

# James Gillespie's Trust Alumni Newsletter

Spring 2026



**Welcome** to our spring newsletter

We had two successful events last year which were well supported, and we hope that this year's events will also be as popular!

The dates this year for our Gillespie Gatherings, for your diary, are **25<sup>th</sup> April 2026 at 1pm**, and our Autumn event will be held on Saturday, 3 October

## In this issue

- Upcoming Gillespie Gatherings
- 300th Anniversary of James Gillespie
- Memorabilia Updates
- Student Performances & Competitions
- Muriel Spark Walking Tours
- Trust Projects & Support

## Don't Miss Out!

We will be hosting the first of our regular Gillespie Gatherings on 25 April 2026.

Delighted to be welcoming **Margot McMurdo** (1967-1973),



who will be talking to us about her varied career as an author and tour guide.

As always there will be a chance to peruse all our memorabilia - from the 'dreaded' school hats, to honour boards and photographs across several decades.

If you have any items you think might be of interest, please feel free to let us know. Photographs can be copied, and returned, other items can be loaned or photographed for the archives.

Warmest of wishes

Your Alumni team –

*Fiona, Linda, Dave and David*

Contact Information: [jgtalumni@gmail.com](mailto:jgtalumni@gmail.com)

## Gillespie Gatherings 2026

The first of this year's gatherings will be held **on April 25<sup>th</sup> from 13.00 – 15.30.**

As always, we look forward to welcoming you to explore our memorabilia collection..."

There will be refreshments available, and an opportunity to make donations to cover the cost of these, and also towards the work of the Trust and its many projects.

We will then be joined by former student **Margot McMurdo**, who will talk to us about her career as a tour guide and author. Margot studied at James Gillespie's from 1967 until leaving in 1973.

**The Second Gathering** will be held on Saturday, 3 October 10.30 – 13.30.

The full programme has yet to be confirmed, but it will again be a presentation by the students. If you missed last year's event, then we recommend that you don't miss out again! It was a very entertaining event. Please keep an eye on the website, where we will be posting up-to-date information as it becomes available.

As always, we will be offering refreshments before and after the event, and welcome your cash donations toward this, and the work of the Trust.

**Entrance** to the school is from **Warrender Park Road or from Whitehouse Loan** (next to Links Dental Practice). **There is no longer an entrance at the top of Lauderdale Street.** There is limited parking at the school, but local street parking is free of tickets and regulations on a Saturday.

At our Gatherings we will be offering refreshments. **CASH donations** for these, and towards the work of the James Gillespie's Trust, will be gratefully received. Unfortunately, we cannot take card payments due to poor signal reception in the Muriel Spark building.

It is always helpful if you can indicate to the alumni team if you hope to attend any of our gatherings. [jgtalumni@gmail.com](mailto:jgtalumni@gmail.com)

**From April through to September** there will be another series of 'Muriel Spark Walking Tours' – please see article further on, check website or directly with alumni team : [jgtalumni@gmail.com](mailto:jgtalumni@gmail.com) for further information or to book a date.



**2026 is the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the  
birth of  
James Gillespie -  
1726 to 1797**

**James Gillespie**, the founder of our school, was born in Roslin, near Edinburgh, on **28th April 1726** and died in the city on **8<sup>th</sup> April 1797**.

James Gillespie was a snuff and tobacco merchant. He bought Spylaw House at Colinton, beside the Water of Leith, and there erected two snuff-mills for grinding snuff.

James and his elder brother John kept a tobacconist's shop at **No. 231 High Street, Edinburgh**, which was frequented by many important people and lawyers from Parliament House.

James Gillespie was a kind and generous philanthropist. His tomb is inscribed:

*“Here rests the remains of JAMES GILLESPIE OF SPYLAW  
Who bequeathed the bulk of his fortune for the  
endowment of an Hospital in the City of Edinburgh, for the  
maintenance of aged men and women, and of  
a free school for the education of poor boys,  
both of which have proved most useful public charities”*

This free school developed over the years into what we now know as **James Gillespie's High School**. Further information on the history of JGHS can be found on the JGT website.

<https://www.jamesgillespiestrust.com/school-and-its-history/>

### NOTABLE ANNIVERSARIES RELATED TO 2026

- 300th — Birth of James Gillespie (1726)
- 150th — Headmaster Robert Foulis retired (1876)
- 110th — Headmaster Thomas Burnett appointed (1916)
- 100th — Introduction of Founders' Day and House system (1926)
- 90th — Thomas Burnett retired (1936)
- 70th — Headmistress Miss May Andrew retired (1956)
- 60th — JGHS moved to Lauderdale Street; opened by HM Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother (1966)
- 10th — New JGHS building officially opened by John Swinney MSP (2016)

### **James Gillespie's Trust**

The funds for the James Gillespie's Trust Projects come from donations and generous legacies from former pupils and staff.

It is the income from these funds that allows the Trust to make donations and awards to school projects where specific needs can be identified.

