

FSS Edinburgh Branch AGM: Wednesday 29 June 2022

Chairman's Report for 2021-22

A full programme of events in French and English was drawn up for the 2021-22 session and we renewed our positive partnership with the Institut français d'Ecosse (IFE).

After the Covid restrictions of the last two years, meetings resumed at the IFE on a Wednesday afternoon from 4.15 to 6.15 pm. Members enjoyed the return to face-to-face meetings as well as the joint events with the IFE, always followed by a "convivial" moment.

All talks are open to guests and non-members. Our programme offers a wide variety of both classic, topical and unusual subjects. We were delighted to welcome new members throughout the year who were keen to join after attending one of the monthly events.

Monthly Events

-The traditional *pot d'accueil* and enrolment that marks the start of the year, was held at the beginning of **October** rather than at the end of September since quite a few members were away in September. At this first very convivial meeting, members and their guests were delighted to meet up again and to hear short presentations from Edinburgh Branch project-partners and speakers for the forthcoming programme.

-At the end of **October** Richard Mowe and Ilona Morrison of the **French Film Festival** gave a preview of this year's 29th edition of the festival. This lively presentation has become an annual date in our programme since 2015 and is always keenly awaited by our members from whom we always receive positive feedback.

-For **November** we chose a topic to coincide with COP26, *Les forêts communales en Ecosse et en France* by Heloïse Le Moal, winner of 2020 Scottish Land Commission National Award. She was commissioned to carry out a comparative study between municipal forests on the continent and the unique system of community woodlands in Scotland. The talk was based on her report and findings. The presentation was highly informative.

-**December** saw a **prize-giving evening** for winners of the annual *concours d'écriture*". The chair of the FSS Edinburgh Branch and the French Consul General gave a brief introduction to this year's event.

The concours d'écriture was created in 2016 by lecturer Sylvain Blanche for University students. From its inception it was supported by FSS Edinburgh Branch, the IFE, the Goethe Institute and Edinburgh College Publishing Department. Our branch provides the judging panel, offers certificates and tokens from its own funds for the first three winning entries. The IFE offers a French course and membership of the IFE to the winner, it hosts the ceremony and exhibition of the texts as printed posters. This year, entries were received from Edinburgh Napier University, the University of Edinburgh, the University of St Andrews. On the evening, after the presentation to the winners, attendees were asked to choose two *Coups de Coeur* from the exhibited entries. The two winners were then presented with a prize before the closure of a most enjoyable evening with a good turnout of students.

- in January, the Epiphany Concert- with renaissance music *from Cordes en Ciel* was cancelled due to the soprano recovering from Covid and postponed till April.

-Our second **January** event was entitled *Pretty Costumes and rendering Movement: Degas' pretext for painting dancers?* by Agnes Ness, a member of the Edinburgh Branch and specialist in art history

and dance which she has been teaching for many years. She studied French and History of Art at Edinburgh University and at L' École du Louvre in Paris. The talk was a "Masterclass" on Degas' techniques for painting dance movement, and much appreciated by a large audience of members and non-members.

-In **February** the talk ***Les James Gordon Bennett, journalistes: un Ecossais à New York, un Américain à Paris*** was given by Geoff Hare, also a member of the Edinburgh Branch, retired lecturer in French studies at Aberdeen and Newcastle University, specialising in history of sport and media. This talk on two fascinating characters in a world of cosmopolitanism and celebrity culture spanning the mid-19th to the beginning of the 20th century was again very well attended, despite storm warnings!

Also In February, Information on a FSSS joint *You Tube* event was circulated to all members. *Songs based on the life of Mary Queen of Scots* introduced and sung by Louise MacDonald (contralto) with Graeme McNaught (piano).

-**March** saw a return for our annual ***Déjeuner des membres*** to the **eh15 restaurant**, where the Edinburgh College catering students prepared a special high quality French meal, beautifully cooked and served in wonderful surroundings and enjoyed by 23 of our members.

Later in March, we welcomed the ***annual Guest speaker from France***. This year in partnership with IFE, the event was in the form of "Meet the author" where a moderator Catherine Guiat a member of our branch and Head Librarian at the IFE, interviewed the French-Algerian novelist, playwright, and actress Samira Sedira. This formula, in a relaxed atmosphere proved highly successful and attracted a good audience of various ages.

The visit coincided with the month of the Francophonie where the guest speaker, Samira Sedira, led a workshop for S3 students on 21 March at the IFE and where several of our members again made use of the annual open invitation to all FSSS members to attend the prize-giving ceremony for the *concours de la francophonie*.

