

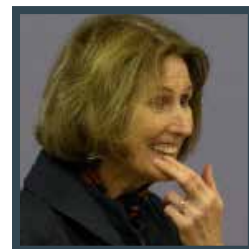


### CONTENTS

- \* A welcome from the President
- \* Events planned for the coming session (2023-2024)
- \* Some highlights from the previous session
- \* Information for RPSG members

### A WELCOME FROM THE PRESIDENT

We are about to start our 23/24 season and have excellent speakers lined up, experts on a wide range of topics. These cover fundamental scientific questions in physics, astronomy and evolution, as well as topical issues such as why we need an NHS, how climate change is influencing human migration and mental health, what we can learn about how to conserve biodiversity from past extinctions, bioethics, the wonders of the human heart, writing plays and conquering extreme environments. We also, in this 300th year anniversary of the birth of the economist Adam Smith, have an examination of the history of capitalism. On top of this, our members soiree event at Fairfield Heritage is coming up soon and a trip to visit a sister Society in Belfast has been arranged for spring 2024. More details of the programme for the first half of the session are given below, and also a brief recap of some of the wonderful events from last year.



We have been in discussion with Glasgow University regarding the sound system in the Sir Charles Wilson Lecture theatre and have arrived at a solution that should ensure we can optimise the sound level to suit the speaker and both the live and virtual audiences. We will very much welcome any further feedback so that we can make any additional adjustments should they be required.

On behalf of Council, I would like to express our thanks to you the membership for your continued support of the RPSG, and Felicity Huntingford and George Rawlinson for editing and compiling the Newsletter.

### EVENTS PLANNED FOR THE COMING SESSION

**MEMBERS SPECIAL EVENT:** Fairfield Heritage, Govan Thursday 28th September 2023. To mark the start of our 222nd session, we have arranged a visit to Fairfield Heritage, a community museum dedicated to telling the story of Govan's outstanding role in world shipbuilding. This is located in the remarkable building that was the headquarters of Fairfield Shipbuilding & Engineering Company Ltd, once among the greatest shipbuilding enterprise in the world. We start at 5.15 pm with a talk by Senior Naval Officer Commander Philip Burgess, on the development of the new Type 26 anti-submarine frigate at BAE Systems Maritime based on the old Fairfields yard at Govan. Following the talk and questions there will be drinks and canapés and guided tours of the museum. Thanks to Tony Burton and



George Rawlinson for organising such an attractive visit.

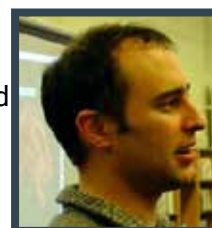
**THE 2023 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**, adjourned from earlier in the year, will be held in the Charles Wilson Building, Glasgow University at 7.15pm, immediately before the opening lecture of the RPSG's 222nd series (see below). Members are strongly encouraged to attend the AGM (which will be brief), because by charity rules we need a quorum for making decisions. Papers for this meeting have already been circulated and are available on the RPSG website.

**LECTURES FOR 2023.** The President and Speakers Group have put together another excellent and varied programme of lectures from internationally recognised experts on a wide range of topics, many highly relevant to the current state of the world.

**VENUE:** Once again, lectures will be held in the Sir Charles Wilson complex at the foot of University Avenue. As described in the President's message, she has been in discussion with Glasgow University, raising members' concerns about poor acoustics at the rear of the lecture theatre and setting up a system to deal with this problem. The complex is easy to get to from Kelvinbridge Underground and by bus and free university car parking is available nearby. As in previous sessions, recordings will be available subsequently on YouTube.

### Lecture Programme.

**4 October Steve Brusatte** Professor of Palaeontology and Evolution, University of Edinburgh  
**The fall of the dinosaurs and rise of the mammals.** Steve Brusatte is a vertebrate palaeontologist whose specialisms include the evolution of dinosaurs and mammals, about which he has published numerous high profile scientific papers. His commitment to and skill in communicating science to the public is reflected in several very successful popular books, including *The Rise and Fall of the Dinosaurs* (2018) and *The Rise and Reign of the Mammals* (2022). In addition, he has acted as paleontology consultant for the BBC's series *Walking with Dinosaurs*, among others.



