

James Gillespie's Trust

Alumni Newsletter

Autumn 2026



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Hello friends!

It's that time of the year again when your alumni team bring you some updates on the ongoing work of the trust and what we have been and will be doing to promote the work of the trust and maintain links to the modern school.

Our next gathering will be on **3 October** from 10 30 am to 13.30 in the Muriel Spark building, so keep the date, but more of that later on in this newsletter!

As always - we are happy to hear from you,
jgtalumni@gmail.com

Linda, Fiona, Dave, David

The 'Alumni Team'

Muriel Spark Memorial

One of JGHS's most notable alumni is the author, Dame Muriel Spark. She was born Muriel Camberg in 1918 and attended Gillespie's from 1923 to 1934. One of her most famous works is 'The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie'.

The "Spirit of Spark" is a major international art commission aiming to create a

permanent public monument to the acclaimed Scottish author Dame Muriel Spark in

Edinburgh's East Princes Street Gardens. It is the first memorial dedicated to a woman

in the historic gardens. The memorial will be located within the green spaces of East



Muriel Spark

Princes Street Gardens, placing Spark alongside other towering figures of Scottish literature like Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson.

The winning design was awarded this summer to Dundee artist Jacqueline Donachie, who proposed a series of curved cast terrazzo forms with steps, neuks, and seating designed to encourage people to pause and read. Her artwork draws direct inspiration from a quote in Spark's 1981 novel, *Loitering with Intent*.

The project, supported by leading figures in the arts, including Ian Rankin, Ali Smith, the National Galleries of Scotland and the Muriel Spark Society and entirely funded by philanthropists Morag and James Anderson, aims to celebrate Spark's literary legacy in her birthplace. The competition reached its final stage when the panel—which included writer Jackie Kay and Spark's long-term companion, Penelope Jardine—selected Donachie's design.

The work is expected to take 3 months and to be in place by the end of 2026.

Muriel Spark Walking Tours

The alumni team are delighted to offer, to our alumni and those interested in Muriel Spark, a walking tour taking in some of the Edinburgh locations that were important to Muriel Spark when she was growing up in the Bruntsfield area of the city. The walk also includes a few of the key locations used in the film adaptation of 'The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie', one of Muriel Spark's most famous books. The leisurely walk begins at Morningside Library and takes about 2.5 hours, finishing in Princes Street.

A Muriel Spark Walking Tour has been set up by the Alumni team as a fundraising venture to support the work of the James Gillespie's Trust, for a minimum donation of £10.

Three walks were planned for 2026 but the first two were cancelled due to lack of interest. The next one will be on Saturday 26 September (which coincides with Doors Open Day) and we invite you to register interest as soon as possible.

jgtalumni@gmail.com

Thank you.

Report on the April 'Gillespie Gathering'

Our April 'Gathering' took place on Saturday 25 April, on a bright but not very sunny day. The numbers were well down on previous similar events but those who attended were highly entertained by our excellent speaker, Margot McMurdo. Margo attended Gillespie's from 1960 to 1973 and gave a most interesting and enjoyable account of her time at school, her work as an interior designer, life on a farm in the Scottish Borders and her time as a Scottish tour guide travelling across Scotland with small groups of tourists from around the world.

Also on display at the event were examples of school uniform, including some new items which included a games skirt from the 1970s, copies of school magazines and group photographs of pupils and staff.

Alumni news

In recent years your Alumni team has supported 30th, 50th and 60th anniversary reunions, all highly successful and most enjoyable occasions organised by individuals from the years in question. However, in 2026 we have had no information about any such events being held.

The team maintains and looks after your alumni database which holds contact information for about 1000 former pupils. However, in 2026 this number has not increased due to fewer new members and a regular number of older members leaving the list. It has proved particularly difficult to attract interest from younger alumni who have left school in the last 50 years.

These diminishing numbers are reflected in the numbers attending our 'Gillespie Gatherings' but we are pleased to say that the statistics show there is steady interest in those browsing the James Gillespie's Trust website. Of particular interest are the pages with photographs and the old school magazines. New items of memorabilia are still coming in, and we are always delighted to accept such items for our archives.

The Alumni team will assess the future of our events that are all fundraising activities for the work of the Trust, after the October 'Gillespie Gathering', and also consider any comments that we receive from our membership. It is likely that, if there is insufficient interest in our events, we will hold only one event next year and thereafter limit our activities to supporting reunions and maintaining the website and Facebook page.

The website <https://www.jamesgillespietrust.com/> is your first port of call for all information about the activities of the JGT Alumni section and the work of the JG Trust.

60th anniversary Reunion

In 2027 we are planning a 60th anniversary reunion event for all those who started secondary school in 1967.

We will meet on **Saturday, 4 September** 2027 somewhere fairly local to Gillespie's for a late lunch and a get together of former students who entered first year in **August 1967**. The venue, time and further details will be confirmed once we have an idea of the numbers who will attend.

If you were in this group, we would love to see you join us, but if this is not possible, maybe let us have a few recollections of your school days, friends you are either still in touch with, or perhaps would like to reunite with, and we can hopefully make a little booklet or similar, particular to our year, that could be shared?

Depending on interest, it is likely that we will be holding a gathering at the school in the morning, so two birds with one stone, as they say!

We would also be pleased to hear of any other such events planned for 2027.

New Book!

One of our former pupils, and a regular attender at our gatherings, Norma Allan has published a new book - **MY GILLESPIE MEMORIES**.

