



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 204th Session held at 7.00pm on Monday 2nd June 2025 at the Augustine United Church, 41, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 1EL

Before the commencement of the AGM The President was pleased to welcome two new Fellows by acclamation, Dr Stephen Cribb and Mrs Sara Kimberlin

The Annual General Meeting was chaired by the President, Professor Beverly Bergman

1). Present

The number of Fellows present was 31 including seven joining via Zoom

2). Apologies for absence

Ms Sara Craig, Professor Stuart Monro, Professor John Sawkins, Dr Alison Morrison-Low, and Wing Commander(rtd) Mike Laver.

3). Minutes of the AGM held on Monday 3rd June 2024

The minutes, copies of which were available on the Society's website were accepted as a fair and accurate record of the proceedings, proposed by Mr Stanley Bird and seconded by Professor Jim Floyd

4). Presentation of the Annual Report of the Council for the year ended 31st August 2024

The Report copies, of which were on the Society's website, and had been adopted by Council and submitted to OSCR, was noted by Fellows.

5). President's Report of the 204th Session of the Society

A copy of the President's Report is as reproduced below:-

This is the President's Report for the 204th Session of the Royal Scottish Society of Arts. My report concerns the objectives, activities and achievements of the Society for the year since the last Annual General Meeting. 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 our strapline of "showcasing Scotland's Science, Technology and Innovation".

Our lecture series began in September 2024 when we enjoyed a lecture by Professor Jonathan Corney asking whether Adam Smith would have approved of the digital factory. He was followed by Associate Professor Heather Stewart, who made us all very envious with her accounts of her expeditions exploring the deep oceans in the Southern Hemisphere. Professor

Harald Haas spoke to us on digital connectivity in November and very clearly explained the challenges of meeting the technical needs of our increasingly complex world. Our pre-Christmas event was an excellent talk by our 2024 Travel Scholarship winner John Whitfield, who told us about the bacterial modelling project that he had undertaken in Canada during the summer and amply demonstrated just how valuable these scholarships are in providing high quality students with potentially career-defining opportunities. The evening concluded with seasonal refreshments.

The New Year began with a talk by Professor Michelle Williams, Professor of Cardiovascular Imaging at the University of Edinburgh, on Artificial Intelligence and imaging of the heart. Despite the obvious attractions of AI, she clearly showed how AI could be a useful tool in the diagnostic armamentarium but we were nowhere near it replacing interpretation by a skilled clinician. Our February talk returned to the topic of meteorites. This time we heard from Professor Martin Lee of the University of Glasgow, probably our first-ever speaker to have had an asteroid named after him, who told us about recent research on meteorites and their possible role in creating the conditions for life to develop on Earth. He had brought some meteorites as examples, which attendees were able to handle – possibly the oldest and most valuable items that the audience had ever held. As we came towards the end of the session, we had two very important talks on brain health. The first was by Professor Willie Stewart from Glasgow, who told us about his work on chronic traumatic encephalopathy and how repeated minor trauma to the head such as when heading a football can, over time, have very serious long-term consequences. He has been working with sports governing bodies to have new rules introduced which would make these sports safer for everyone, but especially for children. Our last talk, which was by Professor Alan Gow from Heriot-Watt University then covered the related topic of how we can help to ensure healthy brain aging for everyone. He pointed out that extensive research had shown that there was no one “magic bullet”, but individual small steps all helped to ensure the best possible outcome for everyone.

All these lectures, which took place in person in the Augustine United Church and by Zoom for our remote attendees, 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, and to Graham Rule for his technical skills running the electronics. Members of Council are also thanked for proposing speakers, and all Fellows are reminded that Council are always happy to receive suggestions for future speakers.

The Society attended the Science and the Parliament event at Dynamic Earth on 21 November 2024, at which I presented the Society’s awards for the highest marks in Higher Engineering Science and Advanced Higher Engineering Science to Megan McLeod and Mikhail Agakov respectively. The Society took a stand at the exhibition which attracted a steady stream of visitors, a number of whom expressed interest in joining.

We had one outside visit during the year, which was a return visit to the Torness Nuclear Power Station, an Advanced Gas-Cooled Reactor. It was attended by a large group of members and guests and we were treated to a fascinating walk round the installation, with very clear explanations of how nuclear power is generated. Understandably, there was a very strong emphasis on safety, which was very reassuring, and it was good to see how it worked in practice with safety built into everything that takes place there. It is a great pity that it is due to be shut down and decommissioned in 2030, although this is a very welcome extension

from its earlier end of service date. It was clear that this is a very clean technology, and Torness alone can supply electricity to up to 2 million homes, as well as providing many jobs.

The year concluded on a high note when three members of Council, Past Presidents Alison Morrison-Low and Professor Ian Robson, and Council member Professor John Sawkins, represented the Society at the Royal Garden Party held at Buckingham Palace on 14 May 2025 which celebrated education and skills. Our three delegates were among only 70 people out of a total attendance of around 7,000 who were selected to be presented to our Patron His Majesty The King.

Once again, I would like to put on record my thanks to all members of the Society's Council, who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the smooth running of the Society, and I would like to particularly express my gratitude to our Honorary Secretary Peter Jones for all his incredible hard work. Thanks also to Pat Jones and Peter Stewart for looking after the refreshments, both before the regular lecture meetings and at our twice-yearly events. The opportunity to socialise is a very important part of our meetings, and I am sure it is what distinguishes us from many other lecture-based societies. In promoting cohesion between Fellows, it harks back to our 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 in a relaxed way was so vital. I am proud that we are able to keep that tradition alive and well, and I thank you all for being a part of it and supporting our lectures.

