



BROUGHTON HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Broughton Tolbooth 1582–1829

New Series Number **12**

June 2022

Welcome to the second Newsletter of 2022. It was good to meet some members in person at our last meeting about the Union Canal, albeit the venue was perhaps not ideal. We still do not know when the school will be available again, so are exploring other possibilities. As you know the AGM will be a Zoom meeting. Details of next season's talks are shown below, and it looks to be a fascinating programme.

BHS Programme 2022/23

The following are the titles and dates of the talks for the next year. The 2023 talks are not yet finalised so dates have not been given, and there may be changes, but the 2022 dates and speakers can be taken as definite, albeit subject to change as ever.

- 5 September David Purdie *James Boswell and Dr. Johnson*
- 3 October James Simpson *John Hope and the Botanic Cottage*
- 7 November Bruce Keith *Bridgescapes*
- 5 December *Christmas Soiree*
- 9 January Jane Corrie *Carl Linnaeus*
- February James Hamilton *the Writers to the Signet and their Library*
- March Barclay Price *Beastly Edinburgh*
- April Alison Rosie *National Archives of Scotland*
- May Dame Sue Black *Subject tbc*

Subscriptions for 2022/23

The subscription has been kept at £6, payable by cash, or cheque made out to Broughton History Society. Please send or deliver by hand to the Membership Secretary: Helen Rorrison, 11 Bellevue Place, Edinburgh EH7 4BS. Payment can also be made by Bank Transfer (BACS) to Account Name: Broughton History Society, Sort Code: 87-70-01, Account no.: 00014452, **Reference: NB Please enter your name as the reference.** This is necessary to identify who has made the payment. The charge for **Visitors** to individual talks is £2 per head. This can be paid in the same way.

Contents

2 Scottish Storytelling
3-4 Linen Trade
5-6 Union Canal

March's talk was given by Donald Smith who stepped in as the original speaker wanted to be able to give his talk face to face. Donald's talk was on Storytelling in Scotland which was a very appropriate topic since 2022 is the "Year of Scotland's Stories".

His talk covered three aspects, oral tradition, the relationship between storytelling & written history and storytelling and local history. He explained how Scotland is particularly rich in oral storytelling traditions due to the cultural diversity of the country, which has endured over thousands of years. We are also lucky that during the nineteenth century collectors like John Francis Campbell, for the Gaelic tradition, and Robert Chambers, for the Scots tradition, avidly collected local oral history and folk tales and in the twentieth century the School of Scottish Studies was formed. There is also a considerable current interest in the subject. The website Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o Riches <https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/> provides access to a rich audio resource of Scotland's cultural heritage. Donald then explained how the use of storytelling was central to many Scottish literary works. This was obviously true for the older Scottish writers such as James Hogg, Robert Burns and Walter Scott, but is also true for more contemporary writers, for example George Mackay Brown and James Kelman. Even the most ancient 'Scottish' texts such as Adamnan's Life of Columba and the Orkneyinga Saga incorporate parts which must have come from oral traditions.

He then went on to consider how local history depends on the memories of the people who live there and referred to the rich history of the Churches in Broughton. Here the inspirational Caithness minister George Gunn was the minister of Broughton Place Church for many years in the mid 20th C and his influence on local history of the Broughton area was considerable.

Since the advent of the internet, the emphasis in providing information for visitors to historic attractions has had to move away from simply reciting facts to engaging the visitor by telling stories.

In the wide-ranging discussion which followed Donald mentioned that, although history is written by the victors, the experience of the oppressed is often retained in the oral tradition, citing the narratives of the Highland clearances.

He also mentioned the chapbook tradition, in which Scotland is particularly strong. These were cheaply-printed ephemeral booklets, a bridge between oral and written tradition, since they were often intended to be read out to an audience who were illiterate. The National Library of Scotland has a huge collection of these, collected by David Laing in the 19th C.

The discussion covered several other topics and brought a fascinating talk to a very interesting end.

Sandra Purves



Donald Smith (photo TRACS)

grown flax and by 1772 there were 252 lint mills throughout Scotland.

The British Linen Company was set up in the old Moray House in the Canongate being established as the first Linen Trading Hall in 1746. To develop the banking business in this trade, the British Linen Bank was formed as a standard lending bank at 38-39, St Andrews Square with this building built by David Bryce in 1846. This bank secured official banking status in 1906 and flourished until 1969 when it eventually closed, but the property is presently

The delicate blue flowered plant, which is flax, when spun, becomes the fabric known as linen, but this can only happen after various processes. Retting or soaking of the cut stalks, crushing, or breaking, then heckling or combing before the actual spinning of the thread. An interesting process before a garment can be made.

Flax is a very ancient textile going back to pre-history where seeds have been found in ancient sites, to Egyptian days when personal clothing garments were made or where mummies of the dead were wrapped in linen bandages. It was also much favoured by the maritime trade for ships' sails. Maps also have links with linen being used in the backing of these. e.g. Bartholomew's of Edinburgh who printed many maps we know today. Household articles, or clothing are only a few of the products of this much-loved woven textile. Scottish maritime culture too was deeply interlinked with the linen trade, Leith being the principal port in Scotland. Kirkcaldy, Culross, Dundee, and Aberdeen were also important ports for this commerce. Verre in the Netherlands, where three hundred Scottish families lived and worked, had an important relationship from the 15th C since Scotland had 'favoured nation' status, In exchange for flax from the Netherlands Scotland exported barrels of salmon, butter and wool.



