



James Gillespie's Trust:

www.jamesgillespietrust.com

Alumni Section:

alumni@jamesgillespietrust.com

James Gillespie's Trust: Alumni Section

Newsletter September 2024

Hello, and a sincere welcome to you all!

The alumni team have not been idle since our last newsletter in March this year - you will see that the website has been regularly updated with interesting items, and our alumni database is also regularly updated.

If you are still in contact with any former pupils, please ask if they have already given us their details, and if not please ask them to consider adding themselves to the database.

We are always interested in receiving news and articles that would be of interest to others. It may surprise you just what others would find interesting! It could be your memories of school, a particular teacher, maybe a subject that led to your career or a hobby which you have maintained to this day?

Perhaps you would like to contact a former friend from school that you have lost touch with - let us know, maybe they are trying to contact you too!

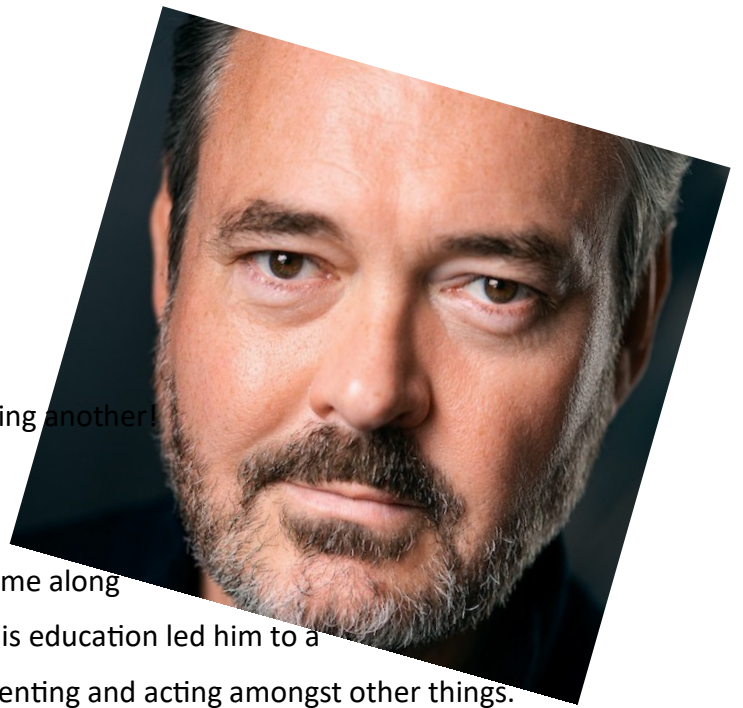
There may be an idea that you have for an event or article in the newsletter or website, again, these pages are yours, the alumni team are simply here to try to facilitate the wishes of you, the alumni.



yours,
the Alumni Team!

With our thanks to Christine Ferguson, who has recently, unfortunately, had to leave the team for personal reasons.

**Next Gillespie Gathering -
October 5th 2024
Muriel Spark Building
13.30–16.30
Guest Speaker**



We had such fun in April at the reunion, that we are holding another! Another. Again, it is for all former pupils and not restricted to a particular cohort or year group.

Grant Stott, a former pupil of the school has agreed to come along and talk to us about his time as a Gillespie lad, and how his education led him to a career, firstly in the police and then in broadcasting, presenting and acting amongst other things.

The event is free to attend, though cash donations to cover the cost of hospitality would be most welcome—we regret that we are unable to take card payments, unfortunately. Due to lack of phone reception in that area of the school, card machines do not work! Any profit is given to the Trust to benefit their ongoing projects, and of course donations specifically to the Trust would also be very welcome on the day. See the website for details of other methods of donating to the work of the Trust.

Gathering April 27th 2024

Not only was the weather very favourable, but also the new 'alumni team' found that the new venue for these events, the Muriel Spark building and theatre within it, was ideal for the type of gathering that we had in mind.