## Lecture Programme continued.

**18 October Tim Birkhead** Professor of Behaviour and Evolution, University of Sheffield

***The Great Auk: greed, death and regret.*** Tim Birkhead is an internationally recognised expert on the biology of birds and the complex relationship between birds and humans. He has written several popular books for a general audience, the most recent being *Birds and Us; a 21,000 year History from Cave Art to Conservation* (2022) and is an excellent communicator. In this talk he will use the fate of the magnificent Great Auk (driven to extinction in 1844 despite efforts to save it) to illustrate the complex forces that constrain our attempts to conserve biodiversity.



**1 November Neil Adger** Professor of Human Geography, University of Exeter

***Changing Places: Migration and Climate Change.*** Neil Adger is a social scientist and human geographer who, besides publishing numerous high-profile academic papers on the political economy of the global environment, has been deeply engaged with reporting to and advising policy makers on the impact of climate change on human populations. To quote from his website: "Migration is as natural as breathing. I have contributed to the emerging reconsideration of migration and environmental change that seeks to refocus analysis and policy away from displacement ... to a broader analysis of the role of mobility and migration in dealing with environmental change"



**15 November Gavin Francis** Physician, medic, traveller and writer

***Free for All: Why the NHS is worth saving,*** Gavin Francis has worked as an NHS doctor on Accident and Emergency and in general practice, and also served as resident doctor with the British Antarctic Survey. He has written extensively on his experiences in both travel and medicine and his books and articles have won many prestigious prizes. In 2021 he published *Intensive Care: A GP, a community & COVID-19*, using his work in Edinburgh and Orkney to inform an extraordinary account of the experiences of doctors and their patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. This year he published *Free for all. Why the NHS is worth saving.* His lecture on this topic will give a first-hand account of what has been described as 'A needle-sharp analysis from the front line'



**29 November Sir John Kay** Emeritus Research Fellow, St John's College Oxford Adam Smith Lecture

***From the pin factory to the iPhone – the complete history of capitalism.*** Sir John Kay is one of Britain's leading economists, with broad research interests on in the relationships between economics and business. His distinguished academic career has been strongly embedded in practice, for example through his work on think tanks and business schools and through company directorships. He has a particular interest in communicating the complexities of economics to non-specialist audiences, for example in his weekly column in the Financial Times and in several popular (in both senses) and acclaimed books. The titles of two most recent books (both published in 2020) give a flavour of his interests: *Radical Uncertainty: Decision Making Beyond Numbers* and *Greed is Dead; Politics After Individualism*.



**13 December Miles Padgett** Chair of Natural Philosophy (Physics and Astronomy) Kelvin lecture

***Does God play dice ?*** Miles Padgett, a Royal Society Research Professor, heads the UK's Centre of excellence in quantum enhanced imaging. He has an exceptional record for highly cited scientific publication and has received numerous honours and prizes, not least being the Royal Society of Edinburgh's Kelvin Medal in 2014. His research covers all aspects of the behaviour of light and its application in new optical techniques for imaging and sensing, from microscopes that see through noise to a tiny optical spanner that can twist miniscule objects on demand. He is surely ideally placed to speak to us on the intriguing topic of this lecture.



**RSPG TRIPS FOR 2024.** Following the success of our members' trips last session (see below), for 2024 the RSPG has arranged a three-night trip (Monday 20th to Thursday 23rd May) to Belfast, home of Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society, founded in 1821. Belfast, which came second after York in a Which? survey of the best large cities in the UK for a short break, has many attractions and is a good base to explore other parts of Northern Ireland. The main features of the trip include: exclusive use for three nights of the magnificent historic Harrison hotel in the centre of Belfast; a reception and dinner with the Belfast Natural History & Philosophical Society and visits to Hillsborough Castle, Armagh Observatory, the Titanic Museum and the Giant's Causeway. Once again, many thanks to Tony Burton and George Rawlinson for organising this interesting and attractive visit. We may organise a second, shorter trip for 2024. Watch this space.



