colleagues, and also raise the profile of the hugely important historic collections at Glasgow, both very worthy causes.*

### From the Library blogs

## First World War Centenary

A guest post by Esther Lucy Janes, a postgraduate student on placement in Archives and Special Collections.

...As the Centenary approached, the University set up a Commemoration Group drawing together people from across the institution to provide a co-ordinating role...

...In 2006 the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele prompted research into the biographies of the University staff and students who had died.

...If you passed by the main gates on University Avenue you probably saw the Memorial Garden. This prominent spot meant that the commemorations were physically visible both to people in the University and to the community in the city of Glasgow...

...The Roll of Honour research revealed that a German man who was a student at the University before the War had died while serving in the German armed forces. His name was added to the Chapel, acknowledging his place in the University community and demonstrating active reconciliation...

...This focus on the individuals helped to connect the University Centenary to the wider city of Glasgow community where they had grown up, lived and worked...

...The University's connections with Erskine Hospital was rediscovered and showcased in an exhibition at The Hunterian. The University gained two new trees from the partnership –



willows to replace the ones Sir William chopped down to get the wood to make artificial limbs!

...Thousands of school children came to visit the University during this time and took the opportunity to see other parts of the campus, which on one memorable occasion led to the Bute Hall being unlocked just so they could see inside. Staff, students and departments in the University could use the Centenary as a focus for a specific research and teaching, and for external engagement. Several students volunteered with Archives Services to help with research or support events and exhibitions. The students involved in the Words of WW1 project filmed performances of First World War poems selected by them to present different perspectives on the War, which were accompanied by original music...

...The Centenary at the University consisted of many overlapping and

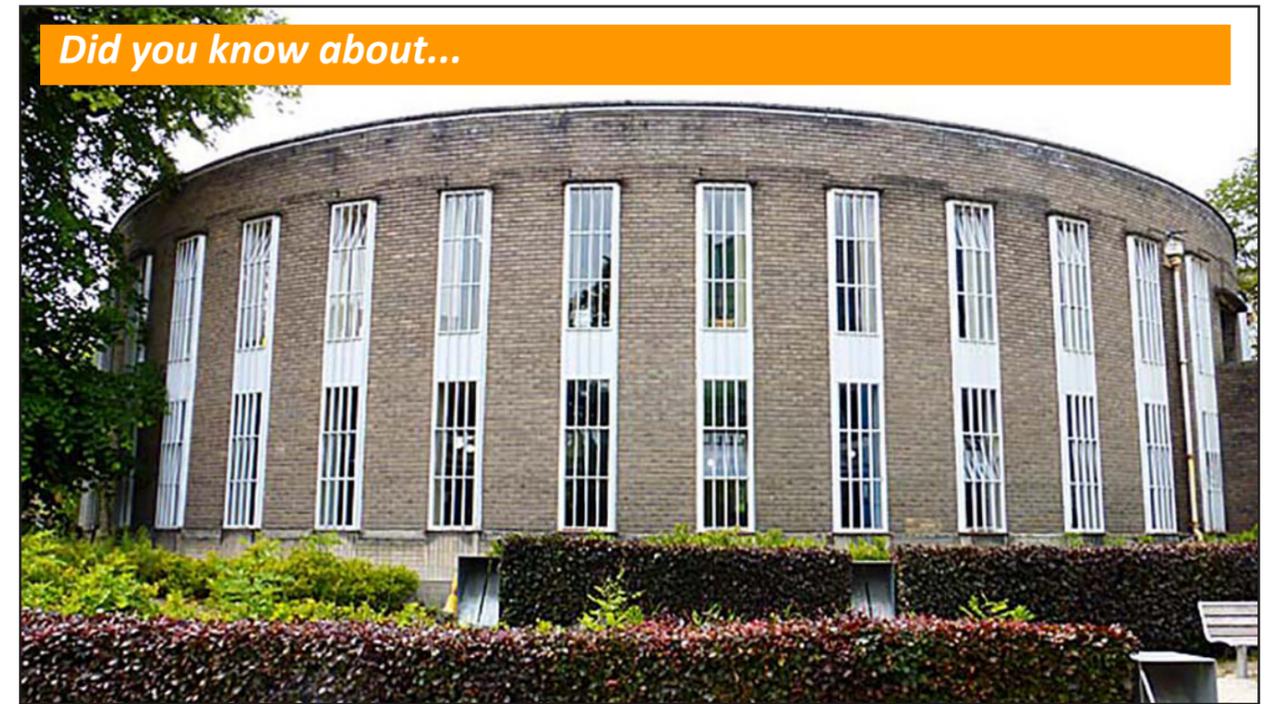
interconnected projects, activities and events, some of which demanded a lot of additional work, public engagement and out-of-hours events...