Starting early in the morning we worked hard to ensure that there were plenty of refreshments and memorabilia to keep everyone interested, and judging from the comments we received, we probably pitched it just about right! We managed to be organised before our first guests



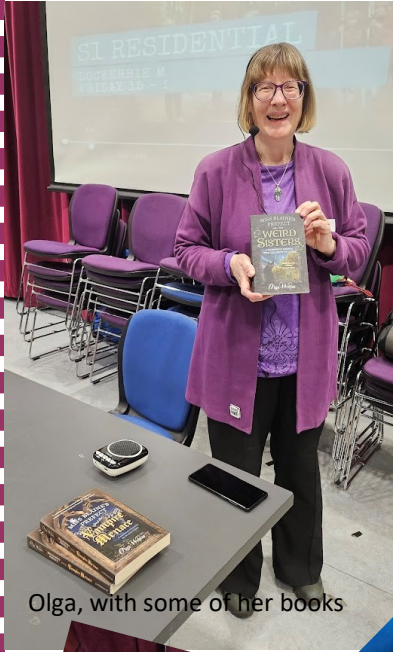
arrived!

It was fascinating for people to look back not only at the period of time when they were students, but to see older photographs of perhaps members of staff, or 'kent faces' that they could relate to. Meeting up with former friends and chatting about their days at school and where life had taken

them was a lovely start to the day.

Several items of school uniform survive in our archives, as well as school badges, medals and photos and we were also able to display the old honours boards, which sadly do not have a permanent home in the new school currently.





Olga, with some of her books

Olga Wojtas then gave us an entertaining and humorous talk about her time at the school, journalism and slightly quirky, detective novels featuring the time travelling librarian from Morningside

She read a short excerpt from books, highlighting the

absolute loathing Shona had for the book 'The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,' and her hilarious efforts to prevent, as far as possible, anyone getting to read it!

Much to the delight of everyone, there were on sale copies of Olga's books which she gladly au-



one of her



L_R: Gladys Bain (nee Sinclair) Olga Wojtas

Fiona Donaldson and Elizabeth White



Gathering attendees 27 April 2024

School Archives Update

Some good news about the school archives! [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) has reached a deal with Edinburgh City Archives (“ECA”) that will see the family research organisation digitising and cataloguing all of the relevant city archives (including the various iterations of the James Gillespie's schools) with the aim of providing open access online. It's hoped the task will be completed by summer 2025.

Those of you who have attended alumni gatherings in the distant past may recall that, in addition to the artifacts, photographs and magazines still exhibited at gatherings today, there were also numerous boxes and files containing paper-based records, including those relating to individual pupils. When the Data Protection Acts (1998 and 2018) (the “DPA”) came into force access to many of these records was restricted.

Given the sheer volume of the school records and the fact they had not undergone detailed cataloguing, no one was quite sure what they revealed. Accordingly, around the time of the DPA it was decided to deliver all the records to ECA, who agreed to digitise and catalogue everything.

When I joined the Alumni Team last year I took on the task of chasing up the ECA in the hope of publishing in the Newsletter details of however far they had got with the digitisation and details of what could and couldn't be accessed. It turned out that the ECA had done nothing other than to create a very rudimentary index identifying the storage boxes the records had been placed into, together with a very limited indication of the contents e.g. “Correspondence 1900s”.

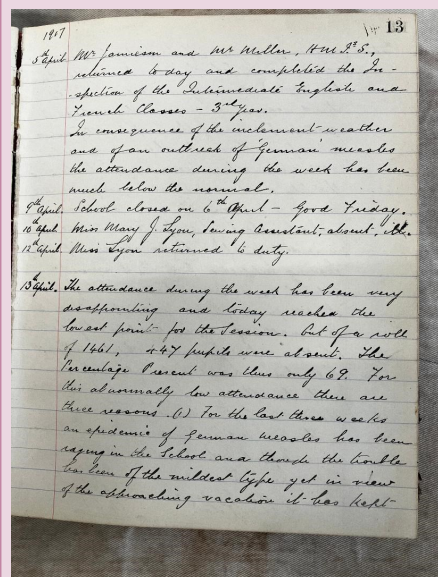
There was also a note of those dated more than 100 years ago (and thus open to the public) and those created since 1924 (in which case potentially restricted under the DPA).

If we wanted a clear record of what existed, we would have to do it ourselves.