Enlightening talks given by Internationally known experts



## SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PREVIOUS SESSION (2022-23)

**THE 221st LECTURE SERIES.** The second half of last session's lecture series started on a seasonal note, with an excellent lecture from Gerry Carruthers (Professor of Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow) on *Robert Burns and 18th Century thought*, focussing on Burn's influence on other great Scottish writers, such as Adam Smith. In our next lecture, the biographer and critic Lucasta Miller followed on from the subject of Burns, who was one of Keats' literary heroes, talking about *John Keats: Body and Soul* and, among other things, giving us some very beautiful readings of Keats' poems. Next, the renowned composer Sally Beamish spoke to us about *Inspiration*, a fascinating lecture on the influences that inspire her, illustrated with examples of her own compositions. Sally has provided a link to her Hill Stanzas performance and has also provided the programme notes. Both can be found on the RPSG website.

We then moved away from the arts to economics, with a lecture from Sir Philip Augar who drew on his knowledge and experience of banking and banking crises to discuss *The big end of town? Coming to terms with the city*, a timely, if alarming, commentary about a sector of the economy that has a significant impact on our lives.

The next planned lecture was to have been about the difficulties of conserving biodiversity, illustrated with reference to the Great Auk, but was postponed at short notice due to a rail strike and rescheduled for this session (see above). Our President Pat Monaghan, who is the Regius Professor of Zoology at the University of Glasgow, stepped into the breach with an excellent lecture, also with an ornithological theme, on *What can birds tell us about how to age slowly?* Drawing on her own extensive research, Pat explained the remarkable features of the biology of birds that make them of great interest in understanding different rates of aging. Also on a scientific theme, Anil Seth, Professor of Cognitive and Computational Neuroscience at the University of Sussex, gave a fascinating lecture about the nature of consciousness called *From beast machine to dreamachine*. 'Beast machine' comes from Descartes and 'dreamachine' refers to a project in which Seth is involved that brings together scientists, artists and musicians in an immersive experience aimed at revealing new insights into how we perceive the world.



Our final lecture, held jointly with the British Academy, also rescheduled and also alarmingly topical, was from Lord Paul Bew, Professor of Irish Politics at Queens University, Belfast, who acted as advisor to David Trimble during the negotiations for the Good Friday agreement. His topic was *Why have the British never understood Ireland/Northern Ireland*. Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about an extraordinarily interesting lecture was the fact that Lord Bew pulled absolutely no punches on any of the players in the recent troubled history of Northern Ireland. To date, the recording of this excellent lecture has received 12,000 views.

**RPSG MEMBERS' TRIPS.** Following the visit of members to York in March 2022, two further visits to link up with sister societies were arranged for 2023, one a return to York to join up again with their Philosophical Society (founded in the early 19th century, but 20 years younger than the RPSG, not that this is a competition) and the other to link up for the first time with the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society (founded in 1793 and with the largest independent library outside London).



Newcastle bridges



York Minster

**The trip to York** took place in April and included a joint lecture with members of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society by Professor Bill Sheils on Henry VIII's Progress to York. It also included a guided tour of Castle Howard from Dr Chris Ridgway, Curator, lunch at the medieval Grays Court in York, a visit and lunch at the Bowes Museum at Barnard's Castle and a conducted tour of the medieval Merchant Adventurers' Hall. The 14 members who took part in the visit again stayed 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.

