



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

EDUCT News

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The Newsletter of the Edinburgh University Club of Toronto

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UPCOMING CLUB & ALUMNI EVENTS

Although we are making tentative arrangements for events for the coming 12 months, since we are hoping to have member feedback on these, based on your responses to our survey of members, we have no definitive dates for any events as of publication of this newsletter. Here is our current thinking:

- **Early October:** an outing to an art gallery such as the McMichael Collection or the AGO
- **Early November:** a pub night
- **Early December:** a talk by an Edinburgh graduate on her recently-released successful novel
- **21 January:** Burns Night
- **Late February:** a talk via Zoom by an Edinburgh professor on Music and Human Development
- **Mid-April:** Annual Dinner
- **Late May:** AGM

In our survey, we also mention some other options. Your responses to our survey will help us give final shape to our upcoming programme. Please respond promptly to help us finalize plans for the coming year.

Message from the President



Happy spring! After such a long and grey winter it's refreshing to finally feel the sun and some warmth.

As we head into the summer months, the EDUCT board is already busy preparing some exciting events for the fall and beyond. This is where we need your help!

We are asking all of you, dear members, to please take a few minutes to fill out our **short online survey**. Your valuable feedback on our events, activities, volunteer opportunities and membership will help EDUCT better understand member interests, barriers to participation and guide future planning and programming. More information on the survey can be found on page 2.

I'd also like to take a moment to thank my predecessor, Anna Voineskos, for her commitment and contributions as President the past two years. I have big shoes to fill! I would also like to thank the rest of the EDUCT board for their dedication and work on all the events and activities throughout this past year. It truly is a team effort and one I'm thrilled to be a part of.

Have a wonderful summer everyone and happy reading!

As always, if you haven't yet had a chance to, please renew your EDUCT membership for 2026 (see p. 20 for details.)

Cheers,
Brittany Howlett

EDUCT Member Survey

We want to hear from you! EDUCT is seeking feedback on our events, activities, volunteering opportunities and membership offerings. Your input will help us plan for the future and strengthen our community of Edinburgh alumni and friends. The survey takes approximately 10–15 minutes to complete.

Please respond by Tuesday, June 30.

[Take the survey](https://forms.gle/G8K6hVsuTaaEKExXA)

or paste this URL into your browser:
<https://forms.gle/G8K6hVsuTaaEKExXA>

Promoting Your Event

If you are organizing an event or participating in an activity that would be of interest to fellow alumni in the GTA, please get in touch with our Communications Officer:

Paul Bradley

pauljfrbradley@gmail.com.

You may also join us on LinkedIn or Facebook to submit your information directly to participating members through these networks.

MEMBERSHIP FEES:

Membership fees for 2026 are due in January. If you have not yet renewed, please see **page 20** for details. We now take INTERAC e-transfers.

Tell us your news

EDUCT News is always looking for interesting alumni stories and news. We are happy to hear about what's new with you! Whether you have just returned from an interesting trip or have a memory you wish to share with your fellow EDUCT Members, we would love to hear from you.

If you have something you would like to share, please contact the EDUCT News Editor, Simon Miles at
simon-miles@sympatico.ca.

The 2026 Burns Night: Our Last at the Duke of Kent

by Simon Miles

EDUCT staged its twenty-second celebration of the famous bard on 22 January. A very good turnout of forty, and excellent performances, made for another splendid evening. At the time, we did not know that this would be our last show at the Duke of Kent. Only in April did we learn that the pub is now closed, supposedly due to an indigestible increase in its rent. But we trust that the spirit of our last Burns Night at the Duke will carry over to our new, yet-to-be-identified location. We have already had some suggestions for pubs with private spaces, but please send us your ideas as soon as possible. Ideally, we need a fully private space, with its own bar and washrooms, and located near the subway.



Warming up

Anna Voineskos, our President, opened the evening with some remarks on recent activities. She then handed over the baton to our MC for the evening ... yours truly. Before getting into our formal programme, I called on Robin McLernon to remind us of the fascinating work she is now championing as a member of the board of the Saltire Foundation Canada. The Foundation is continuing to expand its network of corporations, non-governmental organizations and other institutions which would like to host a Scottish student to serve as an intern for the summer. You may recall the informative article Robin wrote for our September 2025 newsletter. If you, or anyone you know, would like to learn more you are encouraged to read that article, or to contact Robin at: robin.mclernon@gmail.com



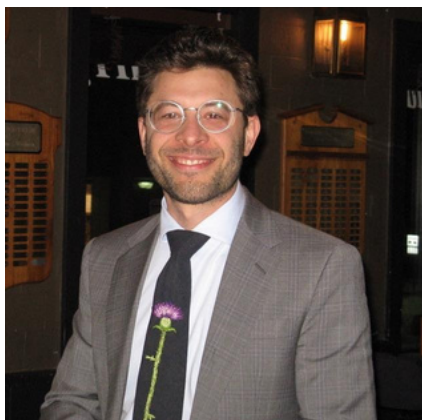
Anna Voineskos watches Graham Ferguson pipe in the haggis

Then, to get us on our way, Victoria Crewe-Nelson's mother, the Reverend Nola Crewe, kindly delivered the Selkirk Grace. This was followed by Graham Ferguson piping in the haggis. It was good to be able to have Graham back behind the pipes after his absence for the two previous years. Bill Campbell did the honours of delivering the Address to the Haggis. Dressed in his highland best, and with a very fine Scottish accent, Bill gave us a splendid rendering of a traditional address that only the brave would undertake. The great chieftain of the pudding race was surely grateful to have its finest attributes acknowledged with such style as it succumbed to Bill's Sgian Dubh (a.k.a. dagger) and silently retired to the kitchen, to be served up for supper.



Bill Campbell addresses the haggis

As we sat down to dispose of said haggis and many other goodies, Michael Weinberger circulated his Burns Quiz. Michael had given us such an excellent quiz last year that he was called back by popular demand. He did not let us down; again, we were challenged by snippets of photos of supposedly well-known Edinburgh landmarks or persons with supposed links with our University, and questions on matters of Scottish trivia designed to show us up as unworthy recipients of Edinburgh degrees! The winning team from Kim and Paul Bradley's table had their skills acknowledged with boxes of Smarties, while the gallant losers, led by Faye Roberts, were given a bar of soap to help them clean up their act in readiness for next year. Nothing to be sniffed at; it smelled fantastic. And Michael received a jar of the finest Tiptree mango chutney ... in recognition of his being the hot composer of cool quizzes.



Michael Weinberger, our Quizmaster, and the only one with all the answers



Faye Roberts launches into her Immortal Memory

Faye Roberts, having been at rest during the quiz, then gave us a star performance with her rendition of *The Immortal Memory*. Why is Burns' work immortal? Well, at the heart of it, Faye thinks that Burns continues to have meaning for each generation because he "really saw his own and his fellows' humanity. At the same time, he saw the connection we all have to the divine, by pointing out where and how we can find the holy and the magical in the everyday world. And he captured it in words formed into verse and songs". He spent a lot of time dwelling on death, and on social and class hierarchies, and while some might dismiss him for that, Faye sees that as a clue as to his ability to connect with so many, over so many years. As someone who grew up on a farm, Faye can relate to the annual cycle that moves from planting, to growth, harvest and death, that underpins some of Burns' work. In *To a Mouse*, he really feels for that mouse whose nest he has destroyed as winter is setting in. And similarly, in *To a Mountain Daisy*, the fate of the daisy is likened to the fate of all of us. Faye also likens Burns to an alchemist: he can convince us that the straw is actually gold. This ability to see the mundane as supernatural is another skill that contributes to his immortality. Likewise, Faye sees Burns' ability to play with social hierarchy, as exemplified in his put-down of the Devil, in his *Address to the Devil*, as another way in which Burns has appealed to many generations. There was much more to this rich and thoughtful performance.

