

RSA Scotland AGM - Report from the Chair

Frances Gallagher writes ...

It was delightful to have so many interested Fellows at our AGM in September. Held in the auspicious surroundings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, a number of distinguished RSA Scotland Fellows and guests were in attendance, including most prominently, Kevin Dunion OBE, and Bob Porrer, Chair of the Fellowship Council. Following the formal presentation of my Annual Report, the assembled Fellows and guests were treated to a most fascinating lecture by **Kevin Dunion**, Scotland's first Information Commissioner. Entitled **What's the harm in Knowing?** *Freedom of information – loss of secrecy*, Dunion explored the nature and purpose of information which is openly accessible, supported by the Freedom of Information Act, and the justifiable reasons for maintaining some secrecy deemed necessary in a democratic society. He also covered aspects of the value of a free press but also the need for responsible reporting to ensure a comprehensive understanding of Rights and Responsibilities and how the press needs to gain the right to be trusted or not as the case may be. Kevin also touched on the press's prurient interest in certain information, and the lengths they will go to receive it; particularly timely given recent revelations around News of the World. His talk was enthusiastically received, as the numerous and wide-ranging questions testified.



The main points of the report are as follows:

- The extent of Fellow engagement in Scotland continues to grow. Events in Dundee, West of Scotland, Glasgow, Inverness and Edinburgh are all being planned to compliment some of the events which we had this past year.
- The focus of our Strategy continues to be Lifelong Learning, Social Cohesion and Socio-Economic Development. Our programme of events next year will continue to reflect this.
- We continue our Partnership working. For example, to capitalise on our joint interests and mission, RSA Scotland has established a working collective with the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities (IASH) Edinburgh, British Council, Royal Society of Edinburgh, and Museums and Galleries/UNESCO. The group is

called Connected Creative Communities Scotland [CCCS]. We are planning another event for early Spring 2012. 'The theme will be- Working in Scotland -How do we ensure the human face of work?' More to follow.

This newsletter is the start of our 2012 programme and I wish all RSA Fellows especially those in Scotland a healthy year ahead.

Scientific Heresy - The Angus Millar Lecture

Royal College of Physicians
Edinburgh, October 2011

In October, RSA Scotland was delighted to host the Annual Angus Millar Lecture within the Royal College of Physicians. Matt Ridley, author of a number of books, delivered a provocative, but fascinating, thesis around the subject of Scientific Heresy. Beginning with the provocations: When are scientific heretics right and when are they mad? How do you tell the difference between science and pseudo-science? Matt proceeded to challenge his audience with a number of 'heretical' positions, homing in particularly on that thorniest of scientific issues - Climate Change. The heretical bullets came thick and fast, and few targets avoided a hit! He spoke of the 'stunning gullibility of the media', always partial to an -ology, particularly if pertaining to a pseudo-science. He turned his sights on the scientific and medical heretics who turned out not to be heretics at all, providing a number of vivid illustrations: the 18th century medical pioneer Alec Gordon of Aberdeen who discovered antiseptics before Semmelweis and Lister; Barry Marshall vilified for his notion that stomach ulcers are caused by a particular bacterium but who finally won the Nobel prize; and Daniel Schectman, likewise ostracised for much of his career but finally awarded the Nobel Prize for his work with quasicrystals ... Ridley then elaborated on his theory of preservation bias, before arriving at the core of his thesis – not that climate change doesn't exist, but rather, as he put it, that in dealing with it, we are 'putting a tourniquet round our necks to stop a nosebleed' ... Without the space to do justice to the central argument of Ridley's lecture, please find the full version here – [Scientific Heresy!](#)



Scotland

Passage to India

Iain Harrison FRSA, writes about a recent trip to Mumbai

Returning from a family holiday in the USA in late October, I put the suitcases and my passport away thinking see you in a year! However, out of the blue came the opportunity to work for "three or four weeks" in Mumbai. A frantic week of paperwork, visa and jabs and I was off!

My first impressions of the city were not the happiest: 90 minutes to get through immigration; traffic jam at 2.00am; the sight of whole families including the family dog sleeping on the pavement in some of the poorer parts of the city ...



Thankfully it did not take long to form a completely different view of life here. There are 20 million people living and working in and

around this great city. All of them appear to want to work and earn an honest crust. Yes, in some parts of the city people will approach the car to sell fruit, flowers, DVD's, books and some really big balloons! There is not, interestingly, anyone sitting on their backside with a sign that says "hungry and homeless".

There are two things that strike one about Mumbai: the huge gap between the poor living under the flyovers and in makeshift homes on the pavements in the poorer areas and those living in expensive, guarded apartments with manicured gardens and sports facilities. The gap between the very rich and the very poor is enormous. The other thing about Mumbai that I suppose I would comment on, being British, is the weather! Despite being there for over a month, the weather was exactly the same day after day. Warm, sunny, not a cloud to be seen and always between 34 and 37 degrees centigrade. Coming home to Scotland in the middle of winter was always going to be interesting!