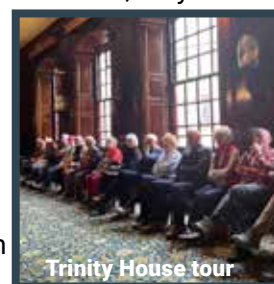


Dr Chris Ridgway



Joint lecture with Yorkshire Philosophical Society

**The Newcastle trip** took place in early May, setting off in torrential rain, but driving into better weather just in time for various outdoor activities. The 24 people who attended, including the Newsletter Editor and her sister, stayed in the grade II listed Grey Street Hotel, excellently located in Georgian Grey Street, said by Gladstone to be the finest in England. The trip started with a conducted tour of a particularly well-preserved part of Hadrian's wall, en route to the remarkable Roman fort at Vindolanda. That evening Anthea Lang gave an excellent talk on the history of Newcastle as reflected in its street names. The next day, we were given a tour around the centre of Newcastle, which has an extremely interesting architectural, industrial and maritime history. In the evening we were taken to Durham cathedral, which we were able to explore before having dinner in its Undercroft Restaurant. On the third day we had a wonderful lecture at the Great North Museum from Dr David Rosario (from Newcastle University's Centre for Extragalactic Astronomy) about the extraordinary James Webb telescope and what it can tell us about the origin of the universe. Note that Dr Rosario will be giving us a lecture on this topic in January 10th 2024. This was followed by a tour and lecture in the Hatton Gallery, including an introduction to the Merz Barn Wall – a construction by the German artist Kurt Schwitters and rescued from the Lake District - as an early example of three dimensional abstract collage. In the evening the Literary and Philosophical Society kindly hosted a reception for us in their wonderful library, which includes some remarkable natural history books, from one of which the beautiful picture of a 15 spined stickleback reproduced at the end of this Newsletter is taken. We came back via Cragside, an impressive Tudor Revival Victorian house and garden, built by William Armstrong founder of Armstrong Whitworth, which among other interesting features, was the first house in the world to be lit by hydroelectricity.



Trinity House tour



Newcastle Lit Phil Society reception

The Newsletter Editor's sister writes of her experience: "My memory of the Newcastle Trip was that we were made welcome everywhere we went. The organisation was so good that we were able to relax and enjoy ourselves and the places and events were excellent. I learnt so much!". Similar comments were received from members, as in the box below. Once again we thank Tony and George for all their work in setting these trips up and making them happen, as well as many people from the host societies.

#### Extract from a letter from RPSG member George Dunwoody to Pat Monaghan

I was fortunate to attend the York event this year and thoroughly enjoyed excellent accommodation, every lecture, visit, and mixing socially with like-minded people. I was therefore looking forward to the Newcastle visit with eager anticipation. I was not, nor expected to be, disappointed.

The attention to detail throughout our visit was exceptional. Transport, accommodation in Newcastle, and eating venues were flawless, providing the perfect platform for our many visits. Hadrian's Wall, Vindolanda and Mithras Temple were brought alive by the meticulous description and information provided by Ruth, our guide. The weather did not dampen our enthusiasm, but the use of an individual listening device was a tremendous success.

The evening lecture on Newcastle city streets provided us with valuable knowledge for our excursion around the city with an excellent guide. Trinity House was amazing. However, the evening visit to Durham Cathedral was exceptional and one I will never forget.

The lecture by David Rosario was outstanding. To be in the presence of a person who has worked on the planning of the James Webb Telescope and to experience his enthusiasm was electric. His willingness to allow our many questions brought his subject alive in so many ways.