In addition, the Trust supports projects that will benefit the school and reflect its history. Projects supported in 2024-25 included new benches for the Darroch campus, equipment for use in the SNUG and support for pupils visiting Hong Kong.

### **New Alumni Team member**

In September 2025 the Alumni team was delighted to welcome a new volunteer team member.

He is **David Currie**, a James Gillespie's High School alumnus from 2001–2007. His strongest academic subject was music, and he still creates music to this day.

David volunteers for Oxfam and sells programmes for Scottish Sinfonia.

David studied Creative Sound Production at The University of Abertay, Dundee. He has a working background in retail from Tesco and administration from the NHS, The Centre of English Studies and the University of Edinburgh. He is very much looking forward to contributing to JGHS alumni events going forward.

### **James Gillespie's Trust Website and Facebook Page**

The JGT Website is an excellent source of information on the history of JGHS and Alumni events.

We invite all our alumni to explore both the website and facebook page on a regular basis, and to tell us about any planned reunions and meetings.

We are always pleased to hear from you and to welcome new members to our list of former pupils. [jgtalumni@gmail.com](mailto:jgtalumni@gmail.com)

## Memorabilia Update

The Alumni team are always please to receive items of memorabilia to add our archives. Some of the items we have received from former pupils recently include documents from **Christine Freshwater (née Clark) (1965–1970)**.



Received from **Janet McBain (1959–1965)** — a beautiful mini uniform made by her mother for a doll. Isn't it cute?

If you have any materials that you would like to donate, please bring them to one of our Gatherings, send them to the school, or, if you are local to the Edinburgh area, let us know and we will arrange a collection.

*This lovely parody of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' was taken from the 1926 school magazine, by **Maude Gairn**, 3 Sen. D*

### **The Charge of the Qualifying**

Half-an-hour, half-an-hour,  
Half-an-hour only,  
All in the classrooms  
Sat they in hundreds.'  
'Forward the pens!' he said;  
Into the valley of thought  
Wandered the hundreds

'Forward, my children brave!'  
Was there a child dismayed?  
Not tho' the teacher knew  
Someone had blundered.  
Theirs not to make reply  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and try –  
Into the valley of thought  
Wandered the hundreds

Exams to the right of them,  
Exams to the left of them,  
Teachers in front of them  
Volley'd and thundered.  
Flashed all their glances rare,  
Flashed as they turned in the air,  
Watching the teacher there  
Charging a hard exam  
While all the Staff wondered.  
Stormed at from bell to bell,  
Boldly they worked - and well,  
Into the Higher Grade  
Went they in hundreds



The following is an extract also taken from **Gillespie's School Magazine 1926**,

*This lovely story is very reminiscent of the simple ways of life, and the greater freedom that children had, as often portrayed in the books of Enid Blyton.*

**Last** summer I made-up my mind to go out on the sea on a moonlit night and wait for the sunrise. Awakened very early in the morning by an alarm clock, I dressed swiftly and quietly and slipped out into the night air. For a while I stood looking on the beauty of the scene around me with something like awe, then I stepped out onto the road and hurried down to the seashore. There I boarded our boat and rowed out of little bay. What a glorious scene it was!

Everything was still as death, except for the plash plash of the oars as they dipped into the water. The warm, caressing breath of the South wind gently rippling the silvery surface of the sea only intensified the silence. Faintly seawards drifted the soft swish and creak of the trees as the wind played hide and seek in their leafy boughs.

Rowing out some distance, I paused and rested on my oars. The moon was full and high in the sky and as I gazed at its luminous orb, and at my mystic surroundings, I experienced a weird feeling of loneliness. The stillness seemed suddenly to be alive and all the queer night sounds far away and ghostly. Over by Riverfoot a dog barked and the sound was caught up by the cliffs opposite, echoing and re-echoing drearily from crag to crag, and finally dying away in a succession of eerie groans.

As I became more accustomed to the solitude however the feeling passed away. I shipped my oars and going to the stern, in the bottom of which I had arranged some cushions the day before, I lay down put a rug over myself and prepared to make myself comfortable until sunrise.

The scene seemed to grow more wonderfully beautiful the longer I surveyed it. The moon shone down with a soft, silvery radiance that imparted a mellow sheen to the rippling sea. The trees and hills were one faint silvery black blur, except where they were outlined sharply against the sky. Away in the background towered the giant mountains, grim sentinels guarding sea and valley eternally. Viewed thus by moonlight and at that hour of silence and solitude, it was all very grand and awe-inspiring, and I felt a subtle sense of peace and security and nearness to God steal over me. Then my thoughts became blurred. Lulled by the gentle rocking of the waves, I sank into a dreamless slumber.

Awakening suddenly, I sprang up, thereby sadly endangering the equilibrium of the boat, and heaved a sigh of relief as I saw that the sun had not yet appeared.

