The Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club

Keeping the Memory Alive: Building the Scott Club Website

*A talk given on Tuesday 2nd November 2026 by **Lee A. Simpson** to members of the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club in Edinburgh.*

Back in 1995 a supernatural experience occurred which put an old copy of *Peveril of the Peak* in my hand. I took it as a sign and attempted to read it. It was bloody difficult, and it took many attempts to grapple with each paragraph until I got the gist of the language. This was made especially trying, being an uneducated, dim-wit from a broken-family in Salford. But I wasn't going to give in…. as it was just the medicine needed to give substance to this vacuous mind.

A few years later Fate also played a hand in bringing me to Edinburgh. Then, having read a few more Scott novels I was keen to find a Scott Club. Thankfully the Writers' Museum pointed me in the direction of a chap called Elgin in Peebles.

Before long I was attending the Annual Dinner. A stately affair held in the Balmoral (The N.B. or North British as it was still referred to). It felt like I was at one of the last, great Victorian Dinners. Someone mentioned while I listened to Tom Fleming that if the Queen Mother died he would have to cut his lecture short as he was the only one qualified to announce the news to the nation! I felt lost. But, the membership was considerate and I was seated next to the Club Secretary to whom I happened to mention that I had been searching local second-hand book-shops in the hope of completing my collection of Waverley Novels.

That news must have reached Fraser Elgin, the Treasurer, as within a few weeks I received a letter inviting me to lunch at this very club (the New Club) with an offer to assist me. Of course, I promptly ignore it, imagining that he was an Earl or such like….

The following year the routine letter for my subscription arrived and I returned it along with a small donation.. and back came another letter again requesting the meeting. You must remember that back then the Scott Club had only recently begun running regular lectures… Just 1 a year… and somehow I hadn't bumped into him by that point.

We arranged to meet in June 2001. And within minutes he was asking me to take over his role as the Treasurer. Being in his 80s he was desperate to get shot of the position. Really desperate. I thought, he doesn't know me from Adam. I could be some crook from Salford and this guy needs time to reconsider. So, I gave him some cock-and-bull story that I needed to go to America with work or such like.. and would only think about it if circumstances changed.

Within a few months, I realized I couldn't shake the guy off and so accepted, and was fast-tracked onto the Club Council. For the next few years, I quietly listened and learned about the workings of the Club. I also took up position as co-Editor of the Annual Bulletin with Fraser, and worked with him to expand the range of events for the Club programme.

I tried to boost membership with a flimsy leaflet that I circulated to all the tourist sites.. It yielded quite a few new members.

At that time, I must have had a mid-life crisis as I took the brave step of giving up my highly paid job (yet exceptionally stressful job in IT) to become a cabaret singer.. and had built myself a website to attract customers. I proposed the idea of a website to the Club and this was the result.

In 2005 the Club had its first website. It was rather simple. But, it included details of Club events, had contact information and a list of Presidents.



The image has been taken from the Internet Archive, though it hasn't rendered the background pattern correctly, I think you get the idea.

The font is Cloister Black. I had seen it used in Scott Novels as the header to new chapters. The oval image was taken from a copy of our Annual Bulletin. It shows a "Cut silhouette" taken of Sir Walter and his dog Spice by Augustin ***Edouart*** *in 1831. The design had been used since 1995 on the cover of our printed Bulletins after being chosen by Patricia Maxwell-Scott and Fraser Elgin. For years I had had correspondence with various galleries and was unable to trace the owner of the work… But recently I have discovered that it was published in a book called Ancestors in Silhouette (1921) by E. Nevill Jackson. It seems that the reason I was struggling to trace the owners is because it is actually 2 separate images taken from the same page in that book.*

….I must add… that over the last 20 years I've morphed from being a Cabaret Singer into a Wedding Singer and then a Wedding DJ and now also a Wedding and Business Photographer… and as I only really have to work weekends I have had plenty of time to raise my kids and devote thousands of hours to building the Scott Club website.

Back in early 2000s Fraser Elgin moved house and while in the process of clearing up he discovered a box of old Reel-to-Reel audio tapes and he asked me if I'd like to look at them. I couldn't believe what he had given me. It turned out that back in the 1960s the Club recorded the main Speaker at the Annual Dinner so that their talks could be transcribed for the Bulletin….. and in that very box were the recordings of some really big names including Harold Macmillan. I just had to get them digitized.

Before long I had some of them available on CD (at least the ones that I could identify as not all were labelled)… and made them available for Club members to purchase for a small donation to funds.

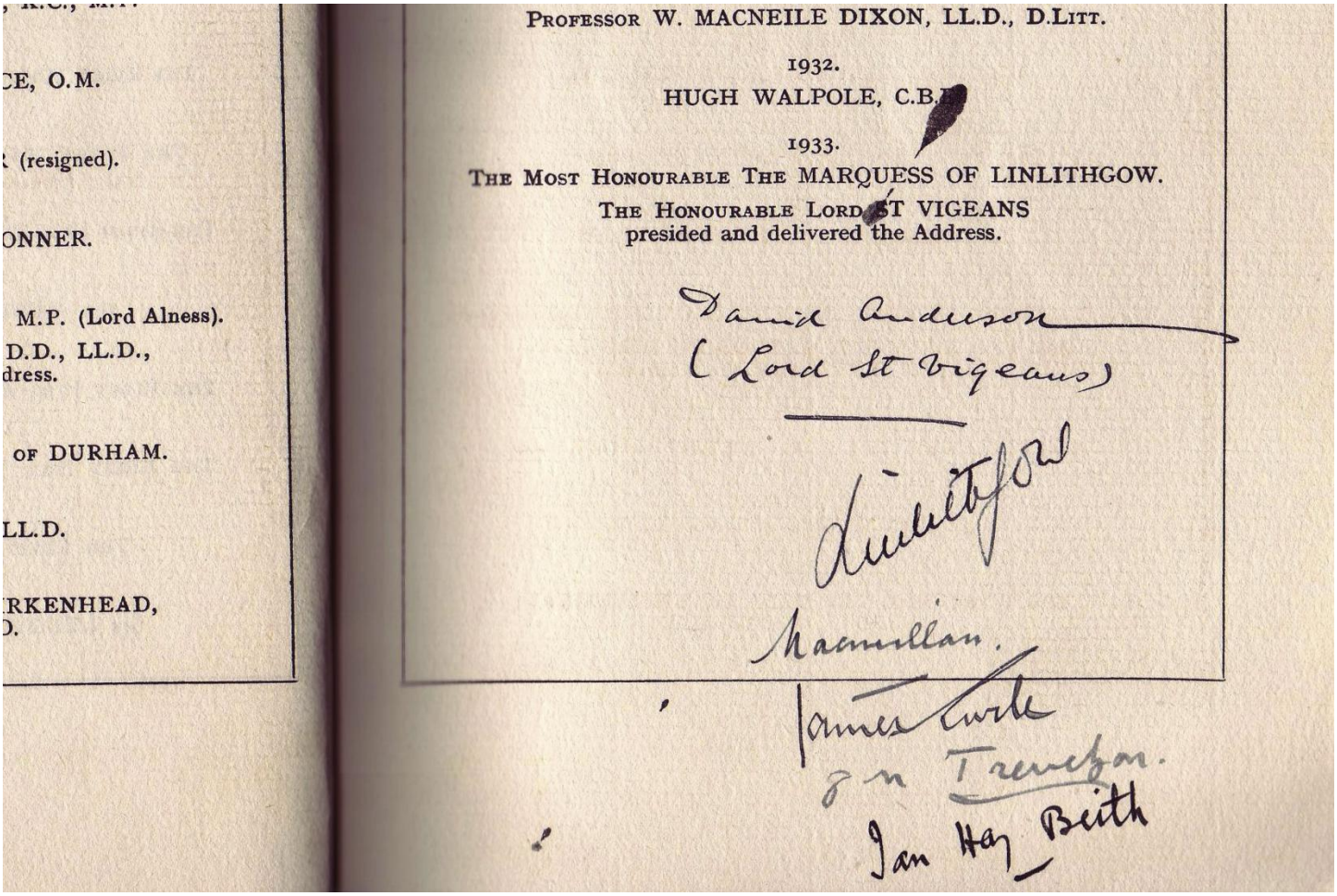
I eventually found a way to get some of them online on the Presidents page. But, that made me realize that if I had the recording…… it would also be best to include the actual transcripts of their addresses too. And so I set about scanning pages and pages of bulletins using some archaic Optical Character Recognition Software. It was a really slow process. As I had to copy just a few paragraphs of text at a time and paste them into a new document… all the while checking them for errors and spelling mistakes. Each one would take the best part of day.

