



A message from the President

Welcome to our second Newsletter for 2022. I am really pleased to say that our return to live lectures for the 22/23 session (our 221st) has been very successful. Our speakers have been outstanding (see the summary in this newsletter). They have received a warm welcome, with large numbers attending the lectures and lively exchanges afterwards. Remember that free parking for the lectures is available in Glasgow University grounds (enter by Kelvin Way, exit via Dumbarton Rd). Our speakers have been very appreciative, and several have commented on Twitter how much they enjoyed the event. The Society has some commemorative medals for talks in certain subject areas, and we were also able to present these again to the relevant speakers. The recordings of our talks so far this year are now available through the Society website. For members unable to come to the live events, a link to the Zoom event can be obtained by contacting George Rawlinson, the Society administrator a few days in



advance. Running our talks as hybrid events is challenging, particularly getting the audio-visuals optimised for both audiences; the help of the AV and other staff in Glasgow University in solving these is much appreciated.

We had a great members' event at the Scottish Opera Production Studios in September, with talks on production and costumes. Those present will recall that mention was made of a previous set for an opera by the composer Sally Beamish, who is herself giving us a talk in February. The new film about the RPSG was shown at this event and is now available on the Society website. In 2023 we have two more members trips to sister Societies in the UK details of which are in this Newsletter. Overall, our Society has survived the upheaval of the

pandemic well and is thriving, with over 80 new members joining this session. We are currently in the process of planning the programme for 23/24. Thank you all for your support of this historic institution that exists to promote knowledge and discourse for the public good. We will be looking for some new Council members to help to run the Society and hope that some members will be willing to put themselves up for election at the next AGM (15th March). Please contact info@royalphil.org as soon as possible for details of the nomination process. We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

The 2022-23 session so far



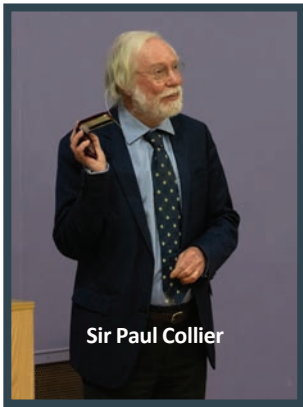
Returning to live lectures: Having made the decision to return to live lectures, the very good attendance by members has been both reassuring and gratifying. Thanks to members for their support, for the excellent discussions arising from each lecture and for the buzz of conversation afterwards. The move to the Glasgow University's Charles Wilson Building has worked well for speakers and audiences, though not without some teething problems (now resolved).



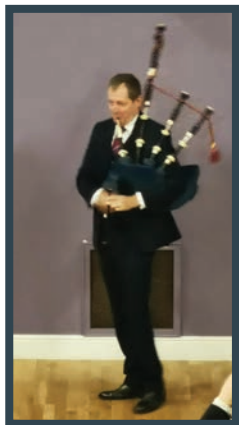
Just now, the size of the lecture theatre is right, being large enough to accommodate our largest audiences (using an overflow room when necessary), and the 'full house' feeling creates a great atmosphere for the speaker and the audience. Many thanks to the President for negotiating with Glasgow University on behalf of the RPSG.



A review of our lecture programme so far this session: Such good attendances must be in large part due the extraordinarily high quality of our lectures so far, which really have been *enlightening talks from internationally known experts*, as our strapline boasts. As an opener, **William Dalrymple** gave us a brilliant, no punches pulled account of the often-horrific history of the British East India Company. Astonishing that a private, for-profit organisation could hold sway over, and indeed plunder the riches of, a vast area for so long. **Saiful Islam** presented a fascinating, accessible and optimistic account of the biophysics of green energy, using amazing 3-D images (hence the glasses in the photo) to illustrate how energy storage using batteries works, and how these can be made more environmentally friendly. **Baroness Helena Kennedy** KC, whose lecture last session had to be postponed, spoke with authority and passion about what we mean by justice, what the law tries to do in this context and the importance of an independent judiciary. The economist **Sir Paul Collier**, in a lecture hosted jointly with the University of Glasgow as part of their annual Bowman Lecture Series, discussed how countries and regions become trapped in poverty and about the need for effective catch-up strategies based on a bottom up rather than a top down approach. He presented alarming figures showing just how poor the life chances are for people in the UK compared with other European countries.