Mumbai has been a real eye opener, so many people going to and from work, the roads jammed with cars, old buses, motor bikes and scooters, people, and on occasions cows wandering across the road. A fascinating experience to live and work in this city and totally different to any other month in my 37 years of working in RBS. I do, of course, look forward to seeing my family and friends again and indeed my colleagues on the RSA Scottish Committee.

I do miss Millport though!

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Literary enablement ...

Marc Lambert, RSA Scotland Committee & Director of Scottish Book Trust

Scottish Book Trust is Scotland's national agency for readers and writers. We are funded directly from the Scottish Government; we are also one of 41 'Foundation' organizations supported by Creative Scotland. Our aim is to promote and develop readership in Scotland, while nurturing its writing talent. We are here to help create a confident, cultured and articulate nation by fostering an enjoyable engagement by all, in all forms of literature – word and book – presented on platforms both real and digital. We work across all age groups, with a special focus on promoting social justice, literacy, creative education, and support for writers.

We are a campaigning organization which supports and represents the reader, writer and educator. We want people to love reading, love writing, and enjoy learning. We believe that as the gateway to knowledge, literature enriches people's lives and is key to the fulfilment of their potential. The highest expression of the democratic intellect, literature belongs to everybody.

Most recently we have been involved in helping develop and deliver Scottish Government policy in Early Years, Literacy and Creative Education. Further information on this can be found here:

- [English Excellence Group Report](#)
- [Literacy Action Plan](#)
- [The Early Years Framework](#)

Based in Edinburgh, we deliver a huge variety of strategic national programmes delivered in partnership with Local Authorities and other agencies. A visit to our website, recently acclaimed as the best arts organisation site in Scotland, will tell you much more.

<http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/>

My role in this is to work with our extremely talented and committed staff to develop the vision and strategy necessary to deliver on our mission. I do the things you'd expect from a CEO – business, relationship and policy development, securing investment, and helping to establish a culture of deep thinking and excellence, alongside fulfilling our statutory duties. But most of all I see myself as an enabler: providing the supportive framework for our staff to excel, and providing democratic opportunities for all those who live in Scotland to enrich their lives and develop their skills and potential.



The Eye, the Light, the Mind, the Computer

How what we see affects well being and the psychology of the mind relating to perception.

Edinburgh start on 20th March at 6 pm in the Italian Cultural Institute with an interactive lecture [3 speakers] and viewing the Exhibition which consists of 12 specially chemically treated photographs to give an unusual light effect. There may be more days prior to the 20th in Edinburgh when the picture exhibition will be available. Event is free booking via the Italian Cultural Institute, Edinburgh. Director Dr Stefania del Bravo.

Glasgow George Moore building Caledonian University on 21st March starting at **5pm** a similar event to that in Edinburgh. This Glasgow event will be welcomed by the Principal of the University, Pamela Gillies. Each event will have expert speakers who will talk about the way in which light in various forms affects the Eye, the Mind and the Computer.

The exhibition in Glasgow will run from 21st to 28th March and is open to anyone who wishes to see the images and how by special chemical treatment they have a very different imagery from what one might expect. The lecture will be on the one night only as similar in Edinburgh and Inverness.

Inverness Exhibition in Great Glen House. Exhibition of pictures available for viewing from 30th March to 4th April. There will be a **lecture on 30th March at 6pm.**

Tea/Coffee after all 3 events to support networking.

Spotlight on the Venture Fund!

Dugdale Bradley FRSA, Venture Fund Panel Chair, writes

Bringing together different disciplines and perspectives, the members of the Panel work with Fellows to generate real progress in a variety of successful project areas. One happy spin off is that Fellows are volunteering their special expertise to these projects once they see the outcomes from the Funding Panel. The Venture Fund can help with supporting research or small equipment, to hold events or a contribution to the running costs of a project.

Limits for grants have now been increased to £1,000 [single Fellow] and £1,500 [group of Fellows]. Roll out of good practice is the key. Where an idea is successful, application can be made to the RSA Catalyst Fund for growth funding.

We are looking for projects, led by, and involving, RSA Fellows that:

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- tackle or remove the barriers to social progress
- inspire our network of Fellows and others to be a force for civic innovation and social change.
- contribute to the challenging agendas around education and skills or design and sustainability. In the last three years, we have funded 12 projects, with some of the more recent ones being:
- MakLab – a fully equipped digital fabrication supervised workshop empowering ordinary people to make things they need
- Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum to provide funding for publicity to set up a network of walking routes across Scotland
- St Stephen’s Arts and Conference Centre, Edinburgh a project to initiate consultation, examine plans and preliminary actions via focus groups to offer support towards feasibility study/decisions regarding the long term viability and future of landmark Playfair building
- EquipMen working with groups of non-European women in the Falkirk area, through a series of workshops, to help them to provide a better diet for their men-folk.

The Contact for Venture Fund applications is Dugdale Bradley. Applicants should request a form, preferably by email, from: jpdbradley-rsa@yahoo.co.uk or by post from 3 Kellyburn Park, Dollar FK14 7AD.