Nonetheless the project was underway and soon the website had not only the audio recording of John Buchan, Harold Macmillan, Lady Antonia Fraser, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Ian Grimble, the Duke Of Buccleuch, Allan Massie, Edwin Morgan, Dorothy Dunnett and Archie Turnbull… it also had the text of their talks too.



What you can see here is the list of Presidents of the Club.. The Bold Blue text had links to the ones I had digitized.

And so I continued when time permitted to digitize other Presidential Addresses:



CE, O.M.

(resigned).

ONNER.

M.P. (Lord Alness).
D.D., LL.D.,
dress.

OF DURHAM.

LL.D.

RKENHEAD,
D.

PROFESSOR W. MACNEILE DIXON, LL.D., D.LITT.

1932.

HUGH WALPOLE, C.B.E.

1933.

THE MOST HONOURABLE THE MARQUESS OF LINLITHGOW.

THE HONOURABLE LORD ST VIGEANS
presided and delivered the Address.

David Anderson
(Lord St Vigeans)

Linlithgow

Macmillan.

James Curle

G M Trevelyan.

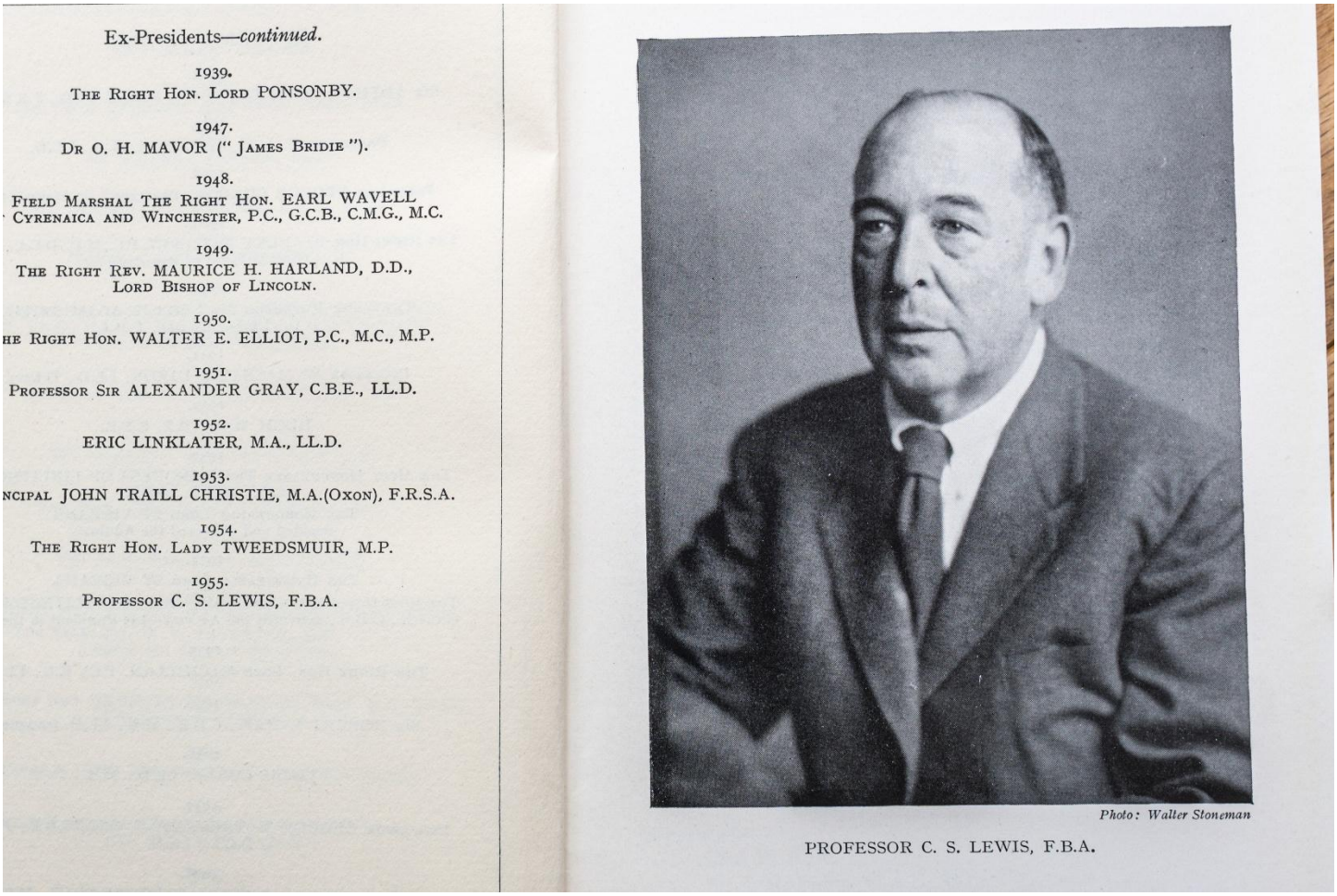
Ian Hay Beith

Whilst scanning a copy of the 1934 Bulletin I noticed some rather interesting signatures.

They are of:

- David Anderson (Lord St. Vigeans) who gave the address in 1933, & became president in 1934, when the Marquess of Linlithgow made the address.
- Macmillan is the Right Hon. Lord Macmillan who became president in 1935,
- James Curle became president in 1936,
- Professor George Trevelyan in 1937
- And Major General John Hay Beith (the popular writer who used the pseudonym Ian Hay) became president in 1938.

I also copied the photographs (where available) from the Bulletins and placed them next to the text. It wasn't long after adding this image that I received a telephone call from one of C.S. Lewis' biographers.