6). Treasurer's Report

A copy of the Treasurer's Report is as below:-

The Annual Report for the year ended 31st August 2024 was circulated with the notice of this meeting and we are getting very close to 31st August 2024 so my projections of where we will be at the end of the session can be fairly reliable. Overall, I estimate that we will have Receipts greater than Payments to the sum of around £2,000. Last year we had a number of expenses which have not been repeated this year, such as refurbishment of the President's chain, and additional Travel Scholarship, together with a donation to the National Library of Scotland (NLS) following the excellent work they have done in digitising some of the Society's older Transactions and photographing our Royal Charter. (Both of these are now available to view on the NLS website, with links from our own website.)

At the end of May our current account held £20,860 which includes £13,607 of 'Restricted Funds', more of which later.

Our main investment portfolio is managed by Rathbones (who recently completed their merger with Investec). It is not expected that this merger will have any direct effect on the way our investments are handled. The President, Secretary, and myself had a meeting with our investment manager in July. Given "world events" the value of our investments, as with everyone else's, has seen some fluctuation during the year and we can expect a certain amount of instability to remain. But there's not a lot we can do about this. At the end of May we had £215,927 with Rathbones which is 2.2% up on the figure for last August, although it was lower during the year and it is anyone's guess what the markets will do next.

I have continued, when time has allowed, to gather together information that I believe OSCR may require when we ask them to authorise a reorganisation of our Restricted Funds. These

range from £26 remaining from a gift by Sir Thomas MacDougall Brisbane to £8,231 from a fund established by Alexander Keith of Ravelstone and Dunottar. OSCR's forms ask for us to confirm that we have failed to get permission from the original donors to change the terms of their gifts, which is straightforward as all the gentlemen concerned have been dead for well over a century. They also ask for details of the terms of the original gifts and I have done some work establishing these as well as I can. It is quite likely that I've got too bogged down in the history of the Society and have got more detail than I need so I will be asking Council to authorise a reorganisation of the Funds, subject to OSCR's permission, based on the information currently to hand.

Last year I reported that our Independent Examiner had reminded me of the importance of chasing up subscriptions from our members. I've tried to do that this and have received a number of payments from Fellows in arrears. I'll be sending out further reminders in the next few weeks so I would ask you all to keep an eye on your inbox for anything from the Society.

Which brings me to some problems I have had communicating with Fellows. We have email addresses registered for the vast majority of Fellows and that has been our preferred way of communicating for some years. Sending postal reminders of each meeting would cost almost the entire subscription income of the Society. I have been sending notices from my own home server but have been told by some Fellows that they haven't been receiving them. In breach of the internet's standards for email distribution it would appear that my servers have been told that a message has been accepted for delivery but then it has been silently discarded. In order to get around this problem I have switched to using Mailchimp, a service that is specifically designed to distribute to mailing lists. However, this service is reporting that only 50 of the 150 notices sent about this AGM had actually been opened. I'm not sure what more I can do and would like to hear of suggestions from Fellows, although probably mainly from the Fellows who aren't here because they haven't received notice of the meeting.

Recordings of our lecture meetings have been uploaded to the Society's YouTube channel throughout the year. These are however marked as 'Unlisted' which means that they won't be found by searching and can only be seen by people who have been sent the link. The link which was sent by email so which also may not have been received. There have been only 112 'views' of the 9 videos uploaded since this time last year each of which took several hours to prepare. I'm a bit disheartened by this low uptake and will be asking Council to consider making some of them 'Public', with the permission of the guest speaker to see if this leads to increased viewership and possibly attracts people to the Society's excellent series of lectures.

The Treasurer was thanked by the President for his report and all his hard work for not only successfully managing the Society's finances, but also for all the other 'behind the scenes' work that he undertook to ensure the smooth running of RSSA.

7). Election of Officers

The normal period of the membership of the Council had been extended due to the Covid pandemic and attempts were now being made to return to normality. Grateful thanks were expressed for their contribution to Council to Mr Stuart Brown who would be stepping down as an ordinary member, and Brigadier Joe d'Inverno would demit office as one of the Vice Presidents to become an ordinary member of Council. His position of co Vice-President would be taken by Professor John Sawkins.

A special thank you to Stuart Brown not only for his ideas for meetings, talks relating to the various areas in which he had been working, but also for the visits he organised especially the very memorable visit to the FlowWave Centre at The king's Buildings

8). A.O.R.B

The Secretary advised that no items had been submitted and the President declared the AGM formally closed at 7.27 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 the Vertical Distillery at Leith, and a "behind the scenes" visit to Edinburgh Airport.

Details of the visits would be circulated to Fellows as soon as they were confirmed.

It was noted that a charge of £24 per person would be made for a visit to the distillery and that a Saturday morning would be preferred time for such a visit.

The President finally reminded Fellows that the first lecture of the 205th session, 2025-2026, would be on Monday 29^h September when the speaker Professor Jim Dunlop, **Professor of Extra-Galactic Astronomy**, University of Edinburgh who will speak on "Galaxies in the Early Universe: Pictures from the James Webb Telescope"

Post AGM Talk

The very enjoyable talk given by Dr Stephen Cribb, entitled, "The Geology of Whisky" was a fascinating and informative talk on the significance of water supplies, and their sources in the production and enjoyment of whisky.

The President was also thanked for having been successful in receiving a donation of a supply of whisky miniatures so that one could be given to all attending the meeting.

The evening was concluded with drinks and a light buffet

Peter Jones
Secretary
5th June 2025

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