**PG Residential Reading Weekend at the Burn, 22-24 March 2024**

A group of people standing in front of a building

Description automatically generated

Scholarly debate, enhanced by blue skies, breath-taking walks around a wooded estate, delicious food, and conviviality over a glass of whisky – what more could one ask for in a weekend? Forty postgraduate students and faculty of the University of Aberdeen’s [School of Divinity, History, Philosophy, and Art History (DHPA)](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/) enjoyed such a weekend retreat together at [The Burn](https://theburn.co.uk/academic-retreats/) near Brechin, Scotland from 22-24 March 2024.

This annual reading weekend, sponsored by DHPA, is optional and helps to differentiate the University of Aberdeen from other university postgraduate programmes. Students who were able to join found it to be an excellent way to engage with others, many of whom they had only met in a classroom or on a collaborate screen. The participants are enrolled in postgraduate taught or postgraduate research programmes. These are a mix of on-campus, hybrid courses, as well as the fully online master’s courses in Scottish Heritage or PhDs from a distance.

The agenda and weekend activities, coordinated by Dr Bradford Bow, was rich in content, yet relaxing. Composed of short presentations (‘papers’) by students and accompanying group dialogue, the format brought new topics to the fore among participants and enabled support to each researcher with challenging questions and suggestions. Topics included Observations on nineteenth-century social, economic, and religious changes from the diaries of a NE tenant farmer, 1826-76; Scottish identity through eighteenth- and nineteenth-century visual art; concepts of Federalism in 1880-1920 Poland and Russia; disability in Old Norse literature; the Scots in the Crusades; and Scots in the New Model Army.

**Favourite Quote from a PhD candidate’s presentation:**

“Historiography… I discovered I didn’t really like it…”

(As a student of history, wow, did he have some explaining to do...)

Informational sessions led by faculty supported those who were transitioning to a postgraduate or taught environment, or even to a PhD, publishing, or the world of academia. The Burn’s bursar, David Turner, delivered a fascinating presentation on The Burn’s history–his last as he is retiring this month after 12 incredible years.

A group of people sitting on couches in a room

Description automatically generatedBut ‘all work and no play make Jack a dull boy’. So fresh air and exercise, frequent breaks, drinks in the library coupled with only the best of Burns’ poetry, and a game or two of snooker were all on tap. Perhaps the highlight was the ever-so-special evening musical performance and sing-a-long by Professor Robert Frost and Professor Karin Friedrich. And apparently the fun didn’t stop when students left the Burn, with reports of ‘car karaoke’ and plans for the next Burn’s musical playlist.

A group of people around a table

Description automatically generatedFood was plentiful, hearty, and delicious, and the Burn aptly catered to all diets, from Friday evening curry night to Saturday’s vegetarian tart and lasagne, to the full Scottish breakfasts each morning.

A picture containing window, indoor, wall

Description automatically generatedStudents stayed in single or double rooms throughout The Burn’s main house and stables. Clean, brightly lit from full length windows with views to the surrounding estate, and communal bathroom facilities that still afforded high levels of privacy, meant that we could achieve an excellent night’s rest.

What emerged throughout the weekend was not just new ideas and conviviality, but a real sense of community among the diverse groups attending the DHPA’s courses. Ages ranged from 25 to almost 70. Participants represented many nationalities and travelled in from all over the UK, Europe, and North America. Research interests varied significantly between centuries and thematic areas as well as potential use of the degree for careers versus purely personal fulfilment.

A group of people sitting in a room

Description automatically generated

The participants in the MLitt Scottish Heritage – formerly only known to each other online – bonded and brainstormed ideas on how to stay more regularly engaged and share ongoing research topics. One idea was to host a reading weekend again in the autumn. Faculty of the DHPA were incredibly supportive in seeking new ways to sustain students’ interests in higher levels of engagement with each other and the school, including more frequent reading weekends. By the end of the short weekend, the sense of community was palpable.