All Change - a new RSA Scotland Team

Bob Porrer, Fellowship Council Chair, writes

At the October 2011 AGM new governance arrangements were approved by a large majority of those voting and these will come into effect over the next six months. The current "Regional" Committees will be replaced by a new Regional or National Team which will include the Chair and one Fellowship Councillor, both elected by a ballot of all Fellows in the Region/Nation. In addition the Network Manager will be a full member of the Team in order to better integrate the range of activity and ensure that all are working towards shared goals. It is suggested that there should be between six and twelve other elected or co-opted members, but there will be flexibility in how the Team organises its own work and the roles it needs (such as Treasurer, Secretary or Deputy Chair). However, it is expected that the Team should operate in an open, fair and transparent way and good practice recommendations are therefore given for the conduct of elections and meetings.



Scotland

Another important change is the requirement for a Development Plan which, along with an Annual Report, will be the focus for discussion at an Annual Conference/AGM and will also form the basis of reporting to the Fellowship Council every year.

The composition of the Fellowship Council is also changing. Instead of 20 elected and 20 appointed it will now comprise the Regional/National Chair and Fellowship Councillor elected by each of the 14 Regions/Nations, with a further 7 elected "at large" Fellowship Councillors who may represent particular interests, skills and experience across the RSA in the UK and Ireland. The remaining 5 places will be appointed to reflect diversity and the wide range of activities across the RSA.

Consultation on the implementation of the new governance structure has now finished and the Trustee Board is expected to give final approval in March to the detailed changes, with a new Regional/National Handbook being issued containing full guidance on implementation and transitional arrangements.

RSA Fellows in the Highlands

Fellows in the North of Scotland looking to enjoy more interaction and participation in RSA activities are invited to join this network. Building upon the successful launch last year, we aim to develop closer contacts between Fellows and to develop a programme of interesting activities and events accessible to those in the north of Scotland.

At the second Highlands network meeting in November 2011, a number of potential project ideas were discussed, with links to other network events around the UK. The first joint event will be an exhibition of images and talk entitled The Eye, the Mind, the Light and the Computer, to be held in Inverness on 30 March, after touring in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

We plan to hold another meeting in the near future so that Fellows can meet and exchange ideas as to how you would like this network to develop. For more information, please contact Kathryn Logan FRSA logan1@uk8.net or on 01463 225530.

With grateful thanks to Dugdale Bradley for his help in putting this Newsletter together.

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Dear Diary

15 Mar RSA Fellows' Well-Being Network
What price prophylaxis in Public Health? with Prof. George Ebers of Nuffield Dept. of Clinical Neurosciences, Oxford University at Royal Faculty of Procurators, Glasgow G2 1BT from 16.30 - 18.30. Ticket only (free). For bookings email rsa-sinew@live.co.uk or call 07973 816270

21 Mar-4 Apr Series of lectures and exhibitions around Scotland, Edinburgh Italian Cultural Institute, Glasgow - Glasgow Caledonian University and Glen House in Inverness. This will be an interactive and visionary session and time for the public to view the exhibition. Admission is free. Email will be sent to all Fellows for booking details

The Eye, Light and The Mind. - How does one affect the other. Edinburgh 20 Mar; Glasgow 21 Mar; & Inverness 30 Mar-4 Apr. For details see this Newsletter or contact: Frances Gallagher fcag2001@gmail.com or Kathryn Logan logan1@uk8.net

29 Mar : MCICH: **Danish Culture & Heritage:** Director General, Ministry of Culture

17 Apr : MCICH: **World Heritage Day Event** at the fully-accessible Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh.

May 2012 please note all Fellows - applications start for new Chair and other Committee members - voting in June/July. Further details to follow from RSA John Adam street.

10 May RSA Fellows' Well-Being Network
Is urbanism and well-being a contradiction in terms? Prof. Sir Harry Burns CMO Scotland and others. Morning symposium at Glasgow Caledonian University. Ticket only. For further details email rsa-sinew@live.co.uk or call 07973 816270

23 Aug **The Book Festival**

August **Festival of Politics Scottish Parliament TBA - RSA Scotland and partners in Parliament Building. Details to follow**

Sept AGM - RSA Scotland

18 Oct Angus Millar Lecture Edinburgh Martin Rees in Royal College of Physicians Edinburgh. details to follow

All MCICH details; contact Ann Packard on apmichc@btinternet.com or 0131 5562052

Glasgow Fellows Network

14 Feb; 13 Mar; 10 Apr; 8 May (second Tuesdays) Always upstairs at Café Gandolfi, 64 Albion Street, Glasgow G1 1NY from 17.30 - 19.00

Edinburgh Fellows Network

29 Mar; 26 Apr; 31 May; 28 Jun (last Thursdays) Always at Le Monde, 16 George Street, Edinburgh from 17.00 - 19.00

Details of events yet to be finalised will be sent via post or email in the coming weeks.