Next up were the life duo of Con Healy, who toasted the lassies, and his wife, Rachel Sachs, who replied to said toast. It was a masterful combination. Con posited the theme of their duet: that the laddies are the draft version and the lassies are the final model with all the wrinkles worked out. Con cited Burns: "Auld Nature swears, the lovely dears Her noblest work she classes, O: Her prentice han' she try'd on man, An' then she made the lasses, O."

Given that Con and Rachel have added a young lassie and laddie to their household, Con had two lassies on which to base his observation that, indeed, they are always right: yes, of course he moved her 'lost' keys, of course he should not sing so loudly that his daughter cannot be heard, and of course they are very loving ... just ask the cat. Rachel elaborated on Burns' intended message by explaining what Burns had omitted to mention, namely just how unfinished a job Nature had done on the laddies. They cannot find anything, whether it is ketchup in the fridge or that homework, they can plan, but forget to tell others of these plans, they can deliver Oscar-winning emotional performances over the things of slightest import, and they know how to press all buttons. But despite their enthusiasm, and their slightly defective state, they are loveable companions to the masterpiece!



Ian Duncan delivers a fine
Tam O'Shanter

By this time, with the dessert devoured, we moved into the supposedly more spontaneous performances. (Actually, they had all been lined up well ahead of time.) First up was Graham to play his guitar and sing us Burns' version of *Ye Jacobites By Name*. Burns wrote this in about 1791, three years after the death of Bonnie Prince Charlie. It was quite critical of the performance of the Jacobites, but well received and published in 1793. Graham kindly followed with more: first, *Ca' the Ewes*, which was Graham's cleaned-up version of Burns' original bawdy piece; and then the full six verses of *Auld Lang Syne*.

We then moved to the much-anticipated performance of *Tam O'Shanter* by Ian Duncan. This is one of the favourites of both Ian and his audience. It is the tale of Tam's journey home from the pub in the village of Shanter. Ian held his audience spellbound with his 20 minutes of acting. He brought the house down!

Victoria Crewe-Nelson then took the stage with excellent readings of *Love in the Guise of Friendship*, and *My Spouse Nancy*. This was followed by equally fine readings of *My Heart's in the Highlands*, by Anne Brusby, and *To a Mouse*, by Michael Weinberger.

David McCulloch followed with some fine singing while playing his accordion. He took us through *Ye Banks and Braes of Bonnie Doon*, *My Love is Like a Red Red Rose*, and *The Skye Boat Song*. We had handed out song-sheets ahead of this to encourage all to join in. Some were somewhat reserved, fortunately others were still full of energy.

Anna offered some closing remarks and handed out the afore-mentioned prizes. David then accompanied everyone on his accordion as we gave a fine rendition of *Auld Lang Syne*. Another fine Burns' night! Now...where do we go next year? Do send in your suggestions.



Anna Voineskos winds up a splendid evening

The 2026 Burns Night Quiz

by Michael Weinberger

Editor's Note: EDUCT's Burns Night Quiz in 2025 was refreshingly challenging for all who were present. It prompted us to ask Michael to return as our Quizmaster in 2026. Again, it was one for which one did not have to be a scholar of Burns' works. We asked Michael if he would reproduce parts of it here. He kindly agreed, and indeed has provided the responses on page 13.

Many thanks to EDUCT for inviting me to compose and conduct my second Robbie Burns Night Quiz. Notwithstanding the diversity of our alumni, it tickles me to see how our communal experience of living in Edinburgh taught us similar factoids unrelated to our schooling. A special thanks to Pouya Jafari ('16), Ben Bestgen ('12), Alastair Wright ('15), Joakim Bjorstad ('15), and Vilde Sofie Rodin ('15) for their feedback as I drafted this year's quiz and their enthusiastic participation once again. If you think the quiz is tricky, it is ... but please note that this year every question was correctly answered by at least one team!

The quiz is in five parts. Points have been assigned to each question. Once done, go to the answers and see how you score. If you think you did really well, let the Editor of EDUCT News know your score and next year, at our Burns Night, you may be able to enjoy bragging rights!

Part I: World Political Leaders

Edinburgh has graduated many who went on to become political leaders. Some great, some not so much... Name the political leader occupying each office. And don't forget those who received honorary degrees from Edinburgh. One point for each name.

1. I am the current First Minister of Scotland:
2. I was Rector of the University many years ago, and I loved my cigars and booze:
3. I was the United States Secretary of Defense under Nixon:

Hint for this last one: Think of a ghostly quiz master!

Part II: Riddles

What is being referred to? One point each. One extra point for the correct spelling for 6 and 7!

1. I am the "Great Chieftain o' the Puddin'-race!"
2. I am collegial, ancient, yet a young man stands above.
3. Though a copy, I'm no child's toy.
4. I am 6,000 kilos, over 500 years old, and my mouth is 20 inches wide?
5. Spit on the street, on your beat, while I beat.
6. This clue will have you blue in the face trying to spell my name.
7. I can strip a tree, and make you sweat while doing so!

Part III: Finish the Poem

One point each.

1. Curs'd be the man, the poorest wretch in life,
The crouching vassal to a tyrant _____,

2. And sleep the gither at the foot,
John Anderson, my _____!

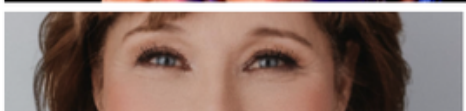
3. My heart's in the _____, wherev'r I go
My heart's in the _____, farewell.

Part IV: Places and People

First, the places: for any one photo, what are you looking at, or where are you? Half a point for each of the nine photos.



Second, the people: Keen eyes!
Who do you see? Hint: only 4/5 are
Alumni. Half a point for each face.



Part V: Quotes

Who said it? Match the people to the quotes. One point each.

1. "Mr. Watson — Come here — I want to see you."
2. "If the misery of the poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin."
3. "We are all missionaries. Wherever we go we either bring people nearer to Christ or we repel them from Christ."
4. "You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear."
5. "Many's the long night I've dreamed of cheese--toasted mostly."

- A Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
B Robert Louis Stephenson
C Alexander Graham Bell
D Eric Liddell
E Charles Darwin

Bonus point: Quote number 5, is from which book?

Solar Energy: Why we need more; how to get it; and the implications for individuals and society

On 28 February 2026 EDUCT enjoyed a very stimulating and informative talk, on Zoom, on solar energy, by Professor Neil Robertson and Dr. Arno Verhoeven. The two speakers brought different but complementary perspectives to bear on the subject. Professor Robertson is Head of Inorganic Chemistry at the University of Edinburgh. He also serves as the Dean of International Partnerships for the College of Science and Engineering. His research interests are in materials chemistry for energy and environmental applications, including photovoltaics, electrical energy storage and photocatalytic water treatment. Dr. Verhoeven is a Senior Lecturer in Design, and Director of Sustainable Development, Edinburgh College of Art. His research projects involve him in design-led approaches to tackling a broad range of complex issues challenging society, including those on energy generation and use.

In broad terms, Neil addressed the technical aspects of the subject and the technological developments that are making solar energy so promising a contribution to efforts to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, while Arno addressed the societal aspects and especially the importance of understanding what different individuals and groups of people need energy for and how they want to use it.

Neil opened the presentation with a very convincing set of numbers indicating how global demand for energy is rising rapidly with the increase in global population (from 6.1 billion in 2001 to an expected 10.4 billion in 2100), and the increase in global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person (from US\$7,470 per person in 2001 to an expected \$27,320 p.p., in constant dollars, in 2100), somewhat counterbalanced by an anticipated improvement in the energy intensity rate per unit of GDP (from 0.294 in 2001 to an anticipated 0.15 in 2100). By multiplying these figures together, one arrives at the rate of global energy use per second. In 2001 that was 13.5 TerraWatts (TW). (A TW is one million million watts.) This global use is expected to increase to 43 TW by 2100.