Ex-Presidents—*continued.*

1939.
THE RIGHT HON. LORD PONSONBY.

1947.
DR O. H. MAVOR ("JAMES BRIDIE").

1948.
FIELD MARSHAL THE RIGHT HON. EARL WAVELL
CYRENAICA AND WINCHESTER, P.C., G.C.B., C.M.G., M.C.

1949.
THE RIGHT REV. MAURICE H. HARLAND, D.D.,
LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN.

1950.
HE RIGHT HON. WALTER E. ELLIOT, P.C., M.C., M.P.

1951.
PROFESSOR SIR ALEXANDER GRAY, C.B.E., LL.D.

1952.
ERIC LINKLATER, M.A., LL.D.

1953.
NCIPAL JOHN TRAILL CHRISTIE, M.A.(OXON), F.R.S.A.

1954.
THE RIGHT HON. LADY TWEEDSMUIR, M.P.

1955.
PROFESSOR C. S. LEWIS, F.B.A.

Photo: Walter Stoneman

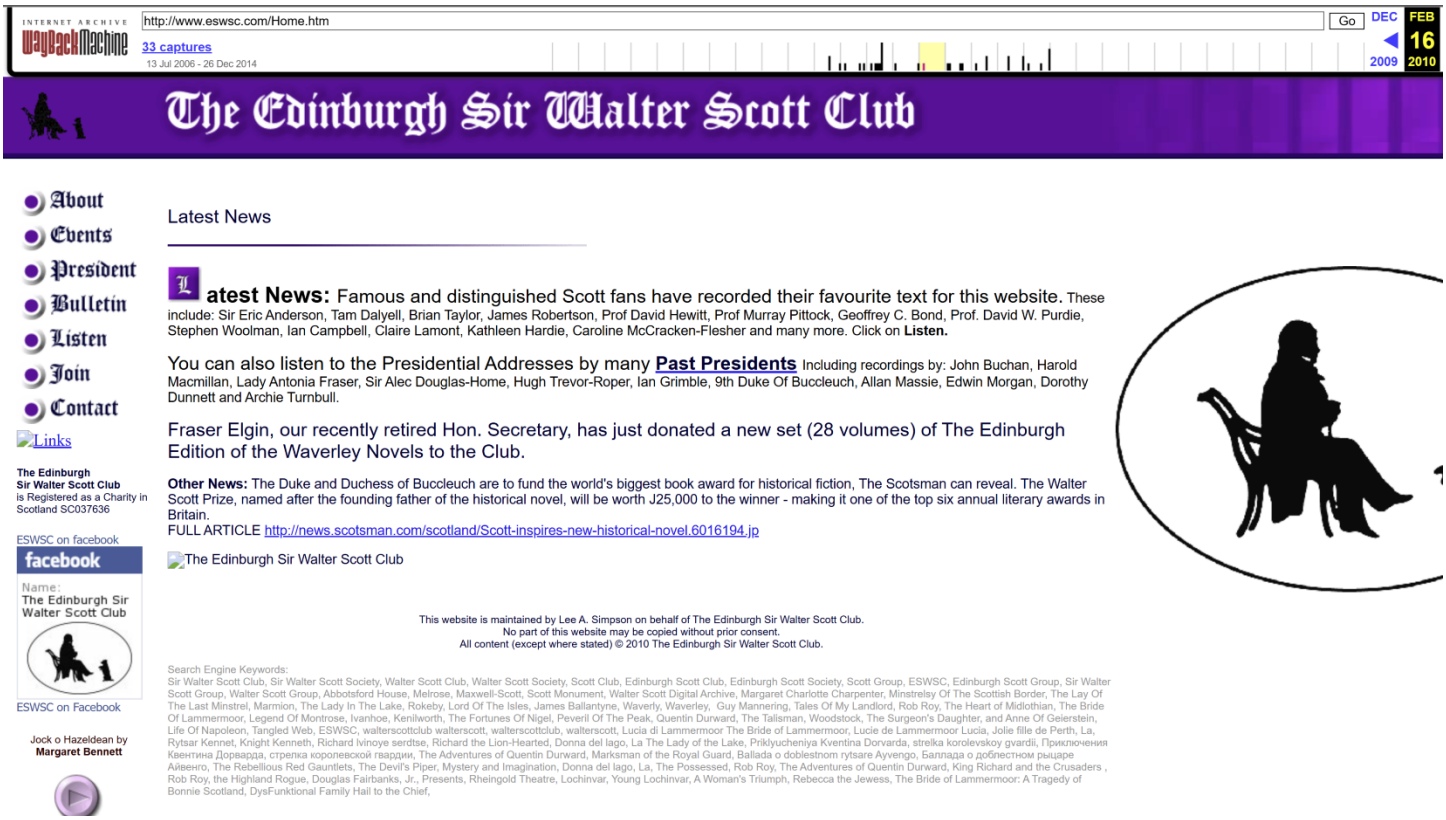
PROFESSOR C. S. LEWIS, F.B.A.

The chap had never seen it before and wanted help in tracking it down. It turned out to have been commission by the National Portrait Gallery of London and is credited to Walter Stoneman. I was also able to inform the C.S Lewis Society as they had never seen it before or even read his speech to our Club either.

I never completed the project to digitize all the Presidential Addresses at the time… but at least I had started the ball rolling.

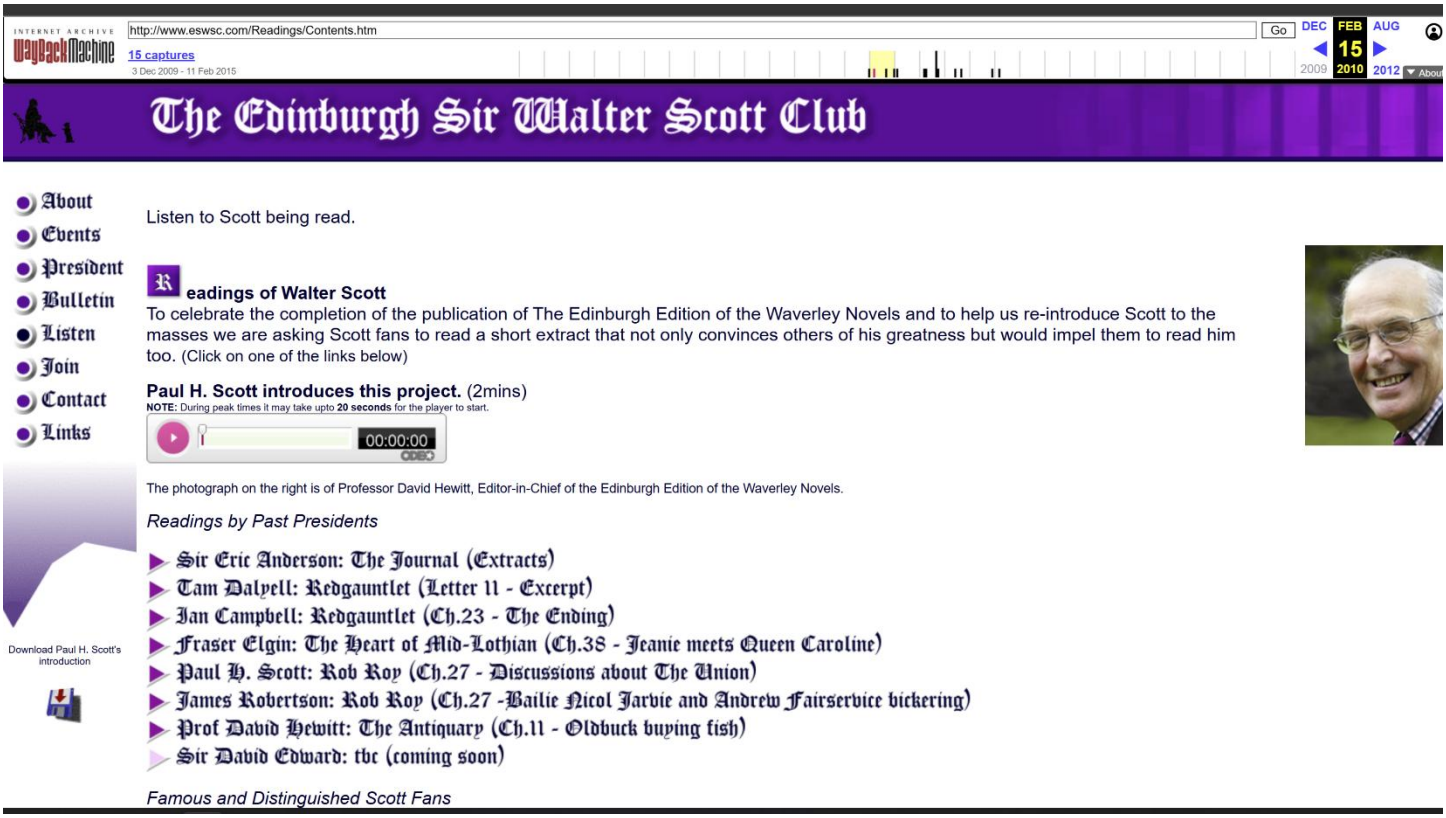
Readings Project:

At the end of 2009 Prof. David Hewitt announced the completion of the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels and so I thought it would be a good idea to run around the country recording folk reciting their favourite passages of Scott text… and thus the Reading project was launched… Along with a revamped website (with horrible colours)



This was a really interesting project. I recorded the likes of James Robertson, Prof. Ian Campbell, Paul Henderson Scott, Prof. Claire Lamont and Prof. Murray Pittock. Most were straight forward.
But poor Tam Dalyell slurred his speech so much, and left huge gaps in-between each word that it took a few hours just to trim all the empty spaces to make it have some pace.