ECA were very cooperative. The school archives are stored off-site, so it was agreed that I would randomly select a couple of the boxes, they would be brought to the Search Room at the City Chambers, and I would try to gauge from these how big a task lay ahead.

I chose the school log books for 1908–1916 and 1917–1928. These turned out to be weekly logs written by the headmaster, presumably for the benefit of the education authorities. Although charming as artifacts, they were predictably rather dull records of which teachers had been allotted which classes and when various inspections were due.

However, the more I read into them the more interesting two particular issues became. First, how dependant school life in winter was on the weather. The school is closed for days and, on occasions, weeks at a time due to snow and ice. Secondly, in the days before vaccinations and antibiotics, infections and illnesses account for long absences of both pupils and teachers.



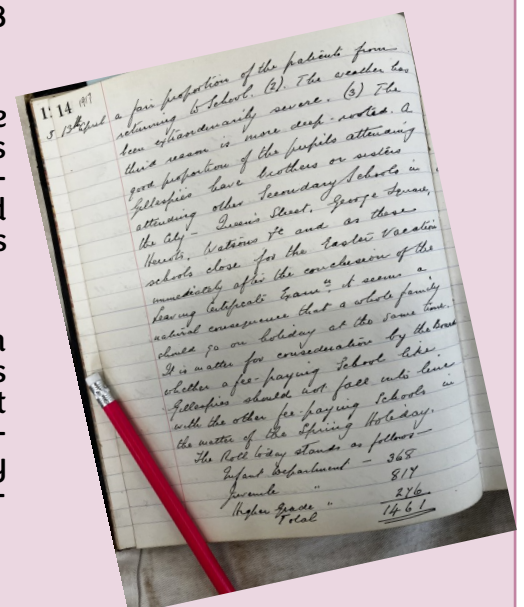
The First World War does not get mentioned (I had expected perhaps some fund raising or church parades) but the flu epidemic of 1918 causes havoc.

A further interesting point was the first appearance on the teacher lists of Miss Christina Kay, the inspiration for Miss Jean Brodie. Attached are a couple of pages from the logs that give the flavour.

The conclusion of the examination of the boxes was that the work was going to be a long, arduous and not particularly entertaining one. However, just as I was leaving the City

Chambers, one of the librarians broke the news to me about Ancestry.com.

I was off the hook! I couldn't have been more delighted.



*In our last newsletter we appealed for some former students to share their life histories with us, perhaps encouraging current students to think beyond the obvious for their future careers. We had a lovely response from **Ralph Findley, OBE**.*

This is his story:

I started at James Gillespie's in August 1973, a consequence, I think, of a Government policy introduced in the 1960s. The school sign on Whitehouse Loan which until that summer had read 'James Gillespie's High School For Girls' was now a little shorter: it was as easy as that.

One mixed year of comprehensive pupils and five years of girls attending an independent school which shrank every year as the comprehensive intakes followed, one after another, until by 1979 the independent school was no more, which is when I left to go to Edinburgh University. If it sounds a little like a social experiment, perhaps it was, but a successful one overall.

It was all perfectly normal to us, but, looking back, there were signs that our transition from primary to higher education was a little different, at least from the perspective of a 13-year-old boy. The Head Girl was, of course, a girl, and there was no Head Boy. The prefects were, of course, all girls. The boards that spoke of achievements and honours spoke, of course, of the achievements and honours of girls. There was some part of me that wondered if boys would be allowed to grace those boards (I can't recall if they ever did). When I describe to friends the nature of the school I went to, this inspiration for Muriel Spark's Miss Jean Brodie and her girls who would conquer the world, they say how fortunate I must have been. Unless, of course, they come from Edinburgh, in which case they would understand that the attention of those girls was more likely to be focused on boys from the many Public Schools in Edinburgh rather than on our motley group of comprehensive pupils. Boys. They probably had a point.