To convey these figures in terms that may be more meaningful to most of us, Neil suggested that we should imagine today's energy consumption by the average European in maintaining their lifestyle as being the equivalent of having 100 of the slaves that a Roman noble may have had at his disposal. And indeed the figure is about 150 slaves for today's average North American.

In addition to the enormity of this anticipated growth in demand, there are the negative impacts arising from the current generation of much of our energy. Firstly, most of this energy is derived from unsustainable sources of fossil fuels, which means that our grandchildren cannot expect to rely upon them to maintain the lifestyles we enjoy today. And secondly, about 73% of global GHG emissions arise from energy generation dependent on fossil fuels.

Thus globally, we have to find ways to generate our needed energy from clean (i.e., not resulting in GHGs) and sustainable sources. Despite many annual UN Conferences of Parties (COPS) on climate change the world has made little progress in reducing the emission of GHGs per capita and stabilizing global temperatures. COP 21, held in Paris in 2015, was a landmark meeting in that there was broad agreement to keep the global rise in temperature to less than 2C and preferably at no more than 1.5C. Already, that latter target seems unachievable. There is a political reluctance to face up to the need to keep at least 80% of currently known fossil fuel reserves in the ground and to strive for 100% of global energy coming from renewables by 2050.

In shifting the focus of the presentation to the supply side, Neil gave us another convincing set of figures with respect to potential sources of energy that would enable global demand to be satisfied in a sustainable and clean manner. Currently, global energy use is at about 18 TW. He argued that no other renewable source comes close to solar in producing the requisite energy. For example, looking at theoretical upper limits of available energy, ocean currents (2 TW), hydro-electrical power (3 TW), wind turbines (4 TW), geothermal (12 TW) and photosynthesis (100 TW), can all make a contribution, however in practical terms all of these together still cannot meet future energy requirements.

Solar, however, has the theoretical potential to generate 120,000 TW. Thus, it is by far the best option to pursue globally. Yes, in specific locations one will find some of the above sources are equally-important choices: e.g., geothermal in Iceland and wind in Scotland, but globally there is no sustainable-energy future without a dominant component of solar.

Having got us to focus on solar, Neil then looked at how the world is progressing on this front. Most important in this regard is that, for many years, the installed capacity of solar power has been doubling about every 2.5 years. Currently, about 2.94% of global energy consumption is met by solar power. If that rate of doubling of installed capacity were to continue then 5 more doublings would equate to around 94% of today's global energy consumption being met by solar power by 2038. Neil emphasized that, while the continuation of the rate of doubling of installed solar power is not a prediction, it illustrates a potentially enormous role for solar in the near future.

What of the concerns that solar panels will take up lots of the Earth's surface, compete with agriculture and destroy remaining wilderness?

Neil took us through another set of figures. Of the 29% of the Earth's surface that is land, some 71% is habitable. And of that habitable land about 46% is used for agriculture, 38% is forested, 14% is shrubland, 1% is freshwater, and just 1% is urban. Solar infrastructure would require just 0.33% of global land (i.e., about 500,000 square kilometres) to meet near-term global demand of 20 TW. That is less than the current footprint of fossil fuel infrastructure worldwide. To bring home how miniscule this 0.33% is, Neil noted, somewhat wryly, that in Scotland golf courses account for 0.3% of land!



Professor Neil Robertson



Dr. Arno Verhoeven

Of course, not all of the solar panels needed have to be on habitable land. And where they are, they may well bring the benefit of shade to the cultivation of certain crops. And in urban areas we are seeing the rapid spread of solar panels on house and office roofs. Neil has panels on his roof in Edinburgh and they meet about 80% of his household energy requirements.

Neil then took us through the technological advances in the development of solar panels since their invention in the 1950s. At that time, they were very expensive and were feasible only for use on satellites. By the 1980s they were coming down in price and could be used on Earth in those remote locations where there was no competition from the grid. However, today, almost everywhere, they are the cheapest source of electricity. But the highly efficient and stable silicon that has been used in most panels does tend to be heavy and somewhat inflexible. Thus, emerging technologies are using nanomaterials, polymers, and dyes, that are light in weight, flexible, coloured, and low cost, that also lend themselves to being integrated into other materials such as roofing tiles. Neil saw the development of solar panels as an example of the benefits to be derived from enabling the emergence of niche markets to make possible such developments.

Looking to the future, Neil sees:

- continued expansion of roof coverage and solar farms,
- the use of new spaces, such as floating panels over reservoirs,
- the advance of agrivoltaics (i.e., the combination of photovoltaics with the growth of crops that benefit from the shade of the panels),
- further developments in photovoltaic technologies that give us the lightweight, flexible solar cells that can be integrated into everything from rucksacks to radios, phone chargers and cars.

These are niche markets that, if enabled, will produce further major advances.

Additionally, we must recognize that, globally, over a billion people still have no access to electricity. For them, a portable source of energy can be transformative in terms of extending their day, enabling time for study, providing access to water via electric pumps, and much more.

Ending on a futuristic note, Neil asked us to imagine a large solar farm, in space, beaming its energy back to Earth. It is theoretically possible and, as he sees it, will be a reality one day.

In sum, Neil sees global society as having the ability, through the development of solar power, to meet the rapidly growing demand for energy, and to do this with cheaper energy. At the same time, solar power will enable locations that are currently off-grid to enjoy reliable power. The current challenges are to find ways to store large quantities of power to feed into the grid and to strike the right balance between solar power and power from other renewable sources.

In picking up from Neil, Arno explained that, as a designer, he saw the need, especially when we are looking for ways of providing more reliable supplies of energy to those who are currently off-grid, to truly understand the needs of the consumer: how much energy is needed, where, when, and for what. And to do that, one really has to understand more of the daily lives, and indeed the values, of those potential consumers. Thus, he sees the need for far more attention being given to listening to individuals, and the community groups of which they are a part, as they articulate their needs.

Further, given the rough correlation, globally, between annual per capita energy use and a country's ranking on the Human Development Index (HDI), more effort should be given to assisting people in the poorer countries to have access to sustainable sources of energy, such as solar power. Arno recounted his work in a refugee camp in Burkina Faso, where there is no public energy infrastructure, to illustrate some of the points he was making.

One photo showed a typical resident charging his phone with energy generated by a solar panel on the roof of his shelter. Why does he need to charge his phone? So that he can keep in touch with his family and friends, who may be in other countries, and to keep on top of his financial transactions. Other photos relayed a cautionary tale. They showed solar cookers that had been donated by the UN as a way of enabling their users to reduce the smoke from indoor cooking and thus enhance their chances of living longer lives. That sounds like a sound motivation for providing the solar cookers. While one photo shows a new solar cooker, another shows several broken cookers. It turns out that the cookers were broken deliberately by the recipients. Why? Because the community did not like to be limited to cooking its food in the middle of the day. They wanted to eat at night, when they socialize. In short, the cookers did not fit in with their pattern of life. As an aside, the aluminium in the cookers was highly valued for its use in improving their dwellings, but the recipients made clear that if they had asked the UN for sheets of aluminium they would have been turned down.

Arno's faith in the value of storytelling as a way of gaining an understanding of people's energy needs led him to relate a story about how he has powered his off-grid office. Lacking access to a sunlit roof, he has used a bicycle to give him a portable panel that can be moved from a sunlit place to a battery for storage of the energy that can be tapped as and when needed.

Arno then moved to another illustration of why it is so important to put people first if we are to shift to carbon-free energy sources. Given that in much of the world this transition has to involve the retrofitting of existing buildings, we need to ensure that the owners and occupants of those buildings are comfortable with what is being proposed and actually provided by the retrofitters. Surveys in Scotland have revealed that mould, tenant distress and even reduced property values are signals of poor-quality retrofits. If the owners and occupants are to trust the retrofitters, there needs to be much more attention to the technical training of those contractors and their understanding of ethical dimensions of their work.

A wide-ranging discussion followed the presentation. In brief, some points of interest emerging from the discussion were as follows.