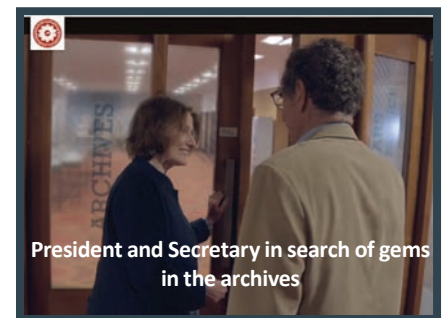


On the medical front, **Gordon Dutton** gave a strikingly compassionate talk about what brain injuries tell us about how our mind sees, including extraordinary images of a totally blind boy scoring goals in a basketball match, using self-generated clicks as SONAR. Unfortunately, Neil Adger was unable to present his lecture on migration and climate change; this is being rescheduled for next session. Council member **Graham Watt** stepped in with an excellent and timely lecture about the Deep End, a remarkable project that in which he has been heavily involved (initially based in Scotland but now world-wide) that supports general practitioners serving the most socio-economically deprived populations, emphasising in particular the huge importance of continuity of care. Most recently, **Alastair Campbell** argued compellingly for a new attitude to mental health, based in part on his own life-long struggle with depression, in a lecture that was at once serious and entertaining, ending with a rousing performance on the bagpipes that included Ode to Joy, the anthem of the European



Union. Thanks to the Speakers Group for coming up with an outstanding programme of lectures, and particularly to the President, who persuaded the proposed speakers to come. We have an equally impressive line-up after Christmas.

The RPSG Anniversary Film: As reported in the last members newsletter, RPSG Council decided that a short film would be a good way to celebrate 220 years of activity by the Society. The main source of information was found in the minute books and proceedings kept at the Mitchell and Glasgow University libraries and from the booklet about the RPSG 'No Mean Society', available in the History section of our website. These contain a host of interesting facts about the range of topics covered including *Is Marriage Good for Health*, *The First Speech Waves Recorded on a Phonograph*, the ethics of slavery and the great engineering inventions in the city. We commissioned a young Glasgow production company, Production Attic, to make the film and it was premiered on the 11th of September at Scottish Opera's Production Studios and is now available to all on the Society's website: <https://www.royalphil.org>. The film has been entered for 6 festivals, including the British Independent Film Festival, The Ogeechee International History Film Festival and the History, Art and Society Film Festival. We hope members enjoy this and recommend it to others.



Events for the rest of the 2022-2023 Session

The second half of our lecture programme: There are six further lectures lined up for the remainder of this session; below are 'trailers' written by the person who will be chairing each lecture.

18 January: Gerry Carruthers. Robert Burns and 18th Century thought. Gerry Carruthers FRSE, Francis Hutcheson Professor of Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow, is General Editor of the Oxford University Press edition of the *Collected Works of Robert Burns* and Principal Investigator of two projects under the rubric of Editing *Robert Burns for the 21st Century* funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council. In his lecture to the Society Gerry will focus on the influence on Burns of other great Scottish writers, such as Adam Smith. He will also cover Burns' involvement in the Ayrshire Enlightenment, a rarely covered area that will give a fascinating insight into the discussion, disputes and legal wrangles that took place across Ayrshire with Burns as an active participant. It will give us far more to think about than the popular vision of Robert Burns as a socialiser and writer of popular songs.



1 February: Lucasta Miller. John Keats: Body and Soul. Following on from the subject of Robert Burns, we turn to the poet John Keats, the two hundredth anniversary of whose death at the age of just 25 was 2021. Burns was a literary hero of Keats, who, at the age of 22, visited Burns' grave and birthplace at the beginning of a walking tour of Scotland. Keats was a tough, resourceful Cockney, to whom his ascent of Ben Nevis on 2 August 1818 would have posed no major challenge, albeit he sat at top "blind in Mist". Lucasta Miller writes in her book *Keats – a Brief Life in Nine Poems and One Epitaph* that, at school, he was "more pugilistic than intellectual". Even so, as the *New York Times*' review of the book says "for a certain lyrical essence of poetry written in English, Keats in his greatest poems surpasses every writer since Shakespeare". Lucasta Miller is a biographer and critic. She was a judge of the Man Booker Prize in 2009, and has worked with, amongst others, the *Independent*, the *Guardian*, the *Economist*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*. She is an Honorary Research Associate at University College London, a Royal Literary Fund Fellow and is excellently qualified to talk to us about all aspects of the poet and his works.

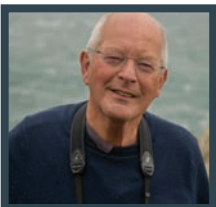


15 February: Sally Beamish (OBE, FRS Edin). Inspiration. Sally Beamish's main instrument is the viola, but she is better known as a composer. She has written symphonies, concertos for various instruments, chamber music, film and ballet scores, theatre music and more. Much of her inspiration comes from jazz and Scottish traditional music. She lived in Scotland from 1990 until 2018. She was a founder member of the Raphael Ensemble and principal violist with the Mozart players and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. She is currently a member of Ensemble V, a string quintet and also the York Road Band. Her compositions are played frequently at concerts around the world and appear on the radio, where she also occasionally features as a broadcaster and teller of short stories. She has recorded almost 40 CDs. The title of her talk is "Inspiration" and we anticipate a truly inspiring evening from one of the UK's foremost performers and composers.

