

Mansfield Traquair News

No: 85



2025

Convener's Report for 2025

Welcome to our spring newsletter!

You may have noticed that the office accommodation at the Centre is currently available for lease – not for sale as the Glasgow Herald erroneously reported it! The Trustees are now seeking new tenants to replace the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) whose lease ends in June. We await a decision on their successors with interest.

The updating of our services continues with a splendid new desk installed on the north side of the narthex. With SCVO's departure, it was decided there was no need for two reception desks so both old desks were removed and a new one created for the Friends opposite to where our old one was situated. We have also replaced our rather tired cash donations box with a new red one to match the card donation box which was installed last year



Following the talk by Clara de la Pena McTigue at last year's AGM on her conservation of one of Phoebe's manuscripts, I was invited to an exhibition of 24 of Phoebe's illustrations for Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese – A5 sized exquisite little gems – which were on show at Bonham's in Edinburgh before being taken to London to be auctioned. The guide price was £60,000 to £80,000 for the set and I understand they sold for over £100,000!

We have recently started advertising our Open Days online in "Edinburgh Minute" and this has provided an excellent response – more than 360 visitors at the March Open Day! After a trial run in February, we now provide guided tours every 20 minutes during Open Days and this seems to work well. It is, of course, still possible to come in and look round on your own without a guide.

Extra guides are always needed so if you fancy guiding or staffing the sales desk and welcoming visitors, do please get in touch, you would be made most welcome.

I always seem to have some sad news to report and this time is no exception. One of the Friends committee, Jenny Sharp, died peacefully at the end of March. Jenny was part of the team which put together the DVD about the murals many years ago. She recently returned to the area, joined the committee and indeed wrote a very interesting article about Phoebe Traquair and her work in the Autumn 2023 edition of East Lothian Life.

I wish you well for what I hope will be a summer with much better weather than last year.

Morag Austin

**Friends Outing: Saturday 13th September at 10.30am
The Thistle Chapel at St Giles Cathedral**



Numbers are limited to 30 and the usual charge appears to be £6pp. To book a place please email calawrie30@btinternet.com advising if you are over 60 (Reduced fee)

The Trustees appointed by Edward VII to oversee the Chapel's construction employed Robert Lorimer as architect and insisted the choice of craftspeople should reflect the national character of the Chapel. This included **Phoebe Anna Traquair** who produced the first nineteen enamelled stall-plates in 1910 before the Chapel was officially opened by George V in 1911.

Order of Malta

At our frantically busy March Open Day (which saw over 360 visitors), we received an enquiry about the possibility of a private guided tour of the Mansfield Traquair Centre as a silent auction prize for an Order of Malta charity ball which will take place on 14th May 2025.



The Order of Malta is one of the world's largest and oldest international charities and it holds an event annually to publicise the work of the Order and raise funds for its good works both in Scotland and overseas. The next ball will be held at Prestonfield and is expected to attract about 200 guests who will be invited to bid for a variety of prizes in a silent auction.

The organisers will include details of each prize on their website, and also publicise the work of the Friends in the ball programme which is given to all the guests on the evening. We are very pleased to have agreed to this request as we believe it will bring knowledge of our work to a large group of influential people.

Happily, Elizabeth Cumming has agreed to lead the tour and to sign a copy of her latest work on Phoebe which will also be given to the winner, who will be able to bring along up to five additional guests. Heritage Portfolio has also agreed to make the prize a little more special by providing refreshments for the group

The pocket guide to Edinburgh's Best Buildings: Author Robin Ward—Mansfield Traquair Centre

Nothing outside this Romanesque church, designed by Robert Rowand Anderson, prepares you for the interior, glittering with murals by Phoebe Traquair. The effect is of illuminated manuscripts come to life in Renaissance and Pre-Raphaelite styles. By 1998, the century old church, by then abandoned, was acquired by the Mansfield Traquair Trust to save it from decay. It reopened as an events venue. Restoration of the murals was completed in 2005.

Crossed wires!

At an Open Day one of our guides found a young couple standing near the top of the spiral staircase which leads to the offices on the lower floors.



The woman said to the man "I wish Jesus could see this!". Our guide, with a look heavenwards, thought "Perhaps He can!"

It subsequently transpired that they were both architects working for Jesus College in Cambridge where they were having problems installing a similar staircase in the face of financial constraints and a divided governing committee.

Outing to Song School

On a mild October morning a group of 23 assembled to visit the Song School (all amazingly with the correct money!). It is an astonishing space decorated by PAT, the work being inspired by the canticle, *Benedicite omnia opera*.

Basically the work depicts a 'procession' heading towards Christ, high up on the east wall. Although the Cathedral paid for her materials PAT did not receive a fee for the work, a true labour of love. Stunning images of prominent Victorians are intermingled with portraits of local personalities connected with the building and of course delightful choristers.



Much of the magic is in the detail: a dog wanders across two panels oblivious to his missing middle, a lion cub curls in a corner, a waddling duck splashes in a puddle. Finally the tiny image of PAT herself, clearly exhausted, curled beside her discarded palette on which she has written her signature.



Suzy Morrison gave us a great tour, tailored specifically for our group. An excellent and inspiring way to spend an October morning in Edinburgh.

www.cathedral.net/cathedral-building/song-school

National Gallery Art Centre at Granton

We had hoped to organise an outing here but have been advised that they are currently unable to accommodate large groups. At the moment they are only able to offer weekday visits for smaller groups of up to 4 people to view specific pre-selected artworks (up to 6 per visit).

If anyone would like to arrange a viewing of specific artworks, thumbnails of their collection can be accessed on the NGS website giving a better idea of what works are available across their sites. <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/search/artist/>

AGM

Our AGM this year will be on Thursday 9th October at 7pm (a formal invitation will follow nearer the time) when our speaker will be Karen Dundas a conservator who has recently been dealing with our murals. She will be speaking about the work she is currently carrying out in the Mortuary Chapel at the Sick Kids.