



Jame Gillespie's Trust: www.jamesgillespiestrust.com
Alumni Section: alumni@jamesgillespiestrust.com

JAMES GILLESPIE'S TRUST: Alumni Section

Newsletter March 2024

Hello, and welcome to the first newsletter from the new Alumni team.

You may be aware that last November, at the Trust's AGM, there were a few changes in personnel due to retirement of post holders.

The new Alumni Team

The Trust's new Alumni team (Fiona, Christine and Linda) was appointed in November, and has taken on the task of keeping alumni informed and updated on relevant news, maintaining the database and looking after the alumni archives. We are volunteers and have been active in recent months reviewing how best we can achieve this, especially through the website and the Facebook page.

Thanks to all who have joined the database and given us your email addresses. However, we know that there are about 85 members who either do not have an email, or have not given us one, and this has meant that they receive the newsletter by post. Please note: **This will be the last newsletter to be posted out to those without email.**

We would really like to keep in touch with all of you, and to do so we would very much like to have an email address for all our members. If you have not already done so, please let us have yours, or one for a friend or relative who is willing to pass on the newsletter. If this is not possible, then please get in touch and we can look at alternatives. It is not our intention to exclude anyone, but the cost of postage takes away from funds that could be used to support Trust projects.

We are very keen to expand our membership list. Maybe you are still in touch with old school friends, and we invite you to let them know about the work of the Trust and the opportunity to join our alumni database. The membership list is used, with discretion, to put people in touch, to help facilitate reunions and to keep members informed.

Furthermore, this is **your** newsletter, so please feel free to submit letters, ideas for articles and photos, requests for events, speakers you might like to hear, indeed anything at all, and we shall certainly try to include as many of your suggestions as we can. This week we were informed of the death of one of our members, Diana Barbara Jackson (née Bleazard) 1949-2024 who attended James Gillespie's from 1953 to 1966, and we extend our condolences to her family.

Would you like to contribute a brief history of your life since leaving school? We would love to hear from anyone who would be willing to share a potted life story. Don't worry too much about whether writing is your forte – we will gladly help you out with that - but a brief outline of the facts, and we could have a wee item for a future newsletter! Not only would this be interesting to your former classmates, but it could be inspirational for current students who are still undecided about their futures, and where they could be headed!

Any copy can be sent to alumni@jamesgillespiestrust.com by 31st July 2024 for our next newsletter.

What is James Gillespie's Trust?

James Gillespie's Trust was established to harness the tremendous goodwill that is felt for James Gillespie's High School and to support the work of the school through various educational schemes and community projects. The Trustees are all volunteers and meet five times a year to discuss applications for funding. The Trust provides support and funding for educational and extra-mural activities within James Gillespie's High School and its community and fosters strong links with past pupils through its alumni section. An example of a project supported by the Trust is the S1 Residential (September 2023)

- The Trustees awarded money to the S1 Residential at the Lockerbie Manor Outdoor Education to cover costs for pupils that could not otherwise have attended. These types of residential trips are such unique experiences and, for many of us, form some of our most lasting memories of school. The S1s had a fantastic

time despite the weather and mud and the photographs of their adventures were the highlight of the October Trust meeting!

Donations and Legacy - The funds for the James Gillespie's Trust Projects come from donations and generous legacies from former pupils and staff. With the income from these funds the Trust is pleased to be able to make donations and awards to school projects where specific needs can be identified. If you would like to support the work of the Trust there is further information on the website, <https://www.jamesgillespiestrust.com/donations> or you can write to the treasurer at finance@jamesgillespiestrust.com

Gillespie Gatherings/Open days! (Please Note the Dates in your diary now)

Our first alumni event is a 'Gillespie Gathering' on Saturday morning, 27th April 2024 to which all our alumni are warmly invited. **The 'Gathering' will be held from 10 am to 12.30 pm in the Muriel Spark Building** (opposite Bruntsfield House main entrance) and all are most welcome. The event is an opportunity to catch up with old school friends, meet new friends, and chat while looking at old school magazines, photographs and memorabilia. Light refreshments will be provided. There is no charge for the event but any cash donations to cover costs and to support the work of the Trust will be gratefully accepted. The highlight of the morning will be a talk by author and former pupil, **Olga Wojtas** in the Muriel Spark Theatre at 11 am. To give us an idea of numbers please let us know by email if you can come along. Thank you.

