



The Royal Scottish Society of Arts

Showcasing Scotland's Science, Technology and Innovation

Patron His Majesty King Charles III

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the 203rd Session held at 7.00pm on Monday 3rd June 2024 at the Augustine United Church, 41, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 1EL

The meeting was chaired by the President, Professor Beverly Bergman

1). Present

The number of Fellows present was 31 with one joining via Zoom

2). Apologies for absence

Ms Sara Craig, Professor Jim Floyd and Mr Ian Ridley

3). Minutes of the AGM held on Monday 5th June 2023

The minutes were accepted as a fair and accurate record of the proceedings, proposed by Mr Stewart Stevenson and seconded by Mr Stuart Brown

4). Presentation of the Annual Report of the Council for the year ended 31st August 2023

A copy of the Report which had been adopted by Council and submitted to OSCR was noted by Fellows.

5). President's Report of the 203rd Session of the Society

The President in presenting her Report for the 203rd Session of the Royal Scottish Society of Arts emphasised that her Report concerned the objectives, activities and achievements of the Society for the year since the last Annual General Meeting. She reminded Fellows that the Society was formed over two hundred years ago for "the encouragement of the useful arts in Scotland", which these days is taken to mean advances in science, technology, engineering and manufacture, the all-important STEM subjects, as encapsulated in the Society's strapline of, "showcasing Scotland's Science, Technology and Innovation".

Professor Bergman said that it was with great sadness that the Society received news of the death on 23 February 2024 of one of its Honorary Fellow Professor Stephen Salter MBE FRSE, Emeritus Professor of Engineering Design at the University of Edinburgh. Known as the "Father of Wave Energy", he was tireless in his efforts to mitigate climate change. Sadly, only a few weeks later, on 8 April, the Society lost another of its Honorary Fellows, Professor Peter Higgs, Professor of Theoretical Physics at the University of Edinburgh, who had proposed the existence of the eponymous Higgs Boson 50 years before its discovery. The President expressed the condolences of the RSSA to the families and the many friends and colleagues of two distinguished Honorary Fellows.

The year 2023-2024 had seen a continuing return towards "normality" since the difficult years of the pandemic, albeit there had been some positives to emerge. One of these was the ability to stream the lectures online, thanks to the technical expertise of the Treasurer Graham Rule. This had enabled many more Fellows and guests to enjoy the lectures, irrespective of distance, weather or mobility. It had also

enabled the Society to build up an archive of digital recordings, where the speakers had given permission, so that Fellows who missed them could catch up, or indeed can hear them again. The Treasurer, Graham Rule, can provide Fellows with the appropriate links if they wished to access any of the archived recordings.

The lecture series began in September 2023 when Fellows welcomed back Professor Declan Diver, who spoke about developments in fusion power since he had last addressed the Society on the topic six years earlier. He was followed by Professor Timothy Drysdale who spoke about the technology which had enabled the creation of remote laboratories, and had revolutionised practical teaching in science and engineering. His talk was illustrated with remarkable AI images featuring a highly recognisable depiction of himself, created entirely from a written description fed into an image generator. In November Professor Paul Digard provided an update on bird flu and why it was so important for it to be monitored. Normally that would have been the last lecture before the Christmas/New Year break, but as the Society had awarded the first Travel Scholarships in 2023, an extra meeting was held on 18th December at which the successful applicant, Ann-Kathryn Hoffmans, gave a talk on her project which she had undertaken in Norway. Sadly, the other successful applicant had been unable to take up his scholarship for personal reasons. Dr Rene Steijl then gave a short talk on quantum computing, and the evening concluded with seasonal refreshments.

The New Year began with a talk by Professor Zoe Shipton from the University of Strathclyde on carbon capture using finely-milled silicate minerals, opening up an important avenue for meeting the challenge of rising CO₂ levels. In February, Professor Colin Snodgrass spoke on “Avoiding killer asteroids”, including an in-depth description of the successful pilot project to alter the course of an asteroid. He gave the audience advance notice of the anticipated flyby of an asteroid on 13 April 2029 at the remarkably close distance of 32,000km from Earth, but confidently predicted that the distance was sufficient not to precipitate a mass extinction event! The March lecture, which attracted a large audience including a small group of pupils and their teacher from Berwick High School, was by Professor Barbara Webb. She spoke about her research into navigation by bees, including a fascinating insight into how they communicate with each other. In the final lecture of the series, Professor Rodger Duffin spoke about the effect of nanoparticles on workers and health, highlighting the importance of understanding the potential risks which may be posed by novel materials.

All these lectures, which took place in the Augustine United Church, provided important insights into new developments in the world of science and technology, and thanks are due to Brigadier Ian Gardiner for his sterling work as Programme Secretary in arranging the meetings. Members of Council were also thanked for proposing speakers, and Fellows were reminded that Council was always happy to receive suggestions for future speakers.

The President represented the Society on two occasions during the year. She was invited by the Scottish Hindu Foundation to their Diwali celebration, a happy and enjoyable event. Professor Bergman also represented the Society at a dinner at Edinburgh Castle in honour of the visit to Scotland of dignitaries of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

The Society took a stand for Doors Open Day at the Augustine United Church on 23 September, which was a useful opportunity to bring the activities of the RSSA to the wider public, and the help provided by the small group of people who kindly manned the stand throughout the day was much appreciated. Volunteers for events such as this were always welcome, and it is always an enjoyable and rewarding experience. A few days later, on 27 September the Society held an excellent and instructive visit for an enthusiastic group of Fellows to the National Robotarium on the Heriot-Watt University campus at Riccarton. The Society attended the influential “Science and the Parliament” event at Dynamic Earth on 22 November 2023, at which the Society’s award for the top marks in Higher Engineering Science was presented to Sam Craig of Earlston High School in the Borders. The Society’s award for the top marks in Advanced Higher Engineering Science was presented to Fraser Price of George Watson’s College in Edinburgh: congratulations go to both

prizewinners. The Society had a stand at the exhibition which attracted a steady stream of visitors during the breaks, and a number of them expressed interest in joining the Society.