Imitate Tam… In… the… three…. Years…. 2003…. To…. 2006…. When…., as…. Elected…. Rector…..
Have a listen to it… even after the edit it still sounds slow! Poor Tam.



So, onto the website each recording would go and next to each one I would include pages from the actual book (under license from Edinburgh University Press) so that folk could read along as they listened….. and an image of an engraving of a scene from the book courtesy Walter Scott Digital Archive Image Collection was included too.

This is what the page from the website looks like today.
https://www.walterscottclub.com/readings

This is what the page from the website looks like today.
I have removed the Engraved images and use artificial intelligence to re-create more closely the scenes being read, because often the engraved images didn't always match the text.

Our President in 1980/81 was:

W.E.K. Anderson

He proposed the Toast to Sir Walter at our 73rd Annual Dinner on Friday 6th March 1981 in The North British Hotel

Download the **[transcript]** or read the **[bulletin]**

Summary of the Speech:

Sir Eric Anderson's address is structured around three compelling reasons for continuing to read Sir Walter Scott: **Scott as a novelist**, **Scott as a Scot**, and **Scott the man**. It is a sophisticated, often humorous, and deeply insightful tribute.

1. Scott as a Novelist
   - Anderson resists a literary analysis of Scott's novels, noting that others before him have done this ably, and citing a request for brevity.
   - Nevertheless, he affirms Scott's greatness as a novelist: free from literary rules, embracing a broad stylistic spectrum from Fielding to Austen.
   - He praises Scott's storytelling, describing his work as sane, commonsensical, and resonant with a wide vision of life.
   - Scott's prose—especially in his Scottish characters—is compared to Chaucer and Shakespeare for its muscularity and music.

2. Scott as a Scot
   - Scott's Scottish identity is key. He was proud of his Berwickshire burr and his use of "Scotch" as a vigorous, authentic language.
   - Anecdotes include his miswritings of "date" and "debt" due to pronunciation, and his substitution of "Perils" for "pearls" when describing Maltese jewellery.
   - His use of Scots is not decorative but natural and effective—never forced, unlike the "Kailyard" or "Lallans" writers.
   - Anderson describes the wide-reaching cultural effect of *The Lady of the Lake* and Scott's influence on European perceptions of Scotland, including Parisian fashion.
   - The 1822 visit of George IV to Scotland, orchestrated by Scott, made



Image Source: Eton College

Subsidiary Toasts

After the toast to The Queen had been honoured, the Chairman proposed "The City of Edinburgh", to which the Rt. Hon. Tom Morgan, Lord Provost of the City of

The reactions from living descendants of those whose addresses are featured has been touching….

Lord Anderson of Ipswich, Sir Eric Anderson's father, was so delighted that he told me how he had alerted his mother Poppy and his sister Kate to the fact that they could once more enjoy listening to and reading the paper's that his father had given to the Club. Commenting: "*It is wonderful to think that they are now digitised and available to readers all over the world.*"

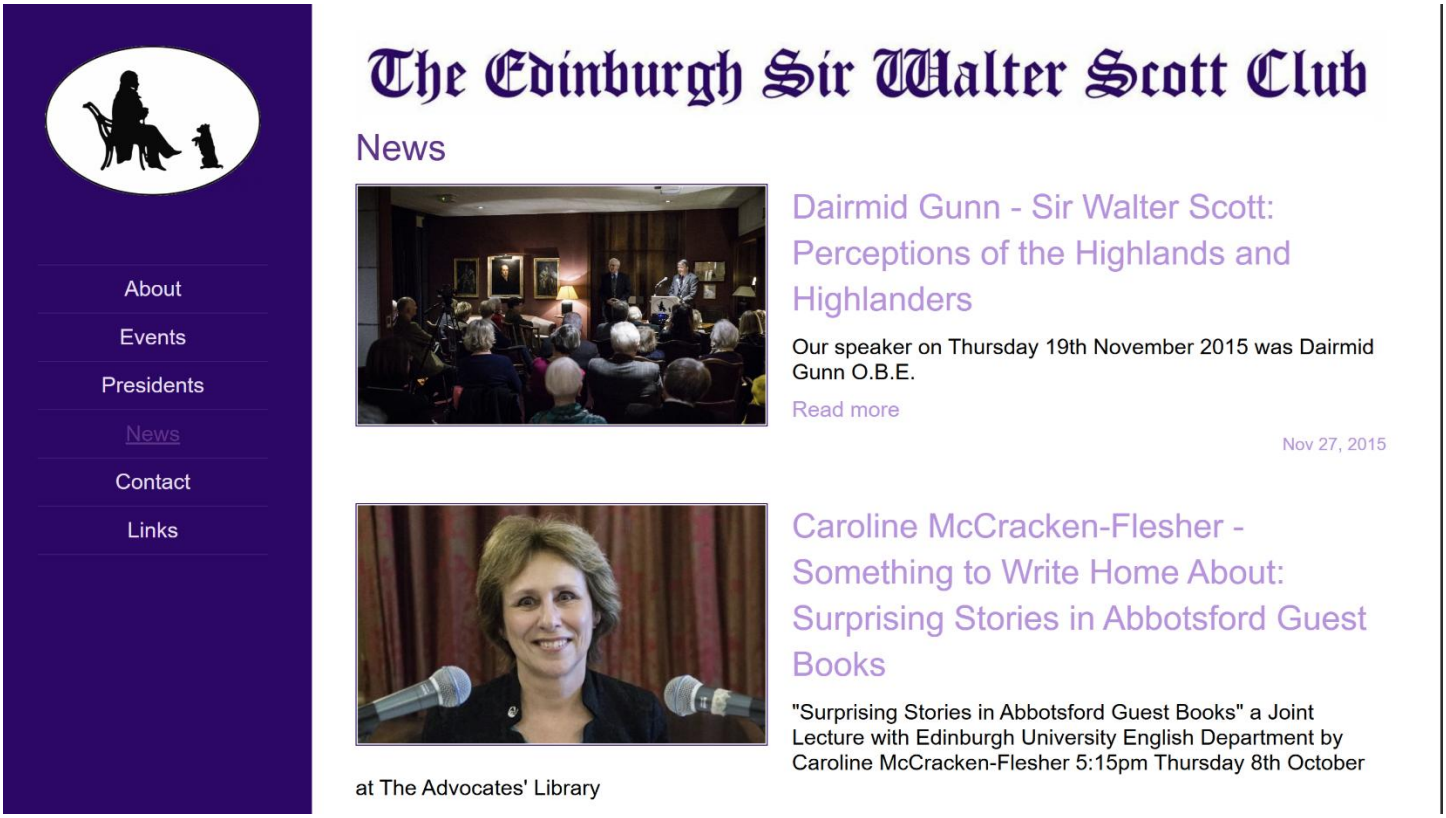
Incidentally, I have recently re-launched this project and you are all welcome to record some text for the website. I have a home studio built just for that purpose. Just complete the form the Reading Page on the website to submit your recording or to request help doing it.