We are delighted that **Olga Wojtas** has agreed to join us and give a short talk about her career in writing. Olga Wojtas, who went to both Gillespie's primary and secondary was, she says, inspired by one of the English teachers during her time there to pursue a career in writing, both as a journalist and as an author. Her writing is a series of comic crime books inspired by Muriel Spark's "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie." Olga's heroine is a former pupil of the Marcia Blaine School for Girls (the name Spark gave to Gillespie's), now a librarian in Morningside Library, who gets sent on time-travelling missions. Olga will talk about how the school has influenced her "Miss Blaine's Prefect" books, which even include her own version of the school song. It is certain to be an interesting morning, and copies of Olga's work will be available to purchase on the day.

It is always exciting to think that you might be able to catch up with a former classmate, and there is a page on the website dedicated to just that, so always worth checking the website.

Although this 'Gathering' has been arranged to coincide with the 50th anniversary reunion of the 1968-1974 cohort taking place on the afternoon of the 27th, **this Gathering is open to all, regardless of the years you attended the school, and is free to attend.**

50th anniversary reunion event - 1968 to 1974 cohort

The 50th anniversary reunion team, led by Sheila Capewell (née Wragg) has organised an afternoon event on Saturday 27th April 2024 in Bruntsfield Hotel between 1.30pm and 5.30pm, to celebrate the year-group that entered S1 in 1968 and left 6th year in 1974 (or before). There will be an afternoon tea, a celebration cake, fizz, music from our era and obviously a LOT of chat! Tickets are £30 per person and must be bought by Monday 8th April from jghs68to74@gmail.com



If you were in the 68 – 74 cohort and would like to come, or you know someone who was (or may have been) in this year group, please contact them and ask them to get in touch at jghs68to74@gmail.com Even if you can't come on the 27th, please get in touch to have access to photos, stories and info about our year-group – and, hear about the possibility of another cohort catch-up later in the year.

History of James Gillespie's

James Gillespie's School was the first free school in Scotland when it opened in 1803. It was established by the bequest of James Gillespie and was originally only for boys. In 1870, it became a day school for boys and girls, whose parents paid moderate fees, though 60 free scholarship places were retained to honour Gillespie's will.

In 1926, Thomas Burnett, the headteacher at the time, introduced the uniform, school badge and motto: "Fidelis et Fortis". Founders' day was celebrated for the first time in the same year. In 1929 the school became a selective girls-only Corporation Grammar, remaining that way until 1973 when it became a non-selective co-ed area comprehensive, as it has been to the present day.

In 1953 a detailed 'History of James Gillespie's' was written by Elaine Cynthia Joan Cochrane, S3c, as a school essay writing project. Elaine has now given permission for her essay to be published on the James Gillespie's Trust website, chapter by chapter, starting in January 2024. <https://www.jamesgillespiestrust.com/school-and-its-history> The final chapter (Chapter 5) will be posted in March. If any member without internet access would like a paper copy of the essay, please let us know.

In Chapter 4 Elaine covers the period 1914 to 1936 and identifies the start of some Gillespie traditions such as the house system and the school song. There is also a reference to James Gillespie's being the Edinburgh school that is probably the highest above sea-level. A check of a topography map of the city confirms this. Edinburgh is built on seven hills and the area around Marchmont, Bruntsfield and Morningside, is the residential area with the highest elevation. We also know that 'our' school is one of the highest achieving in the city and, according to the City Council website, it has the highest notional capacity and the highest school role. A truly High school!

A continuing History of the School was published in 2016, written by former pupil John Macleod, and titled 'Faithful and Brave: A Celebration of James Gillespie's High School'. If you would like a copy, please email the school at: admin@jamesgillespies.edin.sch.uk or write to them at the address given at the end of the newsletter, to reserve a copy and arrange for collection. Price is £17.99 if collected from the school or £22.50 (rate correct as of Nov. 2023) if the book is to be posted to a UK address. Electronic payment can be made using the following details: Account name: James Gillespie's Trust, Sort Code: 80 22 60, Account no: 17854260 There will be copies available at the 'Gathering' on 27th April for payment by cash (we do not have a card machine, sorry).

