

The Thomas Reid Circular

SPRING 2024

Dear Friends and Alumni,

We have finally reached spring, and whilst the weather may not be necessarily reflecting this milestone wherever you are, it is so nice to have longer days and lighter evenings. The campus is beginning to wake up with shoots on the trees and the daffodils creating patches of brightness throughout. Our students now have exams around the corner and, for some, graduation on the horizon.

This last year has been a challenging one, not just for the University, but for our students who continue to face the cost-of-living crisis whilst trying to attain their degrees. The support from donations in any form really does make a difference and allows our students to thrive rather than having to survive. We are especially thankful to those who have generously left a gift in their will to the University, which is having a direct impact on our students. This newsletter highlights some of the generous gifts we have recently received and the impact they will have across a range of priority areas.

If you have been following the news, you will have seen that the University continues to break boundaries in medical research. Recent breakthroughs include the discovery of a new way to detect signs of motor neuron disease and the use of artificial intelligence to assist with the diagnosis of breast cancer. Aberdeen was also ranked 1st for Medicine in the UK in the Guardian University Guide 2024, showing that our innovative medical education is thriving on our world-class campus.

You may have seen that the Sir Duncan Rice Library was recently featured in a National Rail list highlighting seven of the best libraries to visit in Britain! Apart from an amazing collection of books, it houses our Special Collections in an area specifically designed to preserve the many valuable items amassed over 500 years of history. The upkeep of such collections requires continuous oversight and ongoing specialist work to preserve our heritage for future generations.

Finding out more about the variety of areas that our friends and alumni want to support is one of the joys of my job, with no two conversations the same. At the same time, I forge relationships with people who really want to make a difference. I want to thank you for your continued and future support, and I hope to see you at the next Thomas Reid Circle event on 1 June, details of which can be found below.

For now, I hope that the weather is improving where you are, and you can enjoy some more outdoor pursuits. I imagine that those of you in foreign climes are already enjoying warmer weather - no need to make us jealous!

With warmest wishes

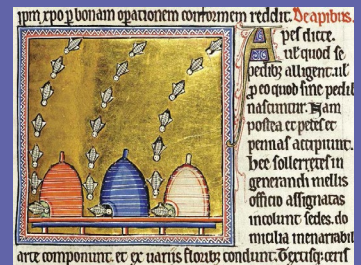
Vanessa

Vanessa Holmes
Legacy Giving Officer



The Aberdeen Bestiary

This priceless manuscript, written and illuminated in England around 1200 and a favourite of many students, is considered one of the best examples of its type due to its lavish and costly illuminations.



Gift in Will Encourages Lifelong Love of Plants

A transformational gift in the will of Anthony Johnston in 2019 enabled the University to establish the Anthony & Margaret Johnston Centre for Doctoral Training in Plant Sciences which provides fully funded PhD studentships in this globally important field.

Anthony and his wife Margaret met while at Aberdeen, both graduating in 1943. Anthony was a passionate mycologist and botanist and had an eminent international career in plant pathology, plant disease and plant protection, working for both the United Nations and as Director of the Commonwealth Mycology Institute.

When Anthony died in 2019 aged 98, following Margaret's death in 2005, their generosity enabled the establishment of a long-term PhD research and training programme for some of the brightest student minds in Plant Sciences.

Vivek Kumar Awon is one such student, with Anthony and Margaret providing him with opportunities he could only have dreamt of when he started growing his own plants as a little boy.

Vivek was born and raised in Kolkata, India and, from a young age, was fascinated by plants. He studied Botany at school which led him to apply to the University of Calcutta, India where he completed his Bachelor and Masters in Botany. During his Masters, he specialised in fungi to investigate their interaction with plants. He then found out that the

University of Aberdeen's Anthony & Margaret Johnston Centre for Doctoral Training in Plant Sciences provided funded PhD research opportunities in his area of expertise and applied and accepted a place. Vivek clearly states that, without this funding, his PhD research would have been impossible.

Vivek went on to say "Funding for research is critical. Someone can be extremely talented, with experience and knowledge, but without funding for their research, it's not possible to progress. Philanthropic support, such as that gifted generously by Anthony and Margaret Johnston, can enable research with the potential for real impact. Their generosity has allowed my research to continue without constraints which is truly amazing and has provided me with the opportunity to follow my passion and pave the way for my future career.