And so, I was beginning to feel pretty smug that the Club now had some of the archive materials online.

But then in 2014 disaster struck. The company that hosted the website vanished! Overnight the website disappeared and so did all the content. Thankfully as you have seen I had been backing up each page to the Internet Archive… (and this is where these image of the old websites have come from) and so I laboriously attempted to rebuild it by copying the text from that back-up.… It took absolutely ages, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the old site wasn't actually compatible with smart phones, whereas the new one would be.

And so, with renewed determination I continued re-building the website.
It would take time before I could get it back to as it was. And for many years the Readings project was actually missing from the new website.

In 2013 we killed off the printed bulletin. To be honest it was an unwanted labour of love. We couldn't even give it away. The events being published in it were almost a year old at the time of print and thus completely out of mind… Then I realized that it'd be easier if they were just included on the website as well.. and henceforward a web-log with events was created.



This also became the time when I started videoing the events.

And so the website continued to grow and from 2014 as I videoed every Club lecture… and created a blog page for each one. These proved to be really popular and have helped to grow the reach of the Club internationally. The audience isn't huge. Most videos only have between 200 and 500 views.. (and only a handful of people actually watch them all the way through)… But there are some exceptions. Hew Strachan's talk has had 6,000 views and Jenni Calder's on *Reading Waverley* has had almost 4,000 views.
If anything they help to keep the Club alive for members who can't attend anymore.
I recently received this rather pleasant email from former Council member Ronnie Renton:

"The sheer range of information is amazing and you have captured pretty well everything the Club has done. For me the marvellous thing is to be able to see, hear and read the lectures that I can no longer attend. Of course I miss the company but I still feel very much part of the Club"

I am so glad that those who for whatever reason can't be here in person still feel part of the Club.

Not one to sit around being bored… in August 2019 (long before lockdown) I had the crazy notion that I would photograph all 5,000 pages of the Club's annual bulletins and minute books dating back to 1894.



Years earlier Fraser had given me the Club collection of Bulletins to look after… but I had noticed loads of gaps… There were over 30 editions missing. And so over the course of many years, I had been tracking down and buying the ones I needed. And as only 2 were then missing I thought it was time. It was no small undertaking and took me over 2 months to photograph every single page.

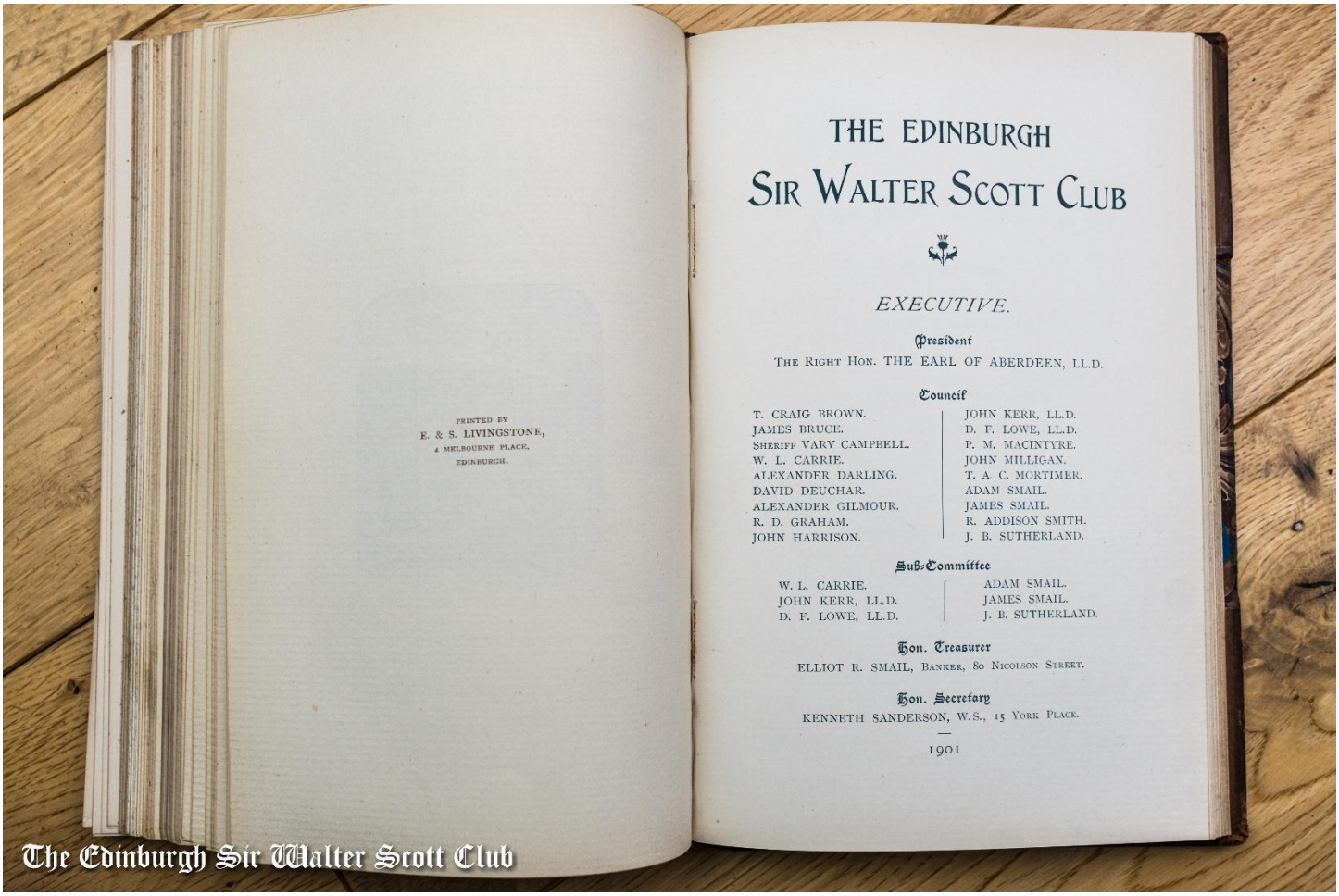
Then each set of images was uploaded to Flickr and linked to the website. Not the best solution, but at least folk could now easily access the text of a past event or an academic paper if required.

https://www.flickr.com/photos/eswsc/

This is where things really starting to get interesting. Now I had a huge dataset.

I've been on the Council myself for over 25 years and during that time I've had many requests to add information to the website. Sometimes items are included immediately, others times I've been known to take years to action the ideas of other committee members. Mainly because they may not have been urgent or I simply didn't consult my list of jobs to do frequently enough.

Anyway, one of those recommended tasks was to create a page dedicated to Council Members themselves – the unsung heroes who have kept the Club alive over the years.