...But at the core was the six-year commitment to the acts of remembrance for all the people who died between 1914 and 1920. This was often very emotional for the people involved, especially if there were a lot of names to read out or a personal story that was particularly poignant...

...The archive research revealed that there were 21 people who had died but who were not commemorated in the Memorial Chapel, so their names have now been permanently added on a new tablet...

...This work to reveal new stories is a continuance of the legacy left by the University staff during the First World War who kept, updated and preserved the records of the students and staff who served and died...

### Did you know about...



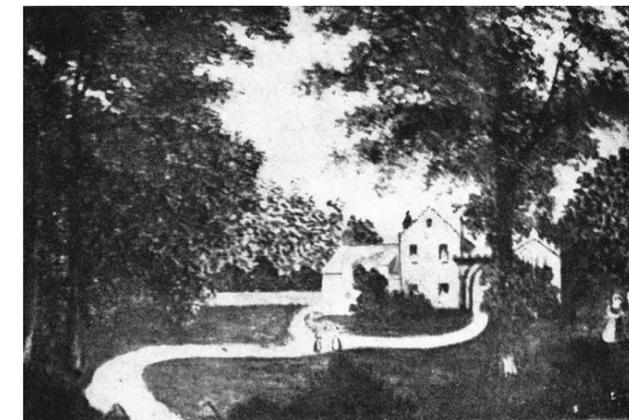
## The Round Reading Room

Many of you have often walked past this familiar building. Some of you might even have studied in it many years ago. This is its history.

In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century a villa named New Hillhead House was built by the muslin manufacturer and calico printer Andrew Dalglish for Walter MacLellan of Blairvaddick.

In 1917, in his memory, the McLellan family donated the house and spacious grounds to the University. From 1870 till the move in 1968 to its present site on Hillhead Street, the University Library was situated in the north front of the west quadrangle and central section of the Gilbert Scott building on Gilmorehill. The Psychology, Russian, and Celtic departments were housed in the villa during the 1930s, but by this time, the reading room situated in the south-east quadrangle of the Gilbert Scott Building was no longer able to accommodate the number of students or sustain the required longer opening hours. Principal Hetherington requested urgent funds for a new reading room. The University Grants Committee gave a grant of £15,000 and the Bellahouston Trustees gave a further £7,500 towards the estimated construction cost of £20,000.

The architects T. Harold Hughes and



Inspired by the Pantheon in Rome, the Round Reading Room (above) eased the pressure on space at the 19<sup>th</sup> Century New Hillhead House, left

David Stark Reid Waugh submitted designs for The McMillan Reading Room, also known as the 'Round Reading Room.' It was so named in memory of University benefactors, Robert and Edith McMillan. This A-listed building was awarded a Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) bronze medal in 1950 for the best building erected in Scotland during the period 1936-1949.

The new Reading Room was built to meet the primary needs of students with individual subject libraries. It had the longest opening hours of any unit in the University library system. The monumental circular domed building was meant to be a modern interpretation of the Pantheon in Rome. The interior however was more

reminiscent of the iconic reading room in the old British Library.

Hughes had presented a number of alternative designs which involved a U-plan courtyard arrangement of potential future buildings around the south, west and north sides of the reading room, leaving the east side open towards Thomas Lennox Watson's Wellington Church of 1883-1884. The plan was also meant to incorporate a square clock tower. In the end only the reading room was built.

Today, the Round Reading Room now houses a student help desk and IT Education Unit.

Coda: The distinctive wooden chairs, refuge to students over the years, are now in service in the dining rooms in the Fraser Building.



## Dates for your diary

The Friends Committee regrets that at time of going to print they are unable to confirm any future talks, outings etc. However, there is an attractive list in planning stages. High on this list is the visit to Inveraray Castle and archive which had to be cancelled last May. When the situation is clearer we hope to have information for you which will be communicated by email or letter.

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WEBSITE:  
[www.gla.ac.uk/fgul](http://www.gla.ac.uk/fgul)  
 (The website is currently under redevelopment but may be used to contact committee members.)

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# Meet our committee



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**Helen Durdell**  
 Honorary Vice President



**David Baillie**  
 Convenor



**Dr Fiona Hamilton**  
 Treasurer



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**Dr David Fergus**