**SCOTTISH DIASPORA TAPESTRY
NL 04 THE CONSERVATOR.**

This artwork relates to the head of the Scottish Community in the Netherlands in Verre. This panel is sewn using crewel embroidery on a linen panel made by Peter Greig and Co of Kirkcaldy. This firm was the last surviving linen factory in Scotland and closed in April 2021.

under renovations as a listed building. Part of the talk discussed the migration of the 12 Huguenot Protestant families from Northern France who sought refuge at that time and settled in Edinburgh in Broughton Village. The main reminder of their existence is the street named Picardy Place after their original home.

They were skilled weavers who were given jobs and supported housing at that time, much like our refugees today. The wives (Spinners) went out and set up various spinning schools thus developing the textile trade in Scotland.

John then traced his own creative design journey touching on his contribution in establishing the Gayfield Creative Space, and his work involving guided walks relating to Linen throughout Edinburgh, and Ireland etc. including his creative organisations called “Our Linen Stories” “Salvage Scotland” and “Concrete Designs to thrive.” We looked at the future of the flax trade today in Scotland with heat moulded chairs and mountain skis made using flax fibre. These being only two of possible creative articles that can be produced. Discussion led to the Flax and Linen Festival which will be inaugurated this year in September 2022 and then hopefully every third year. This will involve many places in Scotland known for their flax heritage such as Silverburn, Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline, Falkland, Burntisland etc, and others abroad. Closer to home, Hopetoun Crescent Garden will also be involved in growing flax again this year as part of a 14-group partnership. This initiative is particularly interesting as the green space of Hopetoun is in reasonably close proximity to the original Picardy of the Huguenot weavers and hopefully, we will see the production of a woven linen tea towel from this flax.

For further information on linen, follow the following links.

[Our Linen Stories | Celebrating Linen Design and Heritage](#)

[Journeys in Design | Exploring Sustainable Design in Scotland](#)

Journeys in Design is a series of programmes exploring where design meets

well-being and sustainable futures, engaging local communities, reaching out internationally, and setting Scotland’s contemporary design talent in context.

Jenny Bruce



The committee of Friends of Hopetoun Crescent Garden sowing the flax seeds in the garden in 2021.



The flax just starting to grow

For our first face to face talk since the COVID pandemic struck in March 2020, we managed to have use of the Drummond Room in Broughton St Mary's Church, as Drummond School was still not willing to open for outside groups. Fortunately this task fell to one of our own members, Sandra Purves, the Society's treasurer. She has been involved for many years in voluntary aspects of the Union Canal, as a trained engineer, and had also organised an outing on the canal with her husband Bill for the society many years ago.

She took us on an entertaining and informative history tour of how the canal came into being, covering the various options for routes between Edinburgh and Falkirk, until it was decided to go for a contour canal, which followed the 240 ft contour via Ratho, Broxburn and Linlithgow. The Forth and Clyde Canal had been opened in 1790 so why was the Union Canal built so many years later, from 1818 to 1822? The main reason was the onset of the Napoleonic wars, largely ended by the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. There was also an urgent need to transport coal from the Lanarkshire coalfields and other materials into Edinburgh from the west.

The original start point of the canal in Edinburgh was Port Hopetoun and it was to run for 31 ½ miles to Port Downie at Falkirk, where it descended 110 ft to the Forth and Clyde Canal by a series of 11 locks. Sandra showed us the estimates for time and funds required to build this canal. Although it stuck to its original timetable of four years, like most large infrastructure projects, it exceeded its original budget of £240,000. This would partly have been due to a 690 ft long tunnel having to be built under Prospect Hill outside Falkirk because William Forbes didn't want it spoiling the view from his home at Callendar House – nimbyism at its worst.

We were informed about the numbering of bridges, the need for occasional draw bridges, milestones (every half mile!), the role of kicking stones to dissuade the horses from falling into the canal and, most impressively, the range of aqueducts large and small. There are three, still surviving large aqueducts, over the Water of Leith at Slateford, the Almond and the Avon, the latter being the second longest and tallest in Britain. The troughs for carrying the water were made from cast iron rather than puddle clay, which meant the support pillars could be hollow and internally braced.

Unfortunately, by 1842 the railways had become the modern form of mass transport and provided severe competition for the ca-



The Avon Aqueduct,
photo Eileen Henderson, [Avon Aqueduct -
geograph.org.uk](https://www.avon-aqueduct-geograph.org.uk) - 1691980, CC BY-SA 2.0

nals. In 1849 an Act of Parliament transferred the ownership of the Union Canal to the Edinburgh & Glasgow Railway Company, who were required to maintain the canal in working order. Ownership passed to the North British Railway Company in 1865.

During its heyday cargo was moved up and down the canal in scows, flat bottomed boats whose profile fitted the shallow waters of the canal. One was found in 2004 at Viewforth but was too fragile to remove in its entirety. Over the years pleasure trips were organised from various centres, such as Ratho and Linlithgow, as they are today, so the use of the canal for pleasure was, and is

now exclusively, one of its main functions.

With the improvement in road transport the canals suffered another decline in the 20th C and parts of the Union Canal had been filled in. The original basin at Port Hopetoun only lasted till 1922, when the Edinburgh terminus was moved to Lochrin Basin. So, when the Millennium Project was started to reconnect this canal with the Forth and Clyde Canal by means of the now famous Falkirk Wheel, a considerable amount of work to excavate and realign parts of the canal was needed. New bridges were built and the waterway cleared of much vegetation. (For 18 months in 1999/2000 I was also involved in repairing or rebuilding sections of dry stone

retaining and other walls along its length - and was expected to follow the 1818 plans as to how such walls should be built!)

Sandra brought us up to date with the work of the Edinburgh Union Canal Society who are trying to replace the iconic Boathouse built in 1989 at Polwarth. She finished with the news that to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the opening of the canal, a flotilla will pass along the canal on 20 – 22 May with muster points at set times from Lochrin Basin to Ratho.

Richard Love



The Polwarth boathouse (Wikimedia cCommons)