Another book relating to the history of the school is 'Box Hats and Blue Stockings' by Norma Allan. This book features memories and reminiscences by former pupils and it is priced at £10. Norma has also recently written an anthology of poems on old age in an optimistic, upbeat and humorous vein which is being launched at the Scottish Storytelling Centre on 6th March 2024. We hope to have some copies for sale at the 'Gathering'.

Spotlight on school magazines from 1924 and 1954

Ellen King was described variously as 'wonder girl', the 'greatest Scottish swimmer of the pre-war era', and 'famous Edinburgh swimmer'. Ellen featured in the 1924 School magazine. She represented Great Britain at the Olympic Games 100 years ago in 1924, and again in 1928. As captain of the Scottish ladies' team at the British Empire Games in 1930 Ellen King won three medals and was also the first swimmer to achieve medals in three different strokes. Ellen Elizabeth King was born in Renfrew in 1909 and brought up in Edinburgh. She lived in Warrender Park Road, attended James Gillespie's School and was a member of Warrender Baths Club. When 'Miss King' retired from competitive swimming, she taught swimming in many schools across Edinburgh. Ellen died in 1994, aged 85 years.

The front cover of the school magazine of 1954 featured a scraperboard design by Wilma Stewart 6D. There were also several of her other scraperboard drawings in the magazine and there are four examples of her work below. The alumni team wonder if she went on to have an artistic career? Maybe she, or someone who knows/knew her will read this newsletter. It would be interesting to find out if she made her career from her artistic abilities. If anyone has any information on what Wilma did/does, we would love to know.



From Scraperboard Drawings by WILMA STEWART, 5D.

James Gillespie's Trust Website & Facebook pages

Since November, the James Gillespie's Trust website has been restructured and updated with new pages and added content, and the Facebook page has been 'reactivated'. We invite you to visit the website, explore and read the articles, obituaries (This year is the 30th anniversary of the death of Miss Mary McIver (1912-1994), headmistress, 1967-1975, news about projects and events and to contribute to both the website and the Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/JGHS.FP/>).

In this Olympic year, in honour of Ellen King, we are considering an article on JGHS Olympians including cyclist Callum Skinner. If you know of any former pupils who have participated in the Olympics, please let us know. Other articles in preparation include one about Bruntsfield House, with photographs by Euan Hickman, one of our members, who left school in 2023.

Photographs and School Memorabilia

Everyone loves looking at photographs. We do have some, but perhaps you have some 'unseen' images or memorabilia. If you have any such items and would be willing to allow these to be held or copied by the Trust and perhaps to be published on the website or in the newsletter it would be lovely to hear from you. Tell us as much as you can about the items including - where, when, who took the photograph and any names you can recall. If there are names that escape your memory, perhaps someone will be able to fill in the blanks.

Contacts

We have over 1000 former pupils who are already on our database but know there are many out there for whom we have no contact details at all. Maybe you are still in touch with some of your school friends, if so please let them know that we would like to hold their contact details, with their permission, and maybe even use in a wee 'lost and found' section of the newsletter, either way it would be good to hear from them as well.

In the future, we hope to be able to facilitate some more reunions, so the bigger our database the more people we can reach to inform them about upcoming events. Hopefully, there will be some interesting talks on topics related to the school, and perhaps open days that may be of interest to some of you? This newsletter is all about sharing and informing so anything that you want to have included please let us know.

'Gillespie Gatherings'

- **Saturday 27 April 2024** in the Muriel Spark Building in the morning 10 am to 12.30 pm.
Please don't forget to let us know whether or not you hope to attend the event.
- **Saturday 5 October 2024** also in the Muriel Spark Building in the afternoon 1.30 pm to 4.30 pm.

We look forward to hearing from you.
Thank you.

James Gillespie's Trust Alumni team
Fiona Donaldson (1967-1973)
Christine Ferguson
Linda Forret (1967-1972)