

THE STERLING SMITH ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM AWARDS A FELLOWSHIP TO ALEX NEISH



At 12.30pm on Friday, 25th August, guests on arrival were welcomed by Colin O'Brien, Chairman of The Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum, and by Alex and Patricia Neish and their son, Sean.



Colin O'Brien, Chairman of the Smith

A light lunch of soup and sandwiches was available from 12.30-1.30 followed by tours of the renowned old pewter collection on display. The event was well attended and note was made of five Stirling Councillors being present (an unprecedented number it was said), several representatives: from the Hammermen of Edinburgh; the Provost of Stirling, Councillor Christine Simpson; Keith Brown, the MSP for Clackmannanshire and Dunblane; Bruce Crawford, MSP for Stirling; the Stirling Poet in Residence, John Coutts; Elspeth King, Curator; Michael McGinnes, assistant Curator; and Kathie Costello of the Friends of the Smith and leader of the volunteer Gallery Guides.

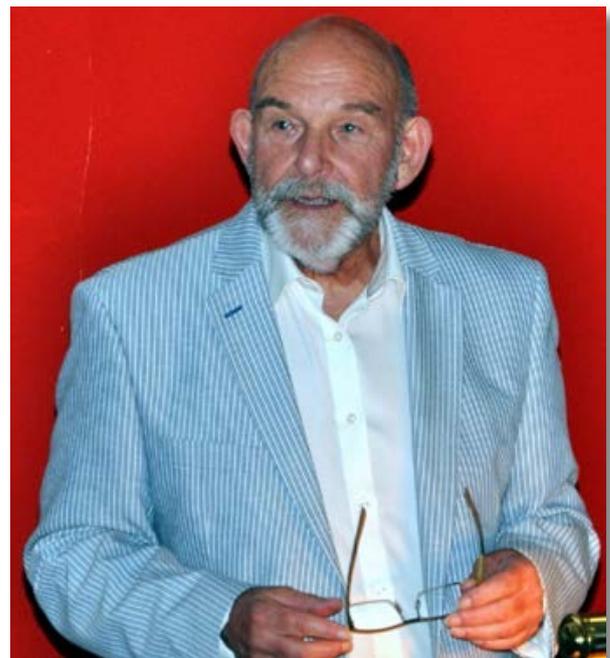
Also present were: Graham Smith, from Dunblane, who made the Silver Medal presented and shown at the end of this article; Dr Jamie Ferguson, President of the Pewter Society; Jonathan Walters, treasurer of the PS; Carl Ricketts, past president of the PS; and

John Bank, Acting Librarian. Special note was also made of a South American Scottish colleague of Alex's, Tony Mackenzie, a friend of 50 years; and a former primary school colleague, Sandy Tosh, who had read of the collection and contacted Alex again after 70 years. Fortunately, wives, partners and well-wishers increased the attractiveness of the audience.

At 1.30pm all guests assembled in the Lecture Theatre. The room was made even more interesting by a small display of key pieces from the collection, and on the walls by carved wooden roundels that decorate the ceiling of the banqueting hall in Stirling Castle.

Colin O'Brien, Chairman of the Smith, welcomed everyone and named a few. He spoke briefly about how wonderful it was that such a fine collection had been given to the Smith (with ongoing support) and mentioned that in 143 years this medal was now to be awarded for only the *sixth* time. (The medal itself is shown in close up at the end of this article).

He was followed by Past President of the Pewter Society, Carl Ricketts, a noted author, authority and himself a collector of Old British Pewter. Carl had set out a small display table



Carl Ricketts, a Past President of the Pewter Society



Some fine examples including: a Scottish Bossed Pewter Dish made in Edinburgh and perhaps used at Holyrood by James VI of Scotland around 1600; 6 superb, slim, Baluster measures from the early 17th century; a very fine and detailed Roman ewer stand or large charger; four William and Mary wriggleworked, flat lid, English Tankards; and a very fine Baluster measure, similar in detail to one rescued from the Mary Rose (which sank in 1545).

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Carl spoke about the importance, and uniqueness, of the Neish collection; how it was of World Class with many of the rarest pieces known. He also mentioned the remarkable circumstances in which it had been assembled, paying due tribute to the collector. He also spoke about the pieces on show, and the importance of Old Pewter. Afterwards, cotton gloves were available for those who would examine such rare pieces.

Provost Christine Simpson (a charming lady whom this writer had the pleasure of her company at lunchtime) spoke after Carl, thanking Alex and welcoming the collection to the Smith Stirling.



Provost Christine Simpson



Bruce Crawford, MSP

Keith Brown MSP (Cabinet Secretary for The Economy, Jobs and Fair Work) proved that politicians are human and gave a warm and humorous tribute to Alex and to the Smith. He was later followed by Bruce Crawford, MSP for Stirling, who also spoke and this writer was delighted that neither made any derogatory reference to the English present! Despite all these politicians, this was not in any part a political event.



Keith Brown, MSP

In between the two above, Kathie Costello, unaccompanied by musicians or other singers, sang two songs quite delightfully, the second of which was a humorous song by Tom Lehrer called

Rickety Tickety Tin – being the only reference she could find that was close to Pewter. The song deals with a fictional familicide whose female lead could

not in the last verse tell lies, as that was a sin! An unusual and very accomplished performance.



Kathie Costello

Following Bruce Crawford was John Coutts, the Stirling Smith Poet in Residence (an honorary role such as is known well to PS members present). He is a performer,



Alex and Patricia



John Coutts, the Stirling Smith Poet in Residence



Elspeth King, Curator

translator and broadcaster. He wore an enlargement of a 'Dysart Poor' beggar's badge. John's title was "Honest Pewter" and he made clear how the products outlast the makers and users, including in his poem mention of various pieces in the collection.

This was in poetic form a tribute to the collection and welcoming those present to inspect the pieces Carl had had put out and were on show within the Museum.

After John, Colin O'Brien presented the Medal and Award of Fellowship of the Smith to Alex.

Alex responded with a few words explaining in small part how he had begun to collect. Clearly, it was an emotional time for him. Alex also told of his fine Jewish collection in the Old Synagogue of Barcelona - given, as the notice there clearly says, by a Scottish Protestant!

After Alex, Elspeth King, Curator, spoke to thank Alex and all present, and then directed us to the afternoon tea of excellent homemade cakes and sandwiches provided by the volunteers in the Museum itself.



The Fellowship Medal; only six have been awarded in the last 143 years!

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It was a splendid occasion, with a variety of short speakers - all very cheerful. The singing and poetry was a delightful addition, giving touches of humour, whilst skilfully presented.

Alex Neish can be very proud and pleased that his collection has found such a fine and permanent home now in 2017, among people who really care.

John Bank

Photos courtesy of Sean Neish

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Link to the Stirling Smith Art Gallery & Museum website: <http://www.smithartgalleryandmuseum.co.uk/>

Youtube links, for those interested, to the songs and the poems follow as videoed –

Kathie Costello 1
https://youtu.be/sio_6PVMTrs

Kathie Costello 2
<https://youtu.be/rAsTFMi9sl0>

John Coutts
<https://youtu.be/PYGqgK6p6es>

(copy and paste into email address bar if necessary).

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