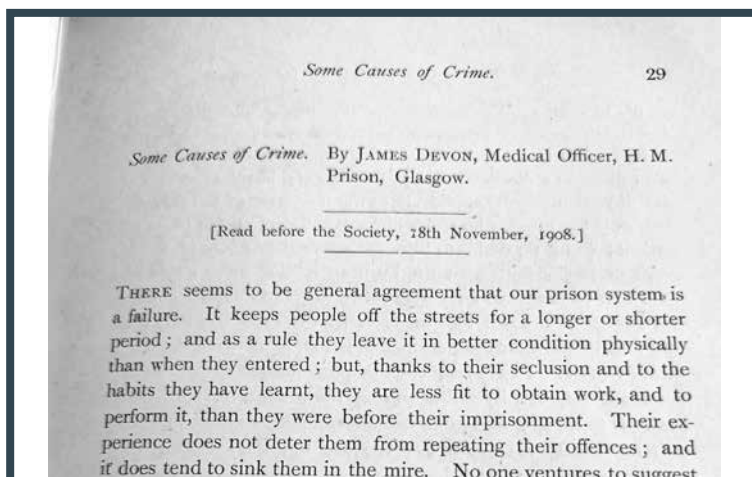
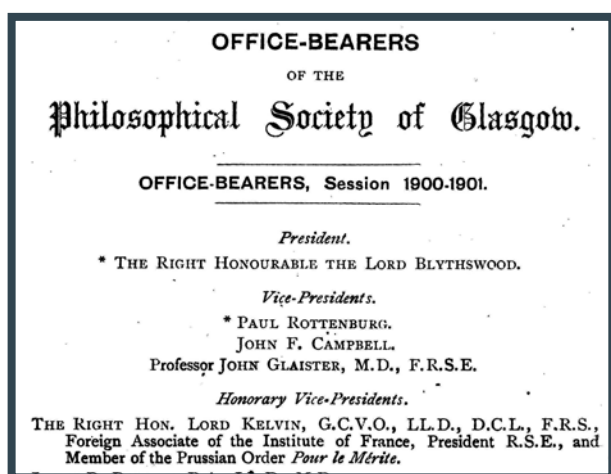
Tony together with George Rawlinson, his hard working back up, made the whole event seamless, trouble free whilst ensuring we obtained the maximum benefit throughout the whole time we were together. Such teamwork! I cannot thank them enough for their attention to detail by ensuring we all obtained the maximum benefit from our short but memorable stay in Newcastle.



## RPSG MEMBERS SECTION

**COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS.** RPSG Council welcomes input from members, whether these are constructive criticism (as in the correspondence about the acoustics in the Sir Charles Wilson lecture theatre, addressed in the President's message, above), useful suggestions (as in the nomination of the playwright David Edgar as the lecturer next February - *All the world's a play*) or appreciative comments (as in George Dunwood's letter above). To reiterate, such input from the members is really appreciated by Council, as it helps to make all the work worthwhile.

**WHAT IS IN YOUR ATTIC?** Do you know what is in your attic, under the stairs or in the boxes that have not been opened for years? The Society was recently contacted by Mr and Mrs Russell, who were moving house and had copies of the Proceedings of the Society covering 1900 to 1914. We are pleased to say that the books are now with the Society and will be placed in the archive at Glasgow University. We would like to thank Mr & Mrs Russell for their kind donation and we wish them a happy move. We have reproduced below two images of particular interest, the first is from the 1900 Proceedings and it is interesting to see Lord Kelvin as the Hon Vice President. The other is from the 1908 Proceedings: there are some fascinating lectures in these volumes if anyone would like to read them. The debates often remain the same as today - as with *Some Causes of Crime*.



**INTIMATION.** We are sorry to note the passing of Alec Mitchell, a graduate in Mechanical Engineering at Strathclyde University. Alex was a member of the RPSG and served on Council from 2007 until 2017, including a spell as Vice President from 2011 to 2014, contributing greatly to the Society's operations. Alec began his engineering career with Yarrow Admiralty Research Department, going on to work for many well-known firms, including Barr and Stroud, Babcock and Wilcox, Ferranti (Avionic systems), James Howden and Unisys, before starting his own company in 1989. While self-employed, he invented and designed special machinery for the food, printing, energy and music industries and built a novel wind power generating system for remote use. He was a visiting professor with the Glasgow School of Art Product Design department and lecturer to BTech students in mechanics and materials. He was a remarkable person and will be very much missed.



Alec Mitchell

**THANKS TO MEMBERS.** Thanks to our members for all their support from loyal attendance at lectures in spite of strikes and bad weather, to enthusiastic participation in our other events, to the various forms of feedback on our activities illustrated above. Please keep submitting them. We would also welcome members to use this Members' Newsletter for longer commentaries on any aspect of the RPSG's activities. Suggestions to the Newsletter editor (Felicity.Huntingford@glasgow.ac.uk).



From a bookmark bought at the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society library.