1 March Sir Philip Augar. The big end of town? Coming to terms with the city. Philip Augar has a lifetime of experience of banking - both retail and investment. His books explore and analyse the bumpy path of the world of finance ranging over the 1986 "big bang", the consolidation and internationalisation of the world of finance, the devastation wrought by the "dot.com" bubble of the late 1990's and the banking crash of 2007/8. Philip is also a historian and his most recent book his book "*Agent Twister*", the true story of the 1974 scandal of John Stonehouse MP published earlier this year, reveals Stonehouse's corporate crimes, his ten-year collusion with powerful Soviet proxies and the political consequences of his antics; a scandal greater than Profumo that lay buried for thirty years. Philip's knowledge and experience was recognised by his membership of the Future of Banking Commission chaired by David Davis MP in 2010, and the same year advising the Scottish Parliament's enquiry into the banking crisis. We're looking forward to a timely commentary about a part of the UK economy that, for good or ill, has a significant impact on us all.



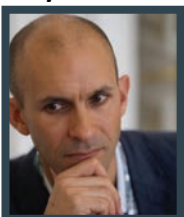
15 March: Tim Birkhead. The Great Auk: greed, death and regret Tim Birkhead is Professor of Behavioural Ecology at Sheffield University and is internationally recognised for his academic research. This has primarily been on birds and covers their reproductive biology, ecology, population biology and conservation. In addition to his scientific work, Tim has a deep interest in our complex relationship with birds, which has both positive and negative aspects. He has written several popular books for a general audience, and the title of his recent book published in 2022 *Birds and Us; a 21,000 year History from Cave Art to Conservation* gives a flavour of the breadth of his interests. He is an excellent educator and communicator and has received several awards for his research work and for his books. In his talk he will use the fate of the magnificent Great Auk (the only large flightless bird of the northern hemisphere, driven to extinction in 1844 despite efforts to save it) to illustrate for us the conflicting forces that come into play in our attempts to conserve biodiversity



22 March: Lord Bew. Why have the British never understood Ireland/Northern Ireland? Paul Bew is a historian and Professor of Irish Politics at Queens University, Belfast and acted as advisor to David Trimble. He has published extensively on Irish politics, for example *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity* and *The Making and Remaking of the Good Friday Agreement*. These books were both published in 2007, the year in which he was awarded a peerage for his contribution to the Good Friday Agreement. He served as Chair of the Committee for Standards in Public Life from 2013 to 2018. The title of his talk is self-explanatory and he is clearly very well qualified to give us an answer on this important and topical question. This is a joint lecture with the RPSG and the British Academy



5 April. Anil Seth: From beast machine to dreamachine. Anil Seth is Professor of Cognitive and Computational Neuroscience at the University of Sussex, where among many other roles, he is Co-Director of the Sackler Centre for Consciousness Science. His broad research interest lies in understanding conscious experience, an area in which he has a high international profile and that he describes as 'one of our great mysteries'. Anil Seth is a highly authoritative and engaging speaker, whose outreach includes a Ted Talk accessed by more than 13 million viewers, his highly acclaimed most recent book *Being You: The New Science of Consciousness* and a recent Guardian Masterclass on understanding consciousness. The *dreamachine* of the title refers to a project bringing together scientists, artists and musicians in an immersive experience aimed at revealing new insights into how we perceive the world; it featured in the Edinburgh Festival 2022, among other locations. We can expect a fascinating and stimulating talk to end this session's lecture programme.



Report from an RPSG member

The Philosophy Posters Project: In 2020, the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow awarded funds to Prof. Claire Cassidy (School of Education, University of Strathclyde) to work with children and a group of teachers trained in Philosophy with Children. The project would bring children from different schools together to participate in a Philosophy Jam. They would philosophise together and then create posters to provoke philosophical thinking to be used in other schools. The pandemic, however, meant the project had to be adapted.

In May this year, four classes from four schools worked with Claire and Alison Murray, an award-winning author and illustrator. Children from Anderston Primary (Primary 6/7), Robert Smillie Memorial Primary (Primary 7), Royston Primary (Primary 7), and Sandwood Primary (Primary 5) participated. Alison and Claire spent a day with each class. In the morning, Claire facilitated Community of Philosophical Inquiry. She then worked with the children on what makes a good philosophical question. Alison then worked with them on what makes a good poster.

In the afternoon, each child generated her/his own philosophical question and created a poster illustrating this. It's no small task illustrating something as abstract as a philosophical question! We imposed some artistic rules on the posters. Children could only use two colours in their posters, and they were not allowed to draw images; they could only tear or cut out coloured paper. Alison then digitised the posters, ensuring that the images were clear, and the questions were well-positioned.