- **April** saw the rescheduled Epiphany concert by ***Cordes en ciel*** with Kristiina Watt (renaissance lute) and Héloïse Bernard (soprano). The programme of specially chosen 17th century "airs de cour", enhanced by a highly informative visual presentation, proved a real delight.

-In **May** the Branch co-hosted a panel discussion on ***The Far-right in France and the 2022 Elections***, organised in collaboration with the University of Glasgow and made possible thanks to an Arts and Humanities Research Grant from the Royal Society of Edinburgh. The panellists included Emile Chabal, University of Edinburgh, Marta Lorimer, London School of Economics and Political Science, Timothy Peace, University of Glasgow. A You Tube recording was kindly made by the French Institute technician and sent by Dr Tim Peace for distribution to members of the FSS and others. He also indicated that such collaboration may be possible in the future.

- The final talk of the session, also in May, ***Proust retrouvé***, was given by Professor Marion Schmid on the recently discovered 75 pages of the oldest draft of Proust's "In Search of Lost time". This was again a joint meeting with the Institute and drew a wide audience. The speaker was able to adapt her talk to a specialist and non-specialist audience and made herself available for the period of conviviality to talk to the attendees. This was a fitting end to our programme, and we look forward to meetings of this quality in the future

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Educational and cultural projects

From its funds, the Branch continues to support several initiatives in line with its remit and where its participation can be publicly acknowledged: The French Film Festival Education Programme: *Le cinéma à l'école* for primary and secondary students, *Le Concours d'écriture*, for university students, the *annual French Film Festival* for the general public.

We are reflecting on the possibility of supporting and building on a language project for Primary pupils with the Scottish children's author Alistair Chisholm, whose book *Inch and Grubb* is recommended reading for P1 and P2. The book has been translated into French and Italian and a recent language and translation workshop in Edinburgh for young pupils proved highly successful.

Alexander Gray Bequest

- **Education Fund (2020-21)**

We are very pleased that with the lifting of Covid restrictions, the exchange visit between Edinburgh College Catering Department and *Le lycée hôtelier de Dinard*, for which we had initially earmarked £500 for their exchange visit in May 2020, finally went ahead in April/May 2022. The Scottish students attended classes, visited restaurants and suppliers in the Dinard area and returned with the French students who were offered the same experience in Scotland.

Part of the project is a very popular one-off dinner prepared by both the Scottish and French students and open to the general public for extra-fund raising. Some of our members attended on a personal basis. The Edinburgh Branch was publicly thanked by the College Principal and the Hospitality Department for its contribution to funds to help students who would not otherwise have been able to go.

- **Lecture Fund (2021-22)**

This is used for paying the honorarium and expenses of speakers in French and for sending the annual Bulletin to members.

Outreach

Exchange of speakers between the branches has resumed. Geoff Hare gave a talk in Aberdeen, Odile Hughson in Aberdeen and Perth and Tom Wight also in Aberdeen and Perth.

The Branch contacted the Edinburgh University French club, whose president was interested in possible joint events. Agnes Ness agreed to give the club members a guided tour of the Impressionist paintings in the Scottish National Gallery. Further cooperation with the students is envisaged.

The biennial Franco-Scottish Society /Association franco-ecossaise Exchange visit. (7th to 15th June 2022: *Les Hauts de France*)

Five of our members signed up for this visit, which due to Covid was postponed from 2020. The programme, slightly amended, was drawn up and organised by the President of the AFE, Thierry Rechniewski and the Treasurer, Julien Valée. This joint activity in line with the original objects of the society for the interchange of members throughout Scotland and France was in place as early as 1896! For this "edition" the FSSS was represented by eight members and the AFE by sixteen.

Membership stands at 48. For the last two years, we have applied reduced membership rates since capitation fees have not been requested for the national subscription.

This year's branch membership rates were raised slightly from the previous "full pandemic" session to £15 for ordinary membership, £35 for patron membership (still a reduced rate from previous

years). For those joining from January, a rate of £10 ordinary membership and £15 patron membership was applied.

Membership fees help to cover minimum administration fees, hire of premises and more importantly to continue giving financial support to local educational projects in accordance with our mission statement.

We continue to offer our members information on topics of Franco-Scottish interest by e-mail or post and a newsletter.

Committee

A big thank you to all who have helped to make this year's events possible and fulfil our remit. Since the last Branch AGM in July 2021, the Branch no longer has a Hon. Secretary. Administration has been divided between remaining committee members. Events are published on the website with additional information wherever possible. Continued and further use of the website is envisaged, and we are grateful to Chris Lindsay, Perth Branch, for his help and support in this area.

We are also most grateful to all members who help at the meetings and contribute to the convivial group atmosphere which has also proved an asset in attracting new members and guests.

*Anne-Colette Lequet, Chairman
(June 2022)*