- We cannot yet say whether solar panels will play a significant role in powering large trucks and planes (as opposed to their possibly being powered by batteries charged from the grid).
- Although research on the impacts of climate change on the generation of energy from renewable resources has been proceeding for many years and it is well known that changing weather patterns will affect river flow volume and variability throughout the year, wind patterns and strengths, and cloud cover, there is not yet enough known that can provide certainty with respect to cloud cover in specific locales, where it may have a bearing on whether or not to invest in solar power.
- Although some political regimes, such as Ontario's current government, may be favouring nuclear power, because it avoids the problems that wind and solar currently have with respect to the storage of vast amounts of energy, the case for nuclear cannot be made on the basis of cost. A recent UK study has demonstrated that the costs of nuclear and solar are currently comparable. And the rate at which the costs of solar power generation and storage are being reduced – 20% every 3 years – indicates that in 15 years, when nuclear plants planned today will be operational, the cost of solar power will be next to nothing in comparison with the cost of nuclear power.
- Although the tariffs imposed by President Trump on Canada's auto sector have raised questions about the viability of recent major investments by the governments of Canada and Ontario in battery technology development and production plants, some of that production will now be directed to the development and production of batteries for the storage of energy generated by renewable resources and to be fed into the grid, as opposed to batteries for electric vehicles.

- An overarching challenge for countries and communities everywhere is to enable a smooth transition from the current system of energy generation and use to one based on renewable resources. Governments have the major role to play in building the requisite shared infrastructure, strengthening the grid, providing the interconnections to enable international and interregional trade in energy, ensuring the production of enhanced storage capabilities to feed energy into the grid, ensuring the right balance of reliance on different sources of renewable resources, and demonstrating trust in, and support for, local communities to develop their own sources of renewable energy. The significance of this message is borne out by the fact that Scotland currently produces 13 times the energy needed for the country just from wind and solar power. However, due to the lack of connections with the grids of other countries, the excess cannot be exported.
- To inspire governments to exhibit the political will to act within their short terms of office, the narrative of change agents (whether individuals or public interest organizations) has to emphasize the rapid reduction in cost of solar power and its ability to meet global energy needs well into the future. Also helpful in convincing politicians who like to kick tyres is the evident success of a few countries, such as Spain and Portugal. Spain, for example, has the capability of meeting 100% of its country's energy needs from renewables, albeit that the right mix has yet to be achieved in order to avoid occasional blackouts.

EDUCT thanks Neil and Arno for such an informative and inspiring talk.

David Argyle Takes EDUCT Through 300 Years of Medicine at Edinburgh

On 17 April 2026 EDUCT welcomed Professor David Argyle as our speaker at our Annual Dinner. David is Vice-Principal and Head of the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine at the University of Edinburgh. To celebrate the Medical School's tercentenary, the School has embarked on a year-long project "Edinburgh Medical School 300: Explore Our Past, Live Our Present, Shape Our Future", with events all over the world. We were very grateful that David could include us in his demanding itinerary.

David's talk was ambitious: he touched on the outstanding figures of the past and their landmark achievements; he conveyed the essence of the School today; and he gave us a sense of the challenges facing medicine and the future direction of medical research and innovations in medical education and healthcare in responding to such challenges.

To give us a sense of the historical context which led up to the formal establishment of the Medical School in 1726, David took us back to 1160. At about that time, the first hospital was established in the south-east of Scotland. It was at Souta Aisle, which is on the road to Falkirk, south of Edinburgh. One has to wonder whether, even in those days, that was to avoid the likely insanitary conditions in the city.

The practice of medicine was institutionalized with the establishment of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1505, and the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh in 1681, the latter in large part due to the efforts of Sir Robert Sibbald, a graduate of the University of Edinburgh, and Sir Andrew Balfour. And, of course, the University itself had been established in 1583.

At its founding, the Medical School was the first in the English-speaking world. Over time, its faculty have assisted in the creation of many medical schools around the world: witness that five of the seven Ivy League schools in the US – Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Pennsylvania, and Dartmouth – owe their origins to Edinburgh. In Canada, the schools at McGill and the University of Montreal were also started by Edinburgh faculty. And some thirteen Nobel laureates – seven in physiology or medicine and six in chemistry – have been associated with the Medical School.

Why this early success? David suggested that it was a combination of the School's founding in the early days of the Scottish Enlightenment with its receptivity to new ideas, the fact that the University was a civic university, and thus not beholden to the church, and that the Medical School attracted people who wanted to be at the forefront. The construction of the Royal Infirmary in 1729 also helped. That building was on Infirmary Street and later became the location for the Department of Natural Philosophy (Physics) and then Geography. And when that Infirmary moved, in 1879, into the iconic new building (today the home of the Edinburgh Futures Institute) on Lauriston Place, it made sense to construct the Medical School next to it.



Professor David Argyle

The early leaders of the Medical School included the famous Munro dynasty – Munro primus, one of the founders of the School, Munro secundus, and then, the disappointment, Munro tertius. In sequence, they occupied the Chair of Anatomy for 123 years. This remarkable trio was profiled in EDUCT News in May 2025.

Another early notable whom David touched on was James Lind, who, in 1753, published a work on the link between citrus fruits and the prevention of scurvy, which was, as David observed, one of the earliest examples of a report on a controlled clinical trial. And William Cullen made a valuable contribution with the publication, in 1777, of his “First Lines of the Practice of Physic”, which systematized contemporary knowledge of medicine and thus became a standard reference in Europe and America, which further enhanced Scotland’s influence on global medical education for generations thereafter.

But, of course, this success came at a price. The research and teaching required cadavers. The famous body snatchers who ensured that the famous professors had a good supply of bodies, were sometimes resorting to murder. Fortunately for the good citizens of Edinburgh, they were brought to justice.

In 1823 there emerged another remarkable institution that owed its origins to the School of Medicine – the Royal Dick School of Veterinary Studies, as it is now called. David related how it was a Professor John Barclay, a specialist in comparative anatomy, who had inspired one of his students, William Dick, a farrier, to pursue further studies in London and to establish what would become the now famous veterinary school. In its early days, the Veterinary College, as it was then called, focused on horses.

Horses were central to the economy, to personal transport, and to the military. Later, a major challenge was the rapid increase in cattle deaths due to the tse-tse fly. In building his private College Dick was amazingly successful. His students included those who would go out to establish veterinary schools around the world, including Canada. The College was formally named the Royal (Dick) Veterinary College in 1906, and in 1951 it became part of the University of Edinburgh. Today, it is ranked number one in the world.



Anna Voineskos, President of EDUCT (far right), and Simon Miles, Dinner organizer (far left), with Professor Argyle (centre right) and Medical School grads, from left to right, Anne Brusby, David Mowat and Anne McKellar

Other early leading lights David acknowledged for their contributions included: Sir James Young Simpson, who introduced chloroform as an anaesthetic in 1847, the same year in which he became Queen Victoria’s physician (he was profiled in EDUCT News of September 2025); Sir Joseph Lister, a pioneer in antiseptics, who held the Chair of Clinical Surgery at the Medical School from 1869 to 1877; and Thomas Addison, who graduated from the Medical School in 1815 and later became known for his work in endocrinology, with his name being given to Addison’s Disease – the degeneration of the adrenal glands.

However, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while the Medical School was ahead of its time in medical research, it was very much a creature of its time in terms of social mores. David related the saga of the famous Edinburgh Seven who, in 1869, were the first female students to be admitted to the School, who performed very well, but who were not permitted to graduate when they had concluded their studies in 1873. Some went on to be leading lights in their respective fields. (See the coverage of these heroines in EDUCT News of January 2022.) Somewhat belatedly, in 2019, the University granted them their degrees posthumously.

Are you a fan of Scottish writing?

Do you enjoy reading novels and non-fiction by Scottish authors? How about books about Scotland or Scots? If so, EDUCT would welcome your views and opinions for publication in EDUCT News.