Once digitised, the images were shared across the schools. Using set criteria, each child voted on their favourite three posters from the other three schools. This meant there was a winner in each class, and an overall winner (see below). Each winner received a framed copy of their poster and a copy of the other three posters. The posters have been printed into books and shared with the winners and their teachers. The images have also been made into postcards and each school will receive a set of these. The remaining printed books and postcards will be shared with practitioners. The children also made a short film about doing philosophy, which was screened via Zoom to the four classes. Zoom allowed them to talk with one another about their posters and doing philosophy.

The project was enormous fun, and we would like to thank the RPSG for supporting our project – and children's creative thinking!

The posters will be freely available through Prof. Cassidy's webpage, as will the film. An event is planned to share the resources with practitioners and others interested in practical philosophy with children – and adults. For more information on the project, books/posters, events or training in facilitating practical philosophy with children and adults, contact claire.cassidy@strath.ac.uk

Here are the winning posters:



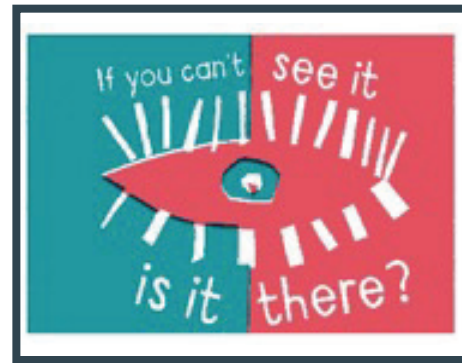
Anderston
Primary School



Robert Smillie Memorial
Primary School



Royston
Primary School



Overall winner (from Sandwood
Primary School)

A comment from the Newsletter Editor: As part-funder of the project, the RSPG has been given a book containing the 70 posters produced during the project, images of which will soon be available on Professor Cassidy's website. The preview that this allows shows a truly extraordinary collection of posters. The variety of challenging questions posed and the skilled and creative designs used to present them are remarkable, as is the extent to which the questions identified by these primary school children map onto the themes addressed in our recent and upcoming lectures. Resonating with recent lectures on artificial intelligence we have 'Will robots take over the world?', on diversity/eugenics we have 'Does skin colour matter?', on conservation and climate change we have 'Does saving the world matter?' and 'Why do people throw away things that are not rubbish?', on vision and perception we have one (prize winning) poster on 'If you can't see it is it there' and 'What colour is a mirror?' and finally on how we experience the world we have 'What is consciousness?' and 'How do you know you are not in a video game?'. My personal favourite is 'Why use rubbers if we learn from our mistakes?'. Congratulations to all involved.

RPSG members tours coming up in 2023



Following the visit of members to York in March this year we are arranging two further visits next year, details of which have been circulated to members. The first trip will again be to York where we will again meet the Chair and members of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society – like us founded in the early 19th century but twenty years younger. The visit will include a lecture and visit to Castle Howard, lunch at the medieval Grays Court, a visit and lunch at the Bowes Museum at Barnard's Castle and a reception and talk at the York Museum. We will again be staying at the Bar Convent which was established in great secrecy in 1686 during the reformation as a convent and the first school for girls in York.

In May we are planning a trip to Newcastle, to link up with the Literary and Philosophical Society of the city – founded in 1793, and with the largest independent library outside London. We will have a conducted tour of part of Hadrian's wall on the way, dinner in Durham Cathedral, lectures on Newcastle, cosmology, and art, and on the way back a visit to Cragside country house in Northumberland. We will be staying at the grade II listed Grey Street Hotel.

For both trips, numbers are restricted to 24 members, but places are still available. Any member wishing to take part in either trip (or both) should let us know by emailing info@royalphil.org. Please also let us know if you wish to have a single, double or twin room.

Trip dates: York - April 3rd to 6th

Newcastle - May 8th to 11th

Messages to RPSG members

Intimation: Members may already be aware of the recent death of Professor Hamish Scott, an international historian of great distinction who worked at the University of Birmingham (1970-78) and then at St Andrews (1979-2009), where he became Wardlaw Professor of International History. He was a fellow of the British Academy and the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and a member of the European Academy. Hamish served as President of the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow from 2012 to 2014. On behalf of the Society and its members, we pass our condolences to his family and friends.



Thanks to members: Thanks for the various forms of feedback on the RPSG's activities. Thanks also for your suggestions for speakers, which have been included in Speakers Group lists and discussions. Please keep submitting them. We would like to have longer commentaries and suggestions on any aspect of the RPSG's activities in the members Newsletter. Suggestions to the Newsletter editor (Felicity.Huntingford@glasgow.ac.uk).