If there were oddities, we at least fell on our feet with the teachers. Mrs Domanska (mathematics), Mr Mackenzie (physics), Mr Gault (Biology), Miss Cuthbert (English). Dedicated, passionate about their vocation. If you wanted proof that teachers give you something for life, here it was. Miss Cuthbert left me with a lifelong appreciation of DH Lawrence and Thomas Hardy for which I am grateful, though Odour of Chrysanthemums hung heavy in the classroom air at the time.

I went on to study Geology, as much as anything because I loved nature - I think Edinburgh gives you that, if you are looking - and it appealed to the scientific bent I had at the time. If you are going to study geology anywhere, Edinburgh is the place, not least because of the geological importance of Arthur's Seat and proximity to the Highlands and Islands of the west coast. And so I became an exploration geologist, mapping for oil and gas in Northern Ireland in 1983 at a time when the province was still grappling with sectarian division. It was an 'interesting' time.

I saw that the people at the top of the company I worked for all had a finance background. They were not scientists like me. I might have not been one of Miss Brodie's girls, but perhaps the ethos was there somewhere—I had ambition, and I changed my career by signing up for three years before the mast of Chartered Accountancy. In those days, to study accountancy in Scotland meant an extra year of conversion course, and so I went south, to Nottingham.

I eventually wound up in London in the late 80's. This was an opportunity, and I became a financial services specialist when the London market was exploding and becoming a global centre for financial services.

It was a fun time, and led me to join one of Britain's biggest companies, Bass PLC - the brewer and pub operator - in 1990. Bass, Britain's oldest trademark - the famous red triangle can be spotted on Manet's 'A Bar at the Folies-Bergère', painted in 1882 - had just acquired Holiday Inn Hotels, and needed someone to help set up the treasury operations to finance it. That was my introduction to the hospitality sector.

I stayed with pubs and beer for most of my career (some might not be surprised). I was fortunate to become Finance Director of one of the country's biggest brewers and pub operators (Marston's PLC) and then its Chief Executive for nearly 30 years.



(Cont'd on page 7)

(cont'd from page 4)

So, we wait to see what summer 2025 brings.

If you would like any more information about the ECA, their website is very helpful - <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/managing-information/edinburgh-city-archives>.

If you are interested in viewing any of the open records you can apply for a seat in the Search Room at the City Chambers by emailing archives@edinburgh.gov.uk. If you are only interested in your personal school records, these are of course open to you under the DPA. The first step is to make a "subject access request" via <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/managing-information/make-subject-access-request/3>. This in turn will require you to make an initial, direct approach the current head teacher. I assume this is for the purpose of verifying ID (although how this helps with those of us who enrolled 70 years ago, I don't know!).

If you do pursue any of these options - we'd be interested to hear from you.

Christine Ferguson

Alumni Volunteers Wanted

Do you have a little spare time on your hands? Would you like to assist us on the alumni team? We are looking for one or two enthusiastic people to help with the work of the alumni team. It is not particularly onerous— three or four meetings a year, online, and a little bit of practical help at our gatherings, and sharing of ideas that could be interesting to other former pupils of Gillespie's!

If you would like to volunteer yourself, please contact the team on alumni@jamesgillespietrust.com

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.jamesgillespietrust.com/donations> or you can write to the treasurer at finance@jamesgillespietrust.com

Legacy in the Links -

A Path in Bruntsfield Links has been renamed to honour the legacy of 'Chariots of Fire' inspiration Eric Liddell.

Unveiled by Scottish International Rugby Player, Darcy Graham, The Eric Liddell Way opens 100 years on from the Scot's historic gold medal at the 1924 Paris Olympics, and was part of the 'Eric Liddell 100' projects supported by the Eric Liddell Community. This follows in the footsteps of Muriel Spark, who also had a path in Bruntsfield Links named after her in 2018. Both have also been honoured by Gillespie's having two of their buildings named after Liddell (Sports) and Spark (Creative)

The [Eric Liddell Community](#) is an Edinburgh care charity and community hub founded in 1980, in memory of the inspirational Olympic gold medallist, Eric Liddell whose win in the 1924 Paris Olympics was the subject of the film 'Chariots of Fire'. The Organisation is currently housed at 15 Morningside Road, in the former church.