Please contact the EDUCT News Editor, Simon Miles at
simon-miles@sympatico.ca

The education of veterinarians suffered similarly. In 1938 the UK Government's Loveday Report, while making some landmark recommendations for systemic changes in the education of veterinarians, noted that the training of women as vets could not be justified, and thus that their number should be kept small.

David, being a Professor of Veterinary Medicine, not surprisingly gave us more on the accomplishments of this remarkable School. Notable among these was the work of Sir Ian Wilmut who, in 1996, led the team that created Dolly the Sheep, by cloning a mammal from an adult somatic cell. This work was undertaken while Wilmut was at the Roslin Institute. The Institute, which, through its earlier forms, has had informal and formal relations with the University of Edinburgh since 1917, became part of the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies in 2008.

From 1941 to 1949 the Medical School and the Veterinary College demonstrated commitment to international solidarity with colleagues by hosting the Polish School of Medicine and the Polish Veterinary School.



Alan Pearson, who introduced David Argyle, with Noel Wright, Medical School grad

Turning to the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine (CMVM) as it is in the 21st century, David emphasized its intellectual reach and integrative approach to all its work. It is a unique grouping where healthcare specialists, vets, medics, biomedical scientists, data scientists, social scientists and professional services teams work together to address the major challenges affecting animal and human populations, while educating the next generation of global leaders. It has adopted a strategy - One Biology, One Medicine, One Health - to achieve global impact in research, innovation, and education. The emphasis is on integrated learning and teaching, research, innovation, and clinical translation. In addition to the work of Sir Ian Wilmut, who died in 2023, David cited the work of Matthew Kaufman and Martin Evans on embryonic stem cells and that of Shinya Yamanaka on induced pluripotent stem cells as illustrative of this strategy in action.

David then turned to the challenges of the near-term future arising from the interplay of such factors as: an ageing population; the complexities of health challenges; the adoption of new technologies into patient care; higher education funding; the economy; and geopolitics. This interplay constitutes the operating environment of the College. The College is responding by acting on lessons learned over many years: consciously nurturing its talent, expanding its research base through local, national and international collaboration, fostering research-led teaching and clinical practice, and taking calculated risks in its investments.



Past Presidents Sarah Tulley and Victoria Crewe-Nelson, testing their medicinal alcohol, and looking all the better for it, and clearly inspiring ...



... fellow guests Bill Campbell and Jonathon Baker to do the same

Building expanded quarters designed to foster interdisciplinary collaboration has resulted in two interconnected innovation clusters, at Easter Bush and Edinburgh Bioquarter. Strong links with industry, governments and research councils are fostered through an emphasis on achieving health, educational, social and economic impacts. The scale of investment is impressive. For example, over the last 20 years, the Bioquarter has benefitted from an investment of £715 million.

This complex supports 9,000 people working or studying (including those in nine health-related commercial companies), while servicing some 2,000 outpatients each day. Over those 20 years, the Bioquarter has generated some £2.72 billion in gross value-added from its research, clinical and commercial activities. Over the next decade the Future Medicine project will be bringing research, teaching and clinical delivery together, to train doctors in a multidisciplinary setting, address the intersectionality of disease, and build an ecosystem from basic science to clinical adoption.

Listening to these impressive achievements of the past and plans for the future, one has to wonder why the UK and other economically advanced countries still have major health challenges. And yet they do.

Part of what drives David and his colleagues is obviously what they are learning about what is not known and needs to be known – for example, with regard to the role of infectious agents in chronic disease. But partly it is because there are still enormous disparities in the health of those in most deprived areas and those in the least deprived areas. In the UK, for example, there is a 22-year gap between the expectancy of a healthy life for those living in the deprived areas of the north of the country as compared with those living in the south. And the gap between rich and poor countries is even greater. Hence David's promotion of the need to think in terms of building an ecosystem that brings together talents, assets, funders and national networks. David illustrated what he meant by this by outlining the constituent components of that ecosystem as it exists in Scotland today. Medicine at Edinburgh has come a long way in its first 300 years.

And of particular relevance for EDUCT, and other alumni clubs around the world, David made mention of two new vehicles being put in place to help fund students to be part of this impressive continuing advance in medicine at Edinburgh: the newly established Future Medicine: Student Fund and, coming soon, the CMVM Future Medicine: Ph.D. Fellowships.

To thank David for visiting us, EDUCT's Board agreed to direct this year's annual donation to support the Future Medicine: Student Fund. EDUCT members who are looking for a way to support the Medical School as it marks its tercentenary may find this Fund an attractive and simple way of making a donation.

EDUCT wishes to express its gratitude to David for giving us such an inspiring talk and wishes him and his colleagues every success in implementing their plans to give us all a healthier life.

EDUCT's AGM Ushers in Board Changes

by Simon Miles

At this year's AGM, on 31 May 2026, EDUCT members elected Brittany Howlett as President and Michael Weinberger as a new Director-at-Large. Sarah Tulley, who had been serving as Immediate Past President, retired from the Board. Sarah was given a warm send-off and thanked for her commitment and time as a former President. Anna Voineskos, who retired from the role of President and became the Immediate Past President, was also thanked for her dedication and service to our cause.

The University's Information Session for Students

by Simon Miles

On 8 April 2026 the University of Edinburgh returned to the Gardiner Museum for its in-person Toronto information session for students. As was the case last year, the session was designed to serve those students who were holders of an offer of a place. For some, the offer was unconditional, for others it was conditional upon securing qualifying scores in their final exams at school. The session brought together both prospective undergraduate and post-graduate (i.e., masters and doctoral level) students. This session, and others like it elsewhere, was being held after an earlier round of online information sessions for students interested in finding out what Edinburgh had to offer.

The Edinburgh team was made up of Dr. Frank Cogliano, Professor of American History, and two International Recruitment Managers: Mikaela Spencer, who is based in the University's New York office; and, Rachael Parsons, based in Edinburgh. Together, they covered everything a student could conceivably want to know about procedures to follow, visas, forms to fill, finding a place to live, banking, student support services, clubs, scholarships, the importance of Edinburgh as a cultural centre, the various campuses, the categories of degrees and their academic structure, and much more.



The team: (from left to right) Simon Miles, Gillian Fournie, Cassandra Mann, Charlotte Pathe, Frank Cogliano, Mikaela Spencer, and Rachael Parsons. Missing is Anna Voineskos

The students then heard from three recent graduates: Charlotte Pathe, Gillian Fournie, and Cassandra Mann. Charlotte spoke about her experience in completing her four-year B.Eng. (Hons) in Mechanical Engineering, including a semester exposed to the work of the Fire Engineering Department (which is regarded as the best in the world). Gillian offered her perspectives as a student pursuing a Master of Law in Medical Law and Ethics, noting, among other things, that she was the only North American in her course. And Cassandra, who had graduated with an M.Sc. in History, spoke of her involvement in the University Students Association and her appreciation of a wide range of student societies in which to get involved. Our President, Anna Voineskos, and I were then able to provide a summary introduction to EDUCT. Our mention of our efforts to collect information on potential sources of funding for Canadians wishing to study at Edinburgh was well received.

As we have come to expect, it was a very well-organized session. We trust that the prospective students were impressed, and have taken up those offers. We wish them well in their studies and encourage them to join EDUCT upon their return to Canada.

Do you know of other Edinburgh alumni in Toronto?

Please pass this newsletter on to anyone who might be interested.

EDUCT Decennial Endowment Fund: Suffering Market Turmoil

by Simon Miles

The EDUCT Decennial Endowment Fund has suffered from the Trump-induced turmoil in the markets that has been experienced since our last report. As of the end of April 2026, the total investment in the Fund stood at £240,396, down from the comparable figure of £247,976 for December 2025.