Then gradually, gradually the grey cast darkened to a deep black. Slowly across this pall stole streamers of faint pink light. They were soon replaced by various glorious shades of deep crimson, and the black patches entirely disappeared. Then still deepening, every deepening, they assumed a darker hue, and all of a sudden grew bright and rosy again.

At last appeared the rim of the sun himself, chasing night away with his ruddy beams. The last star faded from the sky, and the sun slowly but surely ascended above the horizon. His blood-red beams of light were reflected most gloriously in the glowing water, and I felt a pang of regret as the crimson turned once more pink and gradually faded away until the golden beams were victorious.

It was now fully a quarter to five, so I rose reluctantly, put out my oars, and rowed slowly to the shore, which lay ahead of me, bathed in the bright morning sunshine like some fairy strand.

**Chrissie Macleod, Form 2B**

## Muriel Spark Walking Tours

Between **April and September**, there will be another series of **Muriel Spark Walking Tours**. Please check the website or contact the Alumni Team directly at [jgtalumni@gmail.com](mailto:jgtalumni@gmail.com) for further information or to book.

Alumni Team member **Fiona Donaldson** has created the Muriel Spark Walking Tour, based on Muriel Spark's early life in Edinburgh from **1928–1935**.

The leisurely walk takes approximately **2.5 hours** and is mostly flat, with typical Edinburgh gradients and a few steps that can be worked around.

Following three successful tours in 2025, A few more are planned for 2026. Provisional dates for 2026 are:

**9 May, 6 June, 25 July, and 26 September.**

We need at least 6 participants for the event to run, and we invite you now to sign up for one of the above dates.

We begin at Morningside Library at 10.30 am and finish in Princes Street at about 1 pm. This fundraising event is open to JGHS alumni and friends, and anyone interested in Muriel Spark. We are raising funds to support the work of the James Gillespie's Trust and invite minimum donations of £10 per person.

If you are interested, please contact the Alumni team. [jgtalumni@gmail.com](mailto:jgtalumni@gmail.com)



## Young Musician Competition

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> February saw the annual Young Musician competition take place in the Muriel Spark building for 2026. The judges were Elisa Kerr, Michael McGeary and Jed Milroy.



**Dorothy Fong** was first to perform on solo cello with an expertly skilled rendition of 'Julie O' composed by Mark Summer.



This performance was followed by the very free flowing yet highly precise drumming of **Sammy Alexander** who performed Jimi



**Mayada Alkhamisi** followed that with a beautifully played recital of Chopin's 'Nocturne No. 20 in C Sharp Minor'.



Next, **Elysia Crolla** sang 'Easy on Me' by Adele with real heart and passion.



**Iris Robertson** then took to the guitar to perform 'Golden Days' composed by Gary Ryan.



**Joseph Denvir** then both played and sang Fiona Apple's 'The Child is Gone' with remarkable emotional depth.

As the first half drew to a close, before the 15-minute interval, **Ted Garland** demonstrated excellent dexterity by playing **Francisco Tarrega's 'Capricho Arrabe'** on acoustic guitar.



After the interval and a chance to chat and enjoy refreshments, **Nikolas Katsantonis** delivered a spellbinding performance of Chopin's 'Etude No. 10 Op. 4', also known as the 'Torrent'.



**Oliver Vincent Smith** then took to the stage captivating the entire audience with **Vittorio Monti's 'Czardas'** on violin.

Silas Fox then played John Mayer's 'Slow Dancing in a Burning Room', capturing the spirit of the music with real musical exactitude.



The genre versatility of the Clarsach was then demonstrated by **Anson Chong** playing 'New Blues' by Deborah Henson-Conant.



The song 'There Are Worse Things I Could Do' from Grease – The Musical was given a heartfelt delivery by **Taylor Elizabeth Little**.





The final player to play, before the judges convened to decide on the winner, was **Alfie Primrose** with a truly mesmerising recital of Brahms's 'Rhapsody in G Minor, Op. 79, No. 2'

A 2025 finalist, Isak Andersson Ohberg, dazzled the entire room by playing Heitor Villa-Lobos's 'Etude No. 1A1' on guitar.



### The judges, winner and runners-up:



## Gillespie Gathering September 2025

The last Gathering was exciting for us all, as we had little idea of what was going to happen!

'The focus of the September Gathering was on on the school as it is today.

The afternoon opened with the headmaster Neil McCallum giving us all an overview of how the school works in harmony with the Darroch annexe and explaining the opportunity for pupils to study many subjects in Gaelic as opposed to English. The challenges of working out the timetable for all of this must be a huge headache, so well done to the staff and students for making it such a success.



Following Mr McCallum's presentation, it was the turn of the students. After discussions, it had been decided that this Gathering would be led by them, in order to showcase some of the marvellous talent that exists within the school.

What a treat it was!

We had dancers, musicians and drama, all very well performed, and the hard work and dedication of the students shone out from each of the pieces that we saw.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable treat and we would very much like to thank and applaud them all for allowing us to see such talent.