The President was delighted to announce that there were two winners of the 2024 RSSA Travel Scholarship. The successful applicants were John Whitfield and Ed Riley, both from the School of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Edinburgh. John Whitfield will be undertaking an exciting project in biophysics in Canada, and Ed Riley, who is also going to Canada will undertake a placement at the country's national particle accelerator in Vancouver to study radioactive molecules. The Fellows look forward to hearing all about these projects towards the end of the year.

The President wished to put on record her thanks to all members of the Society's Council, who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the smooth running of the Society, with particular thanks to the Honorary Secretary for all the work he has done, especially this year when he has valiantly managed to continue supporting the Society despite considerable personal challenges. Thanks were also conveyed to Pat Jones and Peter Stewart for looking after the refreshments at the meetings. The opportunity to socialise over a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit is a very important part of the Society's meetings, and the President was sure it is what distinguishes RSSA from many other lecture-based societies. In promoting cohesion between Fellows, it harks back to the Society's historical roots as one of the learned societies of the Enlightenment, in which dialogue and the sharing of ideas across an eclectic mix of interests and academic disciplines was so vital. Long may it continue!

Concluding her Report, the President reminded Fellows that the Royal Scottish Society of Arts Society had enjoyed Royal Patronage for many years, and indeed the Society's Honorary Archivist and Immediate Past President Alison Morrison-Low had recently found contemporaneous documents which record that the Society has had a Royal Patron since its foundation in 1821, in the reign of King George IV. The honour was then enshrined in the Society's Royal Charter when it was presented by Queen Victoria in 1841. For many years, the Society's Royal Patron had been Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Fellows would have heard that recently, a number of organisations whose Patron had been the late Queen were informed of their new patron. Not long before this AGM, the Honorary Secretary Peter Jones received a letter from Buckingham Palace and the President was delighted to be able to inform Fellows that His Majesty King Charles III had graciously accepted Patronage of The Royal Scottish Society of Arts. The President had written to His Majesty to express the Society's gratitude to him for honouring the Royal Scottish Society of Arts in this way, and he has been invited to visit the Society in due course.

6). Treasurer's Report

In presenting his Report, the Treasurer advised that the financial position of the Society was very comparable to the situation in the previous year, as in the Annual Report of the Council, access to which had been available to all Fellows. There had been a modest increase in the value of the investment portfolio managed by Rathbones and Investec Wealth Management (UK) and a small deficit in the cash account due to the Travel Scholarships but the increase in annual subscriptions was intended to cover this additional expenditure.

The Society was in good financial health with the unrestricted funds, the majority in the bank account and all of the investments, worth just in excess of £200,000. In addition, there were a small number of historical small prize funds (restricted) worth £13,500. Investigations were in hand to ascertain whether the restrictions on these funds could be removed so that the funds could be used for the Society's current activities.

The Independent Examiner had indicated that as a subscription organisation, it was essential that the Society ensure that its membership list was up to date and that all Fellows paid their annual subscription, currently at £25. This was actively being pursued by the Treasurer.

In answer to questions from the floor, the Treasurer indicated that his reviewing and updating of the members' list had resulted in the loss of a small loss of Fellows, mainly due to their moving away from Edinburgh, indicating that they were too old to continue attending lectures, or those who had died but were still on the membership roll.

The Treasurer also indicated that the yield from the investment portfolio was considered satisfactory in view of the general state of the market.

The Treasurer was thanked for all his work managing very effectively the finances of the Society as well as all the other work he undertook for RSSA to assist with the smooth running of the Society. It was very much appreciated by everyone.

7). Election of Officers

There being no requirement for the election of officers in 2024, this having been effected in 2023, the President was pleased to announce that the two existing vacancies on the Council were to be filled by Professor John Sawkins and Mr Stanley Bird

8). A.O.R.B

The Secretary advise that no items had been submitted and the President declared the AGM formally closed at 7.34 pm.

Following the formal business of the AGM the President drew Fellows' attention to the two visits to places of special scientific interest scheduled for the summer, namely:-

- A visit to **Torness Nuclear Power Station** at 10.00am on Saturday 27th July..... and
- A visit to the **FastBlade Research Unit at Rosyth** on Tuesday 10th September at 2.00pm

Fellows wishing to join the groups visiting these places were asked to contact the Secretary as soon as possible – [secretary @rssa.org.uk](mailto:secretary@rssa.org.uk)

The President finally reminded Fellows that the first lecture of the 204th session, 2024-2025, would be on Monday 30th September when the speaker Professor Jonathan Corney, Professor of Digital Manufacture, University of Edinburgh would speak on, "Would Adam Smith like the Digital Factory?"

Post AGM Talk

The talk given by a member of RSSA Council, Mr Stuart Brown, was entitled, “From fixed to floating – de-risking the hard engineering that will electrify the UK.”

In his talk Mr Brown spoke about the massive growth anticipated in offshore wind as the UK, along with other major economies, looks to move away from polluting hydrocarbons to clean and sustainable sources of energy; and beyond that, how a project he is leading for the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) in Orkney has a major role to play in proving and de-risking the floating wind technologies that will be the core of that transition. It was a fascinating and interesting insight into what is happening in Scotland and the variety of structures being developed and tested to establish which was most suitable for different offshore locations.

The evening was concluded with celebratory drinks and a finger buffet.

Peter Jones
Secretary
14th June 2024

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