As ever, we remind all who are interested that the Fund remains open for further contributions. For details on how to donate, and to receive the appropriate form for donors from your country, please contact me at simon-miles@sympatico.ca

EDUCT Geography Centenary Fund: More Turmoil Plus Good News

by Simon Miles

The EDUCT Geography Centenary Fund, like the EDUCT Decennial Fund, suffered from the Trump-induced turmoil that has been experienced since our last report. As of the end of April 2026, the total investment in the Fund stood at £135,969, down from the comparable figure of £138,839 for December 2025.

However, the good news is that part of this drop is accounted for by the granting of this year's EGCF award to Georgia Haynes. Georgia, a doctoral student in her second year, is conducting a fascinating study on geographies of the book: in this instance the factors bearing upon the shaping of children's picture books, and the influence of those books on a child's attachments to, and identification with, landscapes and other expressions of nationhood and citizenship in Scotland. The working title of her doctoral thesis is "Producing Childhood, Producing Scotland: Authorship, Childhood and the Politics of Picture Books". An article on Georgia's studies will appear in the September issue of EDUCT News.

All interested are reminded that the Fund remains open for further contributions. Any assistance you can give to help us get to the next very important milestone of £140,000 would be much appreciated by all in Edinburgh. For details on how to donate, and to receive the appropriate form for donors from your country, please contact me at simon-miles@sympatico.ca

Answers to the 2026 Burns Night Quiz

Part I: John Swiney, Winston Churchill, Caspar Weinberger.

Part II: Haggis, Old College, Dolly the cloned sheep, Megs Mon, Heart of Midlothian, Buccleuch Place, Ceilidh ... think of strip the willow.

Part III: wife, Jo, Highlands, highlands.

Part IV: Places: Leith and the docks, National Museum of Scotland, National Monument of Scotland (Calton hill is accepted), Walter Scott Monument, Stockbridge, Old College, Victor Hugo Café, the Meadows, Nelson Monument, McEwan Hall.

People: Gordon Brown, Robbie Burns, Charles Darwin, Geoffrey Hinton, Christy Clark.

Part V: Quotes: 1c, 2e, 3d, 4a, 5b, Bonus Q: Treasure Island

Help Us Find Our Next Burns Night Pub

By Simon Miles

Can you help EDUCT find the perfect spot to hold its Burns Nightcap next January? Only in April did we learn that the Duke of Kent, our favoured haunt of many years, is now closed, supposedly due to an indigestible increase in its rent. But we trust that the spirit of our last Burns Night at the Duke will carry over to our new, yet-to-be-identified location. We have already had some suggestions for pubs with private spaces, but please send us your ideas as soon as possible. Ideally, we need a fully private space, with a capacity to seat 50, its own bar and washrooms, a layout that enables everyone to be able to see and hear the performers, and located near the subway. A semi-private room is less likely to work for us because we do not want to have to put up with the noise from other parties in the building. Most likely, we are looking for a pub, but it could possibly be a club or hotel. A pub or hotel is likely preferable since they will not charge for the room. The establishment must be able to include haggis on the menu.

Please contact Paul Bradley at pauljfrbradley@gmail.com or 416-464-9771.

The Story Behind EDUCT

“EDUCT” is intended to form the acronym for the Edinburgh University Club of Toronto.

“Educt” is a word which means, in the language of chemists: “A body separated by decomposition from another.” In addition, there is “e-duct”, an electronic channel, which seems appropriate for all of our members receiving EDUCT News via e-mail.

Rachel Sachs Chairs 2026 Internationally Trained Lawyers Conference

by Victoria Crewe-Nelson

Toronto was the host city for the Internationally Trained Lawyers Conference (ITLC) 2026 from April 23-25, and EDUCT's own Rachel Sachs was its chair. The ITLC is the largest national gathering of internationally trained lawyers in Canada, and is known for bringing together legal professionals, academics, regulators, employers, and equity-focused organizations. This year's theme was "From Hurdles to Horizons: the Evolving ITL Landscape", which focused on helping foreign-trained legal practitioners integrate into the Canadian legal profession.

The Honourable Aston J Hall, Associate Chief Justice of the Ontario Court of Justice, kicked off the main conference day with his discussion on building relationships. Justice Hall emphasized the importance of continuous education (and educating) for the legal profession, and the need for inclusion and appropriate representation of the population in the courtroom. Justice Hall's refrain of "If I can do it, you can do it", struck a chord with the international lawyers in attendance.

In addition to coordinating the volunteers, events and venues, Rachel also leveraged her EDUCT rolodex and asked our own Tom Card and Victoria Crewe-Nelson to be panelists at the conference. Tom's panel discussion on the rule of law was very well received. Victoria's break-out panel presented to a packed room on establishing a niche practice, and cemented new friendships amongst the speakers. The conference concluded with a closing gala that featured keynote speaker Supreme Court Justice Mahmud Jamal, two comedians and an awards ceremony.



From left: Victoria Crewe-Nelson, Rachel Sachs, Con Healy, and Tom Card

Rachel received a well-deserved standing ovation at the end of the night, and took the time to pose for a mini-EDUCT picture, with fellow EDUCT members Con Healy, Tom and Victoria. Congratulations to Rachel for a successful conference, and for working tirelessly for foreign-trained lawyers (such as Edinburgh alumni) to smooth the transition to the Canadian legal environment.

Famous Alumni

Sir Robert Edwards

by Simon Miles

Sir Robert Geoffrey Edwards was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2010 for his pioneering work in in-vitro-fertilization (IVF). At the time of this recognition, about 4 million births had occurred as a result of IVF. By 2025, that number had grown to about 13 million. Sterility, whether of the male or female, had long been stigmatized. The success of IVF changed that to a marked degree. That sterility affects some 10 per cent of couples worldwide suggests the significance of his contributions to society. As one of his former associates, Professor the Lord Robert Winston, observed, he was the creator of the greatest happiness for millions of couples.

Edwards was born in 1925 in West Yorkshire to working class parents: his father was a railway worker and his mother a millworker. As an adult, he identified with the Labour Party and was a Labour Party member when on the local council in Cambridge, while also being a prominent scientist. The family moved to Manchester, where Robert was fortunate to win a scholarship to attend Manchester Central High School. On leaving school in 1943, he was subject to military conscription and served in the army for five years. He then attended Bangor University graduating with a B.Sc. in Biology.

In 1951 he commenced his doctoral studies at the University of Edinburgh, spending much time at what was then the Institute of Animal Genetics and Embryology. The Institute later became part of today's Roslin Institute. His thesis was entitled "The experimental induction of heteroploidy in the mouse". In short, he was experimenting in changing the number of chromosomes in the mice. He graduated from Edinburgh in 1955 and then, after a post-doc year at Caltech, he spent time at the National Institute for Medical Research in Mill Hill, in London, and the University of Glasgow, before joining the faculty, as Ford Foundation Research Fellow, in the Department of Physiology, at the University of Cambridge in 1963. By 1969, he had been appointed Reader in Physiology. He remained on the faculty until his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1989.

Edwards' work on human fertilization had started in about 1960. By 1968 he had been able to successfully achieve the fertilization of a human egg in the laboratory. This was a landmark achievement and it prompted him to start collaborating with the gynaecological surgeon Patrick Steptoe and embryologist and nurse Jean Purdy. They worked out of two bases, one in Oldham in northern England and the other in Cambridge. Sadly, many scientists and religious groups opposed their work. In 1971, the Medical Research Council refused its support. Edwards, Steptoe and Purdy persisted. On 25 July 1978 Louise Brown, the world's first IVF baby, was born as a perfectly healthy child. She is now a great champion of the technique that led to her birth. Her mother went on to have another child by IVF.



Sir Robert Geoffrey Edwards

In 1980, the trio founded the Bourn Hill Clinic near Cambridge to advance their work and to train future researchers and practitioners. In 1984 Edwards was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. Clearly, his contributions were being recognized. The beautiful 400-year-old Bourn Hill mansion has since seen additional buildings on its grounds to accommodate the demand for IVF. Progress continues. Today, the clinic is one of five in eastern England at which patients can receive support from the NHS for IVF. How times have changed.