School Dux 1884

One hundred and forty years ago on 29 July 1884, Mabel Crosbie (Crosby) Mitchell and George D Robertson received silver medals as duxes of James Gillespie's School for boys and girls for the session 1883-84.

They were awarded beautiful pocket watches as prizes at the annual exhibition and distribution of prizes in connection with the school which took place in the Lecture Hall of George Watson's College, Archibald Place, Edinburgh, under the presidency of Bailie Clark, Master of the Edinburgh Merchant Company.

Mabel Mitchell was born in Blythswood, Glasgow in 1870 to mother, Christina and father, Robert. She had three sisters, Catherine, Roberta, Elizabeth and two brothers, and in 1884 Mabel would have been about 12 years old. The family lived in the Polwarth area of Edinburgh at 11 Orwell Place. Mabel trained as a bookkeeper and typist, working in Edinburgh, and died in Pittenweem in 1930.

At the ceremony, the governors of the school announced that they were altogether satisfied with, and thanked the headmaster, Mr Jenkins, and all the teachers for, the first class education the pupils received at Gillespie's School, which had resulted in the percentage of passes in 1883/84 having amounted to 97.3%.

They were also confident that, although it was a school strictly for the children of the working classes, the school could hold its own against any other school in the city. (Adapted from an article in *The Scotsman*, 30 July 1884) The inscription on the watch mentions The Merchant Company. In his will, James Gillespie left £500 to the Edinburgh Merchant Company on condition that they acted as Trustees. The Merchant Company agreed to do this and, in 1803 the [original] Gillespie Trust was formed. However, by 1908, with a growing school role and more space required, the Gillespie Trust had insufficient funds to expand the school premises and the Trustees, reluctantly after 105 years of Merchant Company governance, agreed to pass over responsibility for the school to the Edinburgh School Board.

The alumni team are most grateful to a family member of Mabel's, Maureen Gifford, for passing on this information and for the photograph of the watch.



The Inscription on the watch reads:

Edinburgh Merchant Schools Session 1883-1884

James Gillespie's Schools

Mabel Crosby Mitchell Dux

(cont'd from page 5)

The skills you learn around a Board table are transferable, and I became Chair of Keele University and then Chair of Vistry PLC, one of the UKs largest housebuilders and now a FTSE100 company. I was grateful to be awarded two honorary doctorates, one from Keele and the other from the University of Wolverhampton. I had always wanted to be 'Dr Findlay' and somehow it had happened. I am now Chair of C&C PLC, based in Dublin, owner of famous brands including Tennent's Lager, Magners Cider, and Bulmer's Irish Cider, and live in the Midlands with my wife, Louise.

In 2023 I was humbled to be awarded an OBE for services to hospitality. One warm July day my family and I went to Windsor Castle for me to be presented with the award. If you wonder how those things come about, the truth is one never knows - you don't know who proposed you, or how it was decided, you receive a letter. And so I found myself on a bright red carpet, facing Prince William, and, in answer to his informed and insightful questions, giving a rather irreverent response. It was a fine day.

Ralph Findlay

JGHS 68 – 74, 50 Year Reunion!

In April, fifty one of us met up for afternoon tea and a celebration cake and we all had a wonderful time.

So many memories, so many friendships rekindled.

Was it embarrassing not remembering who someone was? No. we just had to look at their (colour-coded by-house no less!) name badge. Some people even tried to fool us by not having grey 😊 hair but it didn't work!

Even the most reluctant attendees were persuaded to come along, we know not how, by well-meaning school friends, and were won over and thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon.

We had a table for photos and memorabilia, a slideshow with photos, memories – funny and poignant (Miss Frier memories the most by far) and early 70's music playing –

although you couldn't hear it much over all the chatter. We had photos taken including everyone and also by house.

We had asked everyone for their postcode beforehand and plotted them on a map. This led to two people discovering that they shopped in the same M&S and went to the same doctors' surgery in Warrington – with another living not far away! A toast was made to absent friends and those no longer with us.



Reunion Cake



68-74 Cohort 50 year Reunion

Reminiscing afterwards we were all surprised how little we talked about the fifty intervening years, the main chat was about our school days and, for most, our lives in retirement.