Now, with the photographs of these Bulletins I could easily see when someone joined and when they left the committee… and so I set about typing up everyone's name and made a list of the time each one spent on **Council.** It turned out that in these 132 years that over 300 people have been on council. And here is that data:

https://www.walterscottclub.com/council

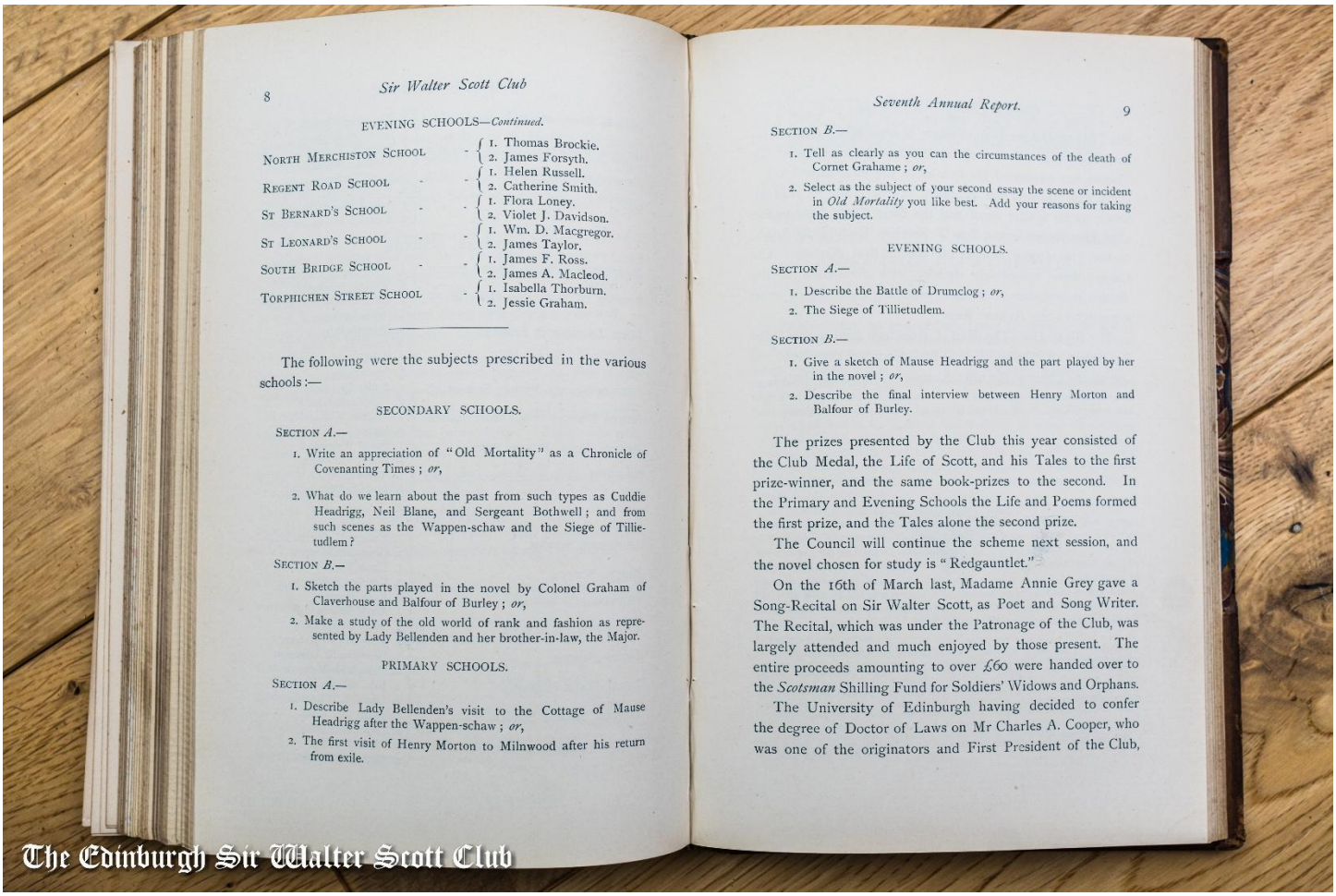
I'd credited Kenneth Sanderson with 38 years in Council… but it would been 45 if I'd included the war years. This is just the top of the list – you can see two columns.

On the same page you can also see who has held the position of Chairperson. Note how this role is only shown from 1979… That was because prior to that date the President was effectively the Chairperson.
Back then the AGM was actually held in the middle of the Annual Dinner! All that changed when Fraser Elgin joined council. The AGM was moved to the summer excursion and from then on Council elected one of their own to fill the role.

And there is also a list of the honorary Secretaries.

In 132 years there have only been 6 Treasurers… so that is almost 25 years a piece. Elliot Smail kept the position for 32 years… more if including the war years. Maybe I ought to aim for 40 years – though, happy for anyone to take over at any time… Just make yourself known. Though please understand if you do wish to take over it is a long-term position!

But back to the Bulletins….



8 *Sir Walter Scott Club*

EVENING SCHOOLS—*Continued.*

North Merchiston School	1. Thomas Brockie. 2. James Forsyth.
Regent Road School	1. Helen Russell. 2. Catherine Smith.
St Bernard's School	1. Flora Loney. 2. Violet J. Davidson.
St Leonard's School	1. Wm. D. Macgregor. 2. James Taylor.
South Bridge School	1. James F. Ross. 2. James A. Macleod.
Torphichen Street School	1. Isabella Thorburn. 2. Jessie Graham.

The following were the subjects prescribed in the various schools:—

SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

SECTION *A.*—

1. Write an appreciation of "Old Mortality" as a Chronicle of Covenanting Times; *or*,
2. What do we learn about the past from such types as Cuddie Headrigg, Neil Blane, and Sergeant Bothwell; and from such scenes as the Wappen-schaw and the Siege of Tillietudlem?

SECTION *B.*—

1. Sketch the parts played in the novel by Colonel Graham of Claverhouse and Balfour of Burley; *or*,
2. Make a study of the old world of rank and fashion as represented by Lady Bellenden and her brother-in-law, the Major.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

SECTION *A.*—

1. Describe Lady Bellenden's visit to the Cottage of Mause Headrigg after the Wappen-schaw; *or*,
2. The first visit of Henry Morton to Milnwood after his return from exile.

Seventh Annual Report. 9

SECTION *B.*—

1. Tell as clearly as you can the circumstances of the death of Cornet Grahame; *or*,
2. Select as the subject of your second essay the scene or incident in *Old Mortality* you like best. Add your reasons for taking the subject.

EVENING SCHOOLS.

SECTION *A.*—

1. Describe the Battle of Drumclog; *or*,
2. The Siege of Tillietudlem.

SECTION *B.*—

1. Give a sketch of Mause Headrigg and the part played by her in the novel; *or*,
2. Describe the final interview between Henry Morton and Balfour of Burley.

The prizes presented by the Club this year consisted of the Club Medal, the Life of Scott, and his Tales to the first prize-winner, and the same book-prizes to the second. In the Primary and Evening Schools the Life and Poems formed the first prize, and the Tales alone the second prize.

The Council will continue the scheme next session, and the novel chosen for study is "Redgauntlet."

On the 16th of March last, Madame Annie Grey gave a Song-Recital on Sir Walter Scott, as Poet and Song Writer. The Recital, which was under the Patronage of the Club, was largely attended and much enjoyed by those present. The entire proceeds amounting to over £60 were handed over to the *Scotsman* Shilling Fund for Soldiers' Widows and Orphans.

The University of Edinburgh having decided to confer the degree of Doctor of Laws on Mr Charles A. Cooper, who was one of the originators and First President of the Club,

The Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club

The next thing that is included is some of the salient points from the Annual Reports. Here you can see the details of the **Essay Prize** and the winners and the Essay Questions.

https://www.walterscottclub.com/the-essay-competition

This is really fascinating and so I added a new section to the website called Awards where you can read up about this at your leisure .. but in essence… the Annual Essay Competition was set-up in 1895 to encourage children to study the works of Sir Walter Scott. It was an amazing success and within 15 years over 7000 school children were reading the prescribed book and of those almost 5000 submitted an essay into the Competition each year -- and most of these were Primary School Children! Yes, Primary School Children.