"I've had access to essential resources, databases, and tools that have been indispensable to my research and have been able to attend conferences and workshops where I've had the chance to collaborate with fellow researchers and present my findings. On a personal note,

the financial support has also significantly reduced the weight of financial stress, allowing me to focus wholeheartedly on my studies without constantly worrying about managing my finances.

"My research involves finding the influence of mycorrhizal fungi on plants by enhancing the absorption of phosphates by selecting microbial community in soil. This could have a positive impact on farming methods going forward and contribute to sustainable farming both locally and globally.

"To me, this research and funding represents a quest for knowledge and a desire to contribute to the betterment of our communities and the sustainable future of agriculture. This year has been an enlightening and challenging journey which has strengthened my resolve and broadened my perspective and I am extremely grateful."



North-East of Scotland Upbringing Inspires Gift to Promote the Doric Dialect

The Development & Alumni Relations team was surprised by a generous gift left to the University by Forbes Hurry for the promotion of Doric speaking and writing at the Elphinstone Institute, as he was neither a graduate or lifetime donor.

With further investigation we learned that Forbes' wife Catherine, who passed away in 2008, was an alumna of the University, graduating MA in 1947. Born Catherine Cow in Peterhead in 1925, her parents worked in the fishing industry and, following graduation, she became a teacher at Peterhead Academy.

We found out that Forbes was educated at Powis Academy, now St Machar Academy. In 1986 he and Catherine moved to Edinburgh where Forbes became a technician at the Museum of Childhood until his retirement in 1999 when he became a valued volunteer at

Lauriston Castle. Forbes maintained an enthusiastic interest in teddy bears and dolls throughout his life and was deeply knowledgeable about the history of toys in general.

Both Forbes and Catherine were Friends of the Elphinstone Institute and had maintained a love of the north-east of Scotland and its language and traditions. Forbes' gift will be hugely beneficial to our students, researchers, and the wider community as the Elphinstone Institute continues to preserve and promote the Doric/North-East Scots language. We are incredibly grateful for this generosity.

We would like to thank Margaret Findlay and Susan Gardner from Museums & Galleries Edinburgh for providing us with information about Forbes and these images.



Legacy Pledge Will Support the Best Medical Education

Professor John Simpson's long association with the University of Aberdeen started 65 years ago when he was accepted as a medical student on the MBChB programme. Following his graduation with Honours in 1965 and the completion of his PhD in 1975, he became a member of staff, now Emeritus Professor, before serving as a Trustee of the University of Aberdeen Development Trust until 2020.

As a key supporter of the University since 1983, John's generosity has already enabled the University to establish the John Simpson Chair in Medical Education, the Alexander Noble Simpson Scholarship, and Wynne Bonnyman Scholarship, and contributed to the Sir Duncan Rice Library and Suttie Centre. By also pledging a gift in his will, John has ensured that his support will have lasting impact.

When asked about the gift in his will and the motivation behind his pledge, John told us the following:

"My major bequest will be to the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition to support undergraduate medical education and undergraduate medical students.

"My wife and I were both medical graduates from Aberdeen and also the first university entrants from our families. The time we spent at medical school served us extremely well in the long term - and was, in the main, enjoyable! I stayed in Aberdeen for

virtually the whole of my professional career as an academic member of staff in Pathology at the University, working clinically also for the NHS as a Consultant Pathologist. In the last 15 years or so of my working life, I was particularly interested in the teaching of medicine and played a major role in the development, organisation, and management of the medical curriculum.

"For a time after retirement, I served as a Trustee on the University's Development Trust, which plays such a vital role in garnering support for the institution, so I am well aware of how very much the University depends on the Trust and all its supporters, not least those who have the foresight and generosity to remember Aberdeen in their wills.

"Aberdeen had always been recognised for the quality of the doctors we produce, but it was only in the 1990s, when university education began to be evaluated across the country, that our place near the top became widely known. I have already founded a Chair in Medical Education to encourage research

in the field and am delighted that Aberdeen's place as one of the very best medical schools in the UK goes from strength to strength.