Edwards was knighted in 2011 for his services to human reproductive biology. Over his later lifetime he received many prizes and awards. He published over 350 peer-reviewed papers, some 25 being published in *Nature*.

In 2013, at the age of 87, he died near Cambridge, leaving his wife and five daughters. Ruth, his wife - the granddaughter of Ernest Rutherford, the 1908 Nobel Laureate in Physics - was herself a noted researcher and pioneer in reproductive medicine.

Editor's Note: EDUCT acknowledges the help of articles in: Wikipedia; Britannica; the University of Cambridge web site; and PLOS Biology in preparing this article. The latter's citation being: Winston R (2013) Sir Robert Edwards (1925–2013): Creator of the Greatest Happiness. PLoS Biol 11(5)

Welcome To Our New Members

by Simon Miles

Tina Tammsalu

Tina Tammsalu is a primary school teacher at Crestwood School. As a home room teacher, she teaches her students everything: reading, writing, maths, and social studies. Quite a responsibility! She looks back on her own upbringing with gratitude. She enjoyed her time at Havergal and Lawrence Park Collegiate Institute. Although there were no outstanding performances, she recalls being quite good at sports and, albeit outside of the school, she competed in synchronized swimming at the provincial level.

Tina attended Queen's University to pursue her undergraduate B.Sc. (Hons) in Psychology and Sociology. Since her mother and sister had both been to Queen's it was an obvious choice. While there, she decided that she would like to be a school teacher and, after graduation, she moved on to Trent University to acquire her B.Ed., in Primary and Junior School Education.

After Trent, Tina headed to Edinburgh. Why Edinburgh? Well, in grade 12 she had discovered a remarkably enjoyable and rapid way of acquiring one's grade 12 English credit. She had flown to Edinburgh, with about 40 other Canadian students and Canadian teachers, to spend three weeks at the University of Edinburgh and one week at Trinity College Dublin for an intensive, seven days a week course in English. It worked – she got her grade 12 English! And of course she fell for the charm of Edinburgh!

In her two years at Edinburgh Tina was at the Moray House School of Education and Sport. It has an excellent reputation, being in the top 20 schools of education worldwide. The experience was a refreshing change of scene.

She very much enjoyed being involved in a major study of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, her class sizes were around 20 students, most of whom were foreigners, and the teaching she found to be of good quality. She had to complete a dissertation and hers was titled "Perceptions of Discipline Methods in Scottish Elementary Schools". She earned her Post-graduate Diploma in Education, which equips one not just to teach but to become an administrator in the education system.

While studying at Edinburgh Tina took advantage of the opportunity to take those cheap flights to such places as Slovenia, Italy and France, along with visits to London and Ireland. And of course, the Scottish Highlands and, most memorably, the Isle of Skye, featured on the travel list too.

Before returning to Canada, Tina decided to stay on for a while in Edinburgh to teach, focusing on special education. But then the visa ran out! So it was back in Toronto, where Tina started to teach grades 2 and 3 for about five years. But Scotland obviously had a special attraction for her. She returned there to teach in schools for about two and a half years. That was during the height of the Covid pandemic, but she was lucky. She had no obvious symptoms while there!

On returning to Canada again Tina started teaching in special education at Crestwood. Outside of teaching, Tina enjoys golf and skiing. But clearly, Burns had Tina down to a T: for this year's summer holiday she is returning to the Highlands again ... her heart's in the Highlands!



Tina Tammsalu

Kassandra Mann

Kassandra Mann is a Guest Experience Expert at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Toronto. The reputation of this luxury brand is premised on its globally-recognized standards of service and guest experience, and Kassandra's department plays an essential role in maintaining this reputation. In brief, she has to be on top of everything from communications, requests, and housekeeping to ensure that everything runs smoothly for every guest.

Kassandra was born and grew up in Mississauga and attended Port Credit Secondary School. She was a self-described high achiever. She got good marks and was active in sports, playing basketball for the school. For fun, she played soccer, and threw the javelin and discus. In high school, history was her favourite subject. She puts this down to the very inspiring history teacher she had in grade 10.

After graduating from high school, Kassandra took a gap year before entering York University to study history. She chose York because its history programme was highly ranked in Canada, and the large number of faculty members suggested to her that there would be opportunities to explore many different fields of history research and learn from some of the leading historians within their respective fields. Enjoying herself, she again excelled in her studies, making the Dean's List in each of her four years of study, and being awarded the Benarroch-Hazan Essay Prize in Sephardic Studies. That essay explored the livelihoods of Jewish doctors within the Christian kingdoms of Medieval Spain. She was fortunate to be among the first group of students to participate in 'Advancing York U', a mentorship and skills-building programme that pairs outstanding students with successful York alumni.

At the time, Cassandra had ambitions of becoming a lawyer, and she was paired with a female senior counsel lawyer based in the GTA. After being exposed to this mentoring, which involved two meetings each month for an academic year, Cassandra was even more convinced she should become a lawyer.

However, while still planning to be a lawyer, Cassandra was also getting more exposure to history-related work. During her last two undergraduate years, she got involved with museum projects, and one course she had taken in her final year, on public history, required its students to work with a museum. The Toronto Ward Museum was launched in 2015 and was still shaping its programmes, which were designed to help document the history of immigration and capture the lived experiences of individuals in the diverse populace of Greater Toronto. Cassandra helped to develop the Museum's podcast series 'The Toronto Ward Museum In Conversation', serving as host, producer, editor, and researcher. She also worked on a podcast interview project with the executive director of the Sikh Heritage Museum of Canada. She graduated in 2022 with her B.A. (Hons) in History, Magna Cum Laude, and as a member of the Dean's Honour Roll.

Upon graduation from York, Cassandra worked as an administrative assistant at a large cardiac clinic while planning to study for the LSAT in preparation for applying to law schools. And as with so many of us, this early work experience led her to rethink what she truly wanted to pursue in life. For Cassandra, it was something that would involve her in historical studies. When she left the cardiac clinic to work for a company that had a contract with the University of Toronto to provide services in support of students with accommodation and accessibility needs, she found the academic environment very much to her liking and decided she should return to university to pursue her master's in history.

In October 2023, Cassandra applied to the University of Edinburgh. Why Edinburgh? The University's history programme was highly ranked internationally, and she had always wanted a chance to experience life abroad beyond Canada. But above all, the History Department had the largest number of historians of any UK university. One morning, while commuting on the subway, she received an email informing her that she was accepted. It is very hard to give expression to delirious delight when on a crowded subway. She will never forget that moment!

In readiness for Edinburgh, Cassandra took on an interesting job as a front desk agent for a casino hotel resort out by the Woodbine racetrack. At the time, it served its purpose: she was able to go to Edinburgh in September 2024.

At Edinburgh, Cassandra opted for the taught M.Sc. programme. Her dissertation was entitled "It's All Fun and Games Until It's Propaganda: An Analysis of Third Reich-Era Games in Relation to the Dissemination of National Socialist Youth Propaganda". This involved an examination of how seemingly innocuous games aided in integrating and spreading the core ideologies of National Socialism. She focused on two board games and one card game. Two of these were invented before the Second World War, and the other after its onset. Her dissertation was the first-ever examination, in English, of two of the three games. She is hoping to get it published.