The scheme was such a success than the Club actually went into debt with the costs of running it and providing the prizes (particularly the Solid Bronze Medal). But, luckily in 1908 an anonymous member donated £1000 which saved us from collapse – In today's money that is almost £150,000!! – Can you imagine someone that generous and so modest.

The Club went into debt again in 1921 so it was decided to stop issuing the Medal as a prize in order to cut costs. Instead a book was issued.

Not one to do things by half, I typed up all the Essay Questions so you can have a go at trying to answer some of them yourselves….
https://www.walterscottclub.com/essay-questions

It shows how many schools entered the Competition each year.

There are details on attempts to revive the prize…. And how that morphed into the Scottish Literary Studies Medal.

And there are some interesting statistics about which book was most featured and when used.

Achievements

Now I had all of the Bulletins digitized it was easy to read all the Annual Reports in them and to discover lots of random facts about the Club

I won't bore you will all of them, but here are a few.
Have a look at the About page for a link to the complete list.

https://www.walterscottclub.com/achievements

1912 a Bronze and Marble Tablet was erected by the Club in Contin Parish Church to the memory of William Laidlaw.

https://www.walterscottclub.com/blog/contin-parish-church

1926 Helped raise funds for an Indicator to go on Eildon Mid Hill

https://www.walterscottclub.com/blog/the-eildon-hills-indicator

And so for each of these Achievements I create a blog-page:
Here is another…

1927 We unveiled a Tablet on Sciennes Hill House to Commemorate the Meeting of Scott and Burns…

https://www.walterscottclub.com/blog/the-unveiling-of-a-tablet-in-sciennes-hill-house-to-commemorate-the-meeting-of-scott-and-burns

1953: Funded a plaque on Ballantyne's grave in Canongate Kirkyard..

https://www.walterscottclub.com/blog/the-ballantyne-plaque-in-canongate-kirkyard

Some discoveries were truly fascinating

In 1965 it was reported that Patricia Maxwell-Scott invited members to a Wine and Cheese party at Abbotsford.

I think the former Prime Minister Alec Douglas-Home must have thought it was a tradition, because in 1967 after he had given the Presidential Address he too invited the members of the Club to a Wine and Cheese Party to take place at The Hirsel during the summer. Needless to say the invitation was received with delight and on 2nd June that year almost 300 members and their friends enjoyed a glorious summer evening with poetry and

wine. Tom Fleming entranced the company with superb readings from Border Ballads and Sir Walter's lyrics. There followed an auction of volumes of Scott which had been presented by Mrs Patricia Maxwell Scott and signed by her and by Sir Alec.

I was then able to share that information and the audio recording of Sir Alex's Toast with his grandson Michael Home who commented*: Thank you for highlighting this charming recording of my grandfather's speech! It's always lovely to hear his voice. I know that Walter Scott, and the shared history and geography, were a real love of his.*

Can you imagine a Former Prime minister inviting Club members to a Summer party nowadays?!

The tradition did continue - in 1969 Francis Collinson (the musical director, BBC presenter and club Council Member) invited the Club to a Wine and Cheese party at The Ley, Innerleithen.

And in 1971 Patricia invited the Club once more to Abbotsford for the Summer.

There is one item that I discovered from the Annual Reports that I haven't as yet been able to include on the website… and that because it is a bit of a mystery and hasn't been completely solved. So I am hoping someone in this room can shed light on it.

Here is a report from the 1979 Annual Bulletin:

"The Chairman referred to the Presidential Address in 1972 by the late Robert Speaight in which he had announced that he proposed to leave to the club a snuff box which had belonged to Sir Walter Scott and which he had presented to John Gibson, Writer to the Signet, in 1832 only a few months before his death. It had come down as an heirloom to Robert Speaight who wished to leave it to the Club as a mark of the honour done to him that evening. Following upon his death his son announced that Mrs. Maxwell Scott had accepted it for permanent display at Abbotsford subject only to its appearance once a year at the Annual Dinner."

Sure enough, when I checked his Presidential Address he did indeed talk about a snuff-box once owned by Scott and inscribed to his solicitor John Gibson. The heirloom he said was gifted to him by Lady Rostrevor-Hamilton, symbolising Scott's gratitude and he said he would eventually offer it to our Club for safekeeping. It was noted that the inscription read: To John Gibson, W.S. from Sir Walter Scott Bart, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1832

So where was it? I contact Abbotsford



To my surprise they said it was donated to them in 2016 by the solicitors Shepherd and Wedderburn. Apparently it was found here in the New Club in the Room of permanent resident Ivor Guild. He was a partner in the firm and they had sent it to Abbotsford upon his death.

And there is another complication. Abbotsford has now consulted two Trustees with curatorial experience at National Museums Scotland. Their view is that the inscription may have been added at a later date. There are several possible explanations, including the possibility that it refers to Scott's son Walter rather than Sir Walter himself.

Could it be a fake? That has not yet been established. At present, there simply isn't enough evidence to be certain about the inscription or the box's full history.

Abbotsford is also trying to establish the position regarding ownership, so there are still questions to resolve.

I will continue investigating and, when I know more, I hope to publish the full story on the Club's website.

But before I do that, I wonder whether anyone here remembers Ivor Guild, knows anything about the snuff box, or recalls it appearing at one of our Annual Dinners.
If so, I would be delighted to hear from you afterwards.

So.

I made steady progress with the website. Keeping it up to date with blog pages of recent events.

You could access the old events by clicking on the link to the relevant bulletin photos.



And by that point I think I had around 50 blog pages with details of past events, and a page for every past president.

But then in October 2023 I met with another challenge. The website hosting company informed me that it was built on old technology and would need to be terminated within 6 months!

That would mean that the entire website (250 pages) would need rebuilding on a new platform using software that was alien to me. I just couldn't believe it. For the 2nd time I was faced with a mammoth task.

It took me 6 months of solid graft just to get the website looking like the old one…

I culled a lot of the blog pages and presidential pages. Instead I just had a list of past-president with a link to the flickr photos of the bulletin.

There was just no-way I could re-build all of it in 6 months. But I was happy that when the switch-over took place the Club still had a good online presence.

The ultimate challenge.

After the dust had settle after that ordeal…. I set myself the ultimate challenge: to digitize every page of the bulletins. I already had the photographs of the pages… All I needed to do now was scan all 5000 pages one by one and convert them into text documents. Create summaries and then post them on the website… and thus finally re-build pages dedicated to every past President.