Norma tells us that within the pages are her own memories of her time at Gillespie's from 1954 to 1960 when it was a Girls' High School known for its high standards and academic achievement.

"Though I was proud to have earned a place there, I soon kicked against the very strict regime and became something of a rebel. I constantly bucked the system and took little advantage of its many activities and clubs. I became anti-establishment!

In spite of that, I had great affection for the school and have retained this feeling to this day. My memories are still vivid in my mind, and for that reason, I think you will enjoy my recollections."



Norma Allan (nee Hardy)

First year photograph in 1954

A Splash of Nostalgia: Edinburgh's Royal Commonwealth Pool



With the Commonwealth Games returning to Scotland this year, many of us have found ourselves reminiscing about the very first time the Games came to our home city of Edinburgh — and the excitement that rippled through the community.

As a keen young swimmer, I was *thrilled* to learn that Edinburgh would be getting a brand-new, state-of-the-art swimming pool for the event. Not just any pool, mind you — a gleaming 50-metre beauty with seating for 1,700 spectators. Even better, it was being built practically on my doorstep in the South Side. For a teenager who lived in the water, this was the stuff of dreams.

Construction began in 1967, the same year I started at Gillespie's, and the site on Dalkeith Road — overlooking Holyrood Park and the iconic Arthur's Seat — quickly became a place of great anticipation. By October 1969, the building was complete, and on 16 January 1970, Princess Anne officially opened the Royal Commonwealth Pool. Or, as generations of Edinburgh locals have affectionately called it ever since, *the Commie*.

The honour of the very first splash went to Sir Peter Heatly, a Commonwealth springboard diving legend with gold medals from three consecutive Games (1950, 1954, 1958). His contributions to the sport were immense — vice chairman of the 1970 Games, chair of the Commonwealth Games Federation, and later an honorary Life Vice-President. He was inducted into both the Scottish Sports Hall of Fame and the Scottish Swimming Hall of Fame. To me, though, he was also “Coach Heatly,” guiding Warrender's elite swimmers during the late '60s and early '70s — including me.



Sir Peter Heatly

Growing up swimming in Edinburgh's Victorian pools — Infirmary Street and Warrender were my regular haunts — the idea of this sparkling modern facility was irresistible. I was determined to be among the first in the water. There was only one problem: the opening was on a school day.

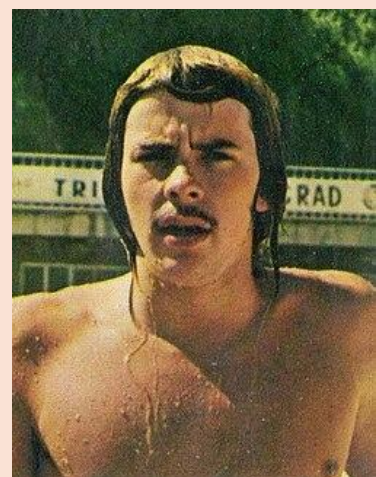
Undeterred, my friend Lesley and I marched ourselves to Miss McIvor's office to request time off for this historic moment. To her credit, I believe she genuinely tried to find a fair way to say yes. The crucial question, however, was whether we were on the school swimming team. I was. Lesley wasn't. And that, unfortunately, sank our chances. Allowing just the two of us wasn't fair; allowing the whole team would exclude Lesley; allowing everyone would cause chaos. Her decision was fair — but oh, was I disappointed.

Still, nothing could keep us away for long. After school, a group of us headed straight to the Commie, where we celebrated by leaping off the springboards and diving platforms, each time going one level higher... until a lifeguard spotted our antics and put a stop to it before I reached the top board. Probably for the best!

Today, the Commie remains one of Edinburgh's most loved facilities. Its massive £37 million refurbishment — nearly ten times the original cost — added a moveable floor to the 25-metre diving pool, allowing it to double as a standard pool, plus a new 25-metre warm-up and teaching pool. The leisure complex now boasts a range of sports facilities and a café, making it a hub for swimmers of all ages.

The renovated pool was reopened by David Wilkie, Olympic gold medallist in the 200m breaststroke in 1976 — the first British swimming gold since 1960 and the first male champion since 1908. And yes, he too was a Warrender swimmer. Clearly, something in that water worked wonders.

The Commie has been part of Edinburgh's heartbeat for over half a century. For many of us, it's not just a pool — it's a place filled with memories, milestones, and more than a few mischievous dives.



Gold Medallist

David Wilkie in 1974



Advance notice of the October 'Gillespie Gathering'.

The next alumni event will be our October 'Gillespie Gathering' on Saturday 3 October from 10.30 am to 1.30 pm when we will have a glimpse into modern day life at Gillespie's.

The event will present a showcase featuring current JGHS students demonstrating their learning in music, drama, dance and media. The showcase we were witness to in September 2025 was excellent and this one will also be an event not to be missed.

We invite you all to come along and support the young people, meet your friends over refreshments, and explore the memorabilia on display.

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.

However, for these donations and purchases of John MacLeod's book 'Faithful and Brave' for only £10, we ask you to bring CASH, as unfortunately we are unable to use card machines, due to the lack of signal in the grounds of the school.

Entrance to JGHS is from Warrender Park Road or from Whitehouse Loan (next to Links Dental Practice). There is no longer an entrance on Lauderdale Street. Limited parking is available at the school or in the local area (no tickets and regulations on a Saturday).

Looking forward to seeing you on the 3rd for another busy day of chat and catchup with friends old and new.

Do let us know if you are hoping to come along, to give us an idea of numbers for catering. **jgtalumni@gmail.com**

Thank you.