Outside of her studies at Edinburgh, Cassandra had a part-time job at the Sheraton Grand Hotel & Spa in Edinburgh. This would also prove helpful in securing her current job. And she was active in University committee work. All 49,000 students at Edinburgh are members of the Edinburgh University Students Association (EUSA). However, each school elects its own representative to the governing body of the EUSA. Cassandra was elected by her peers and became the Postgraduate Taught School Representative of the School of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA). This involved both in-person and virtual meetings to deal with issues affecting both students and staff, and meetings with groups within HCA on their specific concerns. Cassandra also represented HCA on the University's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee – for which, fortunately, there were few issues. She was also selected by the University to serve as a member of the University Collections Advisory Committee with respect to the University's galleries, museums, and collections. Within HCA, Cassandra was appointed a member of HCA's Board of Studies, which discussed proposals for course revisions, inclusions, programme restructuring, and related matters. The initiative that gave her greatest pleasure, though, was the role she played in establishing a breakfast club to operate two days a week in HCA during the spring season. Cassandra had worked with a Vice-President of EUSA on this initiative, ensuring it was open to all students.

After graduating from Edinburgh, Cassandra moved to England to stay in the house once owned by her great-grandfather in Nottingham. From that base, she took side trips to such places as Lincoln, where she was able to see one of the four original surviving copies of the Magna Carta of 1215. And of course, while at Edinburgh, she took advantage of travelling across Europe, going wherever the airline would take her for next to nothing. Aside from the month exploring Europe at the end of her studies, among the most memorable trips were those to Bulgaria, Poland, and Paris. Then it was back to Toronto, to look after those who are travelling here! Not surprisingly, she has very fond memories of Scotland and looks forward to returning before long - perhaps one day completing a Ph.D. in history.



Kassandra Mann, steeped in history at the ancient Roman theatre of Philippopolis, in Plovdiv, Bulgaria

Books

Benbecula: Unsettling and Mesmerizing

by Toni McGregor

Graeme Macrae Burnet, *Benbecula* (Windsor, Ontario, Biblioasis, 2025, 170 pp., ppbk.), Cdn \$22.95. (Also available in hardback, published by Polygon, UK, in 2025.)

When Simon, our Editor, broached the possibility of me (me?) writing a book review, I thought there were two or three rather good candidate books I had read recently. But then I thought I should attempt to find a Scottish writer. And that is how I collided with *Benbecula*.

It's a wee book which packs far more than its size would suggest.

In 2021, the independent Scottish publisher, Polygon, launched the Darkland Tales, a series of novellas, by Scottish authors, which explore moments in Scottish history through a 21st century lens. *Benbecula* is one of these.

Scottish author Burnet has written a fictionalized historical crime thriller which is as unsettling as it is mesmerizing. Set in Benbecula in the 19th century, it takes its premise from an 1857 triple murder by one Angus Macphee. Told, five years later, in the voice of his brother, Malcolm, it is the tale of a young man's slow descent into madness and murder.

Angus is one of four siblings who, with their parents, eke out a living harvesting kelp and growing potatoes. We don't ever know – who can ever know – what triggers Angus' descent into madness, but his behaviour becomes increasingly worrisome and aggressive. He is tormented, berated or simply avoided by his fellow islanders. He murders his father, mother and an aunt who lives in a small hut on their patch of land. He runs away, but is hunted, captured and sent to the mainland to be tried for his crimes.

Earlier in the book, before the murders, the possibility of institutionalizing Angus crops up. We learn that the paltry income the family earns puts them just above the poverty line and creates the typical bureaucratic catch 22 that would have allowed them to do something for Angus. I almost wrote "...allowed them to help Angus", but help for mental illness was not in 19th century vocabulary. Their income put them just above the threshold for parish-funded institutionalization.

Benbecula captures the ruthlessly hard life of crofters in the Outer Hebrides at the time and the seeming pointlessness of "sowing a bushel of wheat in order to harvest a bushel of wheat". But idleness was not an option – hard work was a measure of a man's worth. Burnet portrays a starkly depressing depiction of island life. There's no romanticism here.

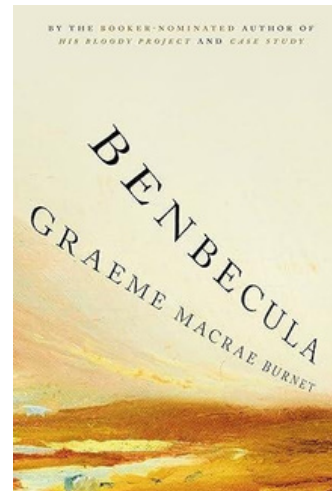
As the only surviving family member to remain on the island after the murders, Malcolm is ostracized by the islanders and lives on whisky and memories. Two other siblings, John and Marion, leave the island ... or do they? Malcolm abandons any attempt at work and lives alone in the family home. A neighbour keeps an eye out for him, but this leads Malcolm to narrate some sexual motives that may or may not be true. And what else of Malcolm's memories are true? Was Angus the only family member to commit a crime? Is Malcolm descending into madness simply because he lives with only his thoughts and memories, or is incest at the root of this family's dysfunction?

We are left questioning anyone and everyone's sanity on Benbecula.

Having read a few contemporary Scottish authors, among them Alasdair Gray, Irvine Welsh, Douglas Stuart and now, Graeme Macrae Burnet, I think their common ground is gritty, dark and disturbing ... weather-related maybe?

Burnet ends his tale with an extensive examination of the historical records he used to follow Angus' life, capture, trial and subsequent sentence to an asylum for the criminally insane. The legal defence of insanity was recognized in Scottish courts in 1843 – surprisingly early I thought, but not with any aim to help and treat the insane. Angus was cruelly incarcerated for the rest of his days.

Burnet is hailed as one of Scotland's best contemporary authors. *Benbecula* was shortlisted for the 2026 Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, it was longlisted for the 2026 Crime Writers Association Historical Dagger Award, and for the 2025 Highland Book Prize, and was a *Globe* 100 Best Book of 2025. As others have observed, the book appeals to a select audience. As for me, well ... I didnae love this book, but I'd recommend the read.



Professor Frank Cogliano's New Books

by Simon Miles

When Frank Cogliano, Professor of American History at Edinburgh, was in Toronto in early April to attend a student information session, he happened to mention that there is now a paperback version available of his book that he introduced us to at our Annual Dinner in 2025: *A Revolutionary Friendship: Washington, Jefferson, and the American Republic*. The book was very well received at the Dinner and we sold lots of copies that night. So we thought that you should be aware of the paperback edition that is now available. Like the hardcover, it is published by Harvard University Press. It runs to 368 pages. The cost is US\$24.95. The ISBN: 9780674304994.

And for those of you who have already read *A Revolutionary Friendship*, Frank has a new book coming out in June on Jefferson. This is titled *Thomas Jefferson Survives: American Independence in His Time and Ours*. Frank co-authored this book with Peter S. Onuf, who is the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation Professor Emeritus at the University of Virginia. It runs to 256 pages and is published by Norton Liveright. The cost is US\$29.99. The ISBN: 978-1-324-09807-2.

The two authors are recognized as the two leading authorities on this much-studied political giant. Indeed, just after I had talked with Frank in April, I happened to be watching Lucy Worsley's *The American Revolution* on PBS, and who is her opening expert on the American Constitution? Yes, Frank!

Frank kindly gave us a glance at the covers in the photo here.

If you would like to learn more about these books, check the following links:

For *A Revolutionary Friendship* go to:
<https://www.hup.harvard.edu/books/9780674304994>

And for *Thomas Jefferson Survives* go to:
<https://www.norton.com/books/9781324098072>



Treasurer's Report

Our Treasurer reports that EDUCT's accounts, as of 31 May 2026, show a balance of \$16,405.

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Jean Grier and Mary Bownes, Private Giving, Public Good: The Impact of Philanthropy at the University of Edinburgh, (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2014), 224 pp., £30.

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For a review of the book, see EDUCT News, September 2014, p.19.



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EDUCT wishes to acknowledge the generosity of alumni and friends of the
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We extend our gratitude to each of them. If you are a member of the Carlyle
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Are you on our list?

We know of over 240 alumni in the Toronto area. As of 31
May 2026, we have 166 members, most of whom are in the
Toronto area. If you would be interested in joining EDUCT,
please do not hesitate to contact the EDUCT President or
the Club Treasurer.

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