I managed 3 per day…

https://www.walterscottclub.com/past-presidents

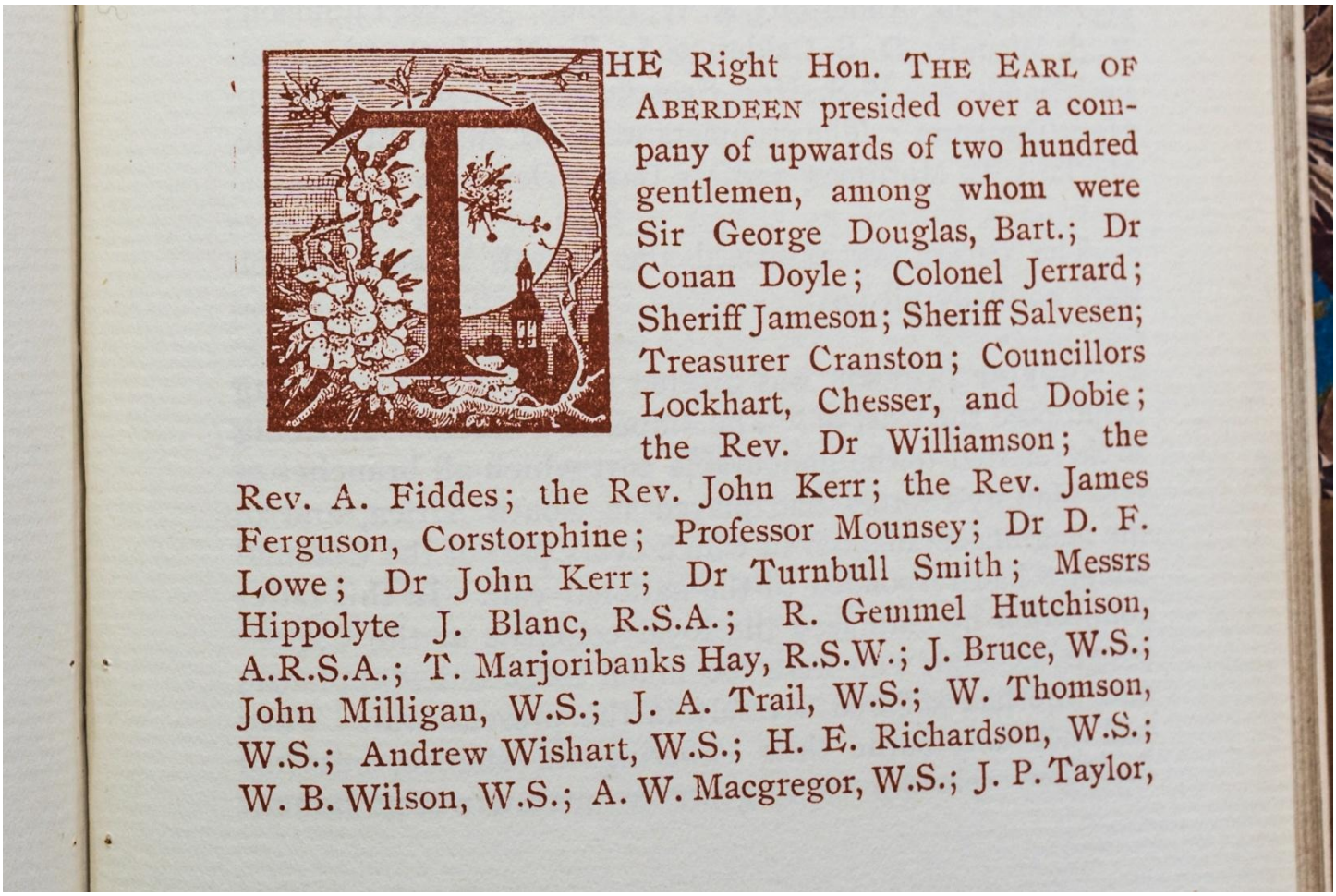
It took 3 months to do all Presidential addresses; 108 of them now have downloadable transcripts of their speeches. 13 have video and 18 have audio.

Of the past Events 132 now have transcripts, 80 have videos and 5 have audio recordings.

https://www.walterscottclub.com/events

What that list doesn't include is all the subsidiary Toasts given at the Annual Dinners. Of which there are many… and some are more interesting than the actually Presidential Addresses simply when you learn who was speaking.

Working my way through the Bulletins from 1894… I got to 1901, the year when the Earl of Aberdeen presided. I was excited to see a very special name appear in the list of attendees. (which I also have been including on the webpage).



THE Right Hon. THE EARL OF ABERDEEN presided over a company of upwards of two hundred gentlemen, among whom were Sir George Douglas, Bart.; Dr Conan Doyle; Colonel Jerrard; Sheriff Jameson; Sheriff Salvesen; Treasurer Cranston; Councillors Lockhart, Chesser, and Dobie; the Rev. Dr Williamson; the Rev. A. Fiddes; the Rev. John Kerr; the Rev. James Ferguson, Corstorphine; Professor Mounsey; Dr D. F. Lowe; Dr John Kerr; Dr Turnbull Smith; Messrs Hippolyte J. Blanc, R.S.A.; R. Gemmel Hutchison, A.R.S.A.; T. Marjoribanks Hay, R.S.W.; J. Bruce, W.S.; John Milligan, W.S.; J. A. Trail, W.S.; W. Thomson, W.S.; Andrew Wishart, W.S.; H. E. Richardson, W.S.; W. B. Wilson, W.S.; A. W. Macgregor, W.S.; J. P. Taylor,

Does anyone see the name in that page?

There were six Toasts at the 8th Annual Dinner on 6th December 1901… The Royal Toasts; The Imperial Forces; The Memory of Sir Walter Scott; Literature; The City of Edinburgh; and The Chairman.

What was even more exciting was that Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle gave the Reply to Literature…

I created a blog page especially for this one speech:

https://www.walterscottclub.com/blog/reply-to-the-toast-to-literature

It was a revelation to the Conan Doyle Estate, to the Friends and to the Conan Doyle Society. None of whom were aware of its existence.

Here are 2 quotes from that speech that I'd like to share:
"Literature is the huge mirror of life, reflecting all things material and spiritual."
"I recommend to every man... a literary retreat - a time when he may get away from the rush of life, and steady his mind and sober his judgment by a course of the classics."

So now there are almost 500 webpages… So many that I've had to miss some from the Talk… such as the *Young Lochinvar* Drama Workshop; the History of the Club; The lost audio recording of Margaret Bennett and Martyn Bennett from 1994…. , My research into all the other Scott Clubs from around the world; the Chronological Biography of Scott; or even the story about how "One Crowded Hour of Glorious Life" got misattributed to Scott……. … and yet, many more are pages are still to come.

I also have plans for a Gazetteer to include:

Public Houses associated with Sir Walter Scott:
https://www.walterscottclub.com/gazetteer/uk-scott-pub

all the Waverley-related locations across the United Kingdom
https://www.walterscottclub.com/gazetteer/waverley-uk

and all the Drinks associated with Sir Walter Scott.
https://www.walterscottclub.com/gazetteer/scott-drinks

Earlier this year, I added a simple Walking Tour to the Club website. I'm now happy to report that, thanks to the help of several academics in this room, including Peter Garside, who has very kindly curated every page, there are now more than 45 locations around Edinburgh for you to explore.

https://www.walterscottclub.com/walkingtour

Next year, I intend to extend the project to include locations associated with Scott across a much wider area.

Of course, a project of this scale is never really finished. Historical research is an ongoing process, and there will always be opportunities to correct an error, add new information or uncover another connection. I'd like the Walking Tour to be a living resource that grows and improves with the help of the wider Scott community. Almost like a Wikipedia if you will.

So, can I ask you all a huge favour? If you have a few minutes this week, please take a look at one or two of the pages of the Walking Tour. And if you notice an error or can direct me to some additional information that ought to be included, please let me know directly.

The more people who contribute their knowledge, the better this resource will become, and the more we can do to bring Sir Walter Scott to the attention of a wider public.

When I first met the late Fraser Elgin here in 2001, little did I realise what I was about to let myself in for. I am not an academic or a Scott scholar, yet this Club welcomed me as one of their own…. Doing this work is the only way that I can give something back, and to repay the trust you have placed in me.

Some of you may be wondering what drove me to undertake it all… and why I continue to give my time freely to this cause.

The answer is simple. I owe Sir Walter Scott for enriching my life.

When I was 18 I was abandoned by my parents when they split up.. .and I never saw them again. My so-called friends turned my council house into a drug den and I ended up in a very dark place. By 23 I was spiritually, and almost physically dead. It has taken years of recovery. For a long time Sir Walter's words were the only beacon of hope. I owe my sanity to him. For that reason, I give me life to promoting Scott. ... and so while I am alive I will continue to give my time and resources to spreading this Gospel.