**A room with a staircase and flags

Description automatically generatedProgramme**

**Friday, 22 March 2024**

16.00 Pick up at Laurencekirk and Montrose train stations/check-in

18.00 David Turner, Bursar of The Burn, ‘Welcome and Introduction’

19.00 Dinner

20.00 Heidi Mehrkens and Karin Friedrich*,* ‘Making the Transition: UG to PGT, PGT to PGR’

21.15 Networking & Social Time

**Saturday, 23 March 2024**

09.00 Breakfast

10.00 PG Papers I (Chair: Alanna MacTavish)

Neil Harper, ‘The McWillie Diaries: Insights from the diaries of a NE tenant farmer, 1826-76’

Dr Donna Betts, ‘The Complex, Intersecting Layers of Scottish Identity as Expressed in Three Phases of Painting Spanning the 17th - 19th Centuries’

A person standing in front of a projector screen

Description automatically generatedA person standing in front of a projector screen

Description automatically generatedA person standing in a room

Description automatically generatedA person sitting in a chair in front of a screen

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Description automatically generatedA group of people in a room

Description automatically generated11.30 Coffee break

We appreciate our student presenters:

Top row: Neil Harper, Dr. Donna Betts, Marcel Garboś

Bottom row: Erin Benton, Arpad Kuffler, and Cameron Flint

12.00 BA Postdoctoral and PG papers II (Chair: Heidi Mehrkens)

Paper 1: Marcel Garboś, ‘Brotherhood Beyond the Borderlands: The “Great Russian nation” in the Polish Federalist Imagination, 1880s-1920s’

Paper 2: Erin Benton, ‘But the boy was boneless…’: Disability and Embodied Narratives in Old Norse Literature'

13.00 Lunch

14.00 Walk around the Estate

15.00 Robert Frost and Pawel Grabowski, ‘Pointers for Working in Archives’

15.45 Bill Naphy, ‘How to rework your thesis as a monograph and develop a book proposal’

16.45 PG papers III (Chair: Aly Macdonald)

**A person sitting in a chair

Description automatically generated**Arpad Kuffler, ‘Souldiers to the Syrian war': Pre-modern Histories of Scotland and the Crusades, 1527 – 1715’

Cameron Flint, ‘Scots in Strange Places: Scottish Involvement in the New Model Army’

19.00 Dinner

20.00 Live Music: History in Song led by Robert Frost and Karin Friedrich

**Sunday, 24 March 2024**

09.00 Breakfast

10.15 Laura Mair and Anna Lively, ‘How to navigate postdoc applications and life’

**A river flowing through a forest

Description automatically generated**12:00 Depart The Burn and transport to train stations

Programme (<https://theburn.co.uk/academic-retreats/>)

**A group of people posing for a photo

Description automatically generatedParticipant List 2024**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Students** | **Course/Programme** |
| Benton, Erin | PhD |
| Betts, Donna | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
| Bonner, Megan | MLitt Medieval and Early Modern Studies |
| DeMarco, Avery | PhD |
| Dobie, Amanda | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
|  |  |
| Ferenczy, John | MLitt Medieval And Early Modern Studies |
| Flint, Cameron | PhD |
| Gray, Vicky | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
| Grabowski, Pawel | PhD |
| Hamilton, Alastair | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
| Harper, Neil | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
| Ivanecky, Jakub | MLitt Medieval and Early Modern Studies |
| Kelly, Susan | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
| Kilmartin, Cari | MLitt Modern History |
| Kuffler, Arpad | PhD |
|  |  |
| Llewellyn, Richard | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
| Lourenco, Miles | MLitt Viking & Nordic Studies |
| MacTavish, Alanna | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
| Meiklejohn, Kirsteen | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
| Moreau, Elizabeth | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
| Napier, Graeme | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
| Ndwandwe, Sabelo | PhD |
| Robertson, Gordon | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
| Robertson, Hannah | MLitt Scottish Heritage |
| Strong, Genevieve | PhD |
| Van Els, Lynn | MLitt Modern History |
| Vassev, Kaloyan | MLitt Modern History |

A person sitting on a couch

Description automatically generatedA person sitting on a couch waving

Description automatically generatedTwo women sitting on a couch

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| --- | --- |
| Armstrong, Jackson | DHPA Faculty |
| Bow, Brad | DHPA Faculty |
| Friedrich, Karin | DHPA Faculty |
| Frost, Robert | DHPA Faculty |
| Garbos, Marcel | DHPA Faculty |
| Lively, Anna | DHPA Faculty |
| Naphy, Bill | DHPA Faculty |
| Macdonald, Aly | DHPA Faculty |
| Mair, Laura | DHPA Faculty |
| Mehrkens, Heidi | DHPA Faculty |
| Walsh, Owen | DHPA Faculty |