"It will of course be up to the School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition to decide how to use my bequest, but my wish is that it will be to support the provision of medical education and research into it, as well as to support the students who undertake it."

The University has recently been ranked 1st for Medicine in the UK in The Guardian University Guide 2024 and the desire of alumni like John to ensure that Aberdeen provides the best possible medical education to produce the best doctors, contributes greatly to this ongoing success. John's generosity will benefit generations of medical students, as well as the patients they will treat, thanks to the world-leading medical education they are sure to receive at the University of Aberdeen.



Devoted Couple Leave Transformational Gift for Neurosciences

Ruth and Bernard Smith enjoyed a very happy life together, meeting when Aberdeen-born and educated Bernard was Chief of Neurology at the Meyer Memorial Hospital in Buffalo and Ruth was Chief Librarian.

Bernard graduated from the University of Aberdeen MBChB in 1940 and maintained a deep affection for his hometown and the University which had equipped him for a distinguished career. On his death in 1985, he left his estate to Ruth with the request that, on her death, the estate would be left to the University of Aberdeen to establish the B H Smith Chair in Neurology. Ruth lived for another 37 years, passing away in 2022 at the age of 103 and leaving the University a truly transformational gift in her will.

Ruth Hanna was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1918 and was educated at the University of Michigan and at Simmons College, Boston, where she gained a Bachelor of Science degree in 1940. She served with the American Red Cross in Liverpool, London and Paris during and immediately after the Second World War before moving back to Boston. In 1958 Ruth was recruited as Chief Librarian at the Meyer Memorial Hospital in Buffalo and, soon after, met Bernard.

Bernard was born in Peterculter, Aberdeen in 1917 and graduated with a First in Medicine from Aberdeen in 1940. From 1941 until 1946 he served in the Royal Army Medical Corps, achieving the rank of Honorary Lieutenant Colonel, before undertaking his postgraduate training in both Neurology and Psychiatry. After moving to the US, he took up roles at the State University of New York at Buffalo, becoming Professor of Neurology until his retirement in 1979. During this time, while also Chief of Neurology at the Meyer Memorial Hospital, he built up the Hospital's neurology department and established a training programme for residents.

Ruth and Bernard married in 1959 and during their devoted marriage enjoyed art and opera, travelled the world

(including annual trips to Aberdeen) and were widely known for their hospitality and entertaining.

Bernard sadly died in 1985 and his ashes were interred in Peterculter.

A few years before his death, Bernard and Ruth had made the decision to leave the bulk of their estate to the University of Aberdeen with 'the aim of endowing a named faculty position in neurology'. Bernard expressed his wish that the University apply to the British Schools and University Foundation (BSUF) to enable his bequest to come to Aberdeen.

Following Bernard's death, Ruth made several donations between 1987 and 1990 to establish the B H Smith Chair in Neurology via the BSUF but made it clear that the University needed to establish its own Foundation before she was willing to make any further donations. And so, the University of Aberdeen Development Trust USA, now the University of Aberdeen Foundation, was established in 1994. Ruth understood Bernard's connection to the University and his desire to advance medical research and kept her promise to him over many years during her lifetime and now, with a gift in her will.

Ruth's legacy gift will help the University build on existing critical mass in neuroscience and medical imaging to advance its expertise in the causes, treatments, and innovations needed to halt, and ultimately prevent, neurological disorders. We're very grateful to the University of Aberdeen Foundation in the US for their support in the administration of this transformational gift.

Ruth was a vivacious individual who maintained a deep commitment to the University. During one meeting, when two University colleagues were visiting her in Buffalo in 2014, she picked them up from the airport driving her Mercedes Coupe at the age of 96 and was a gracious and charming host.

Ruth and Bernard were devoted to each other and when she died in 2022, she had arranged for her ashes to be interred with Bernard's in Peterculter, bringing them together again one final time in what was and is a true love story.



If you would like to speak to someone in confidence about the gift in your will to the University of Aberdeen please contact Vanessa Holmes, Legacy Giving Officer, +44 (0)1224 274132 or email vanessa.holmes@abdn.ac.uk

All donations to the University of Aberdeen are administered through the University of Aberdeen Development Trust SCIO which is a charity registered in Scotland No. SC050996.

The University of Aberdeen is a charity registered in Scotland, No. SC013683.