Of course we realise that reunions aren't everyone's thing, but we would still like to hear from you. We can add you to the database so that you can see photos, read stories, view the map etc.

Several people couldn't come in April so an informal get together is planned on October 5th this year. If you are one of the 1968 to 1974 cohort, and would like to hear about our next meet up, or join our database, please email jghs68to74@gmail.com

Sheila Capewell

Faithful & Brave

By John McLeod - a short
history of the school

Reduced!

Account name: James Gillespie's Trust
Sort Code: 80 22 60 Account no: 17854260 for payment

Last remaining stock of this charming book has been reduced by £8 and is now only £9.99, plus postage!

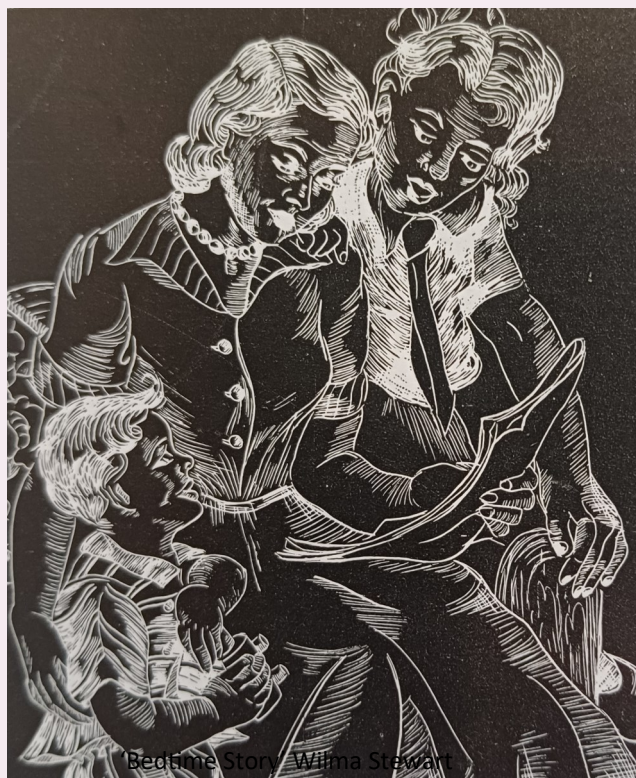
To receive your copy please Email the school at:

admin@jamesgillespies.edin.sch.uk to reserve a copy and arrange for collection with proof of payment. Price is £9.99 if collected from school or £14.50 if the book is to be posted to a UK address.

Wilma Stewart

In our April issue of the newsletter, we were asking if anyone knew who the artistic Wilma Stewart was. Much to our delight, we did get a lovely response from someone who knew her— **Margery Goodban (Nicholson)**

Margery tells us: Wilma married John Forgie and they had two sons. The family lived at Brodick, on the Isle of Arran. Sadly, she died suddenly at the age of 46, in 1983. Her husband was a member of Greenbank Church, and so I was still in contact. Margery recalls - 'She was certainly a wonderful



Bedtime Story - Wilma Stewart

artist, even at school, and it was very sad that she died so young'.

Following some research, we have been able to find out that it seems Wilma Jane Stewart was born in 1937 in Edinburgh. In 1959, aged 22 she married John Murray Forgie in Peebles.

Her two sons appear to have been Murray Stewart Forgie, born in 1961, and Garry Muir Forgie, born in 1966, but it has not been possible to absolutely corroborate all of this information.

Despite a bit of further searching there was no further information on her career or hobbies after leaving school

Thank you so much Margery, for this information following the wee piece in the newsletter,



The Night Watchman - Wilma Stewart

Upcoming Reunions

There are a couple of reunions planned for 2025!

The Class of 1975 are planning a 50th year reunion.

The Class of 1965 are planning a 60th year reunion.

If you, or anyone you are in contact with could be interested in attending either of these planned events, please get in touch so that your details can be given to the co coordinators of these events.

Remember to keep an eye out for more information.

The Trustees

As trustees, we will work tirelessly with the school and community to promote and encourage excellence in all aspects of school life and we invite you to help us in any way you can. Although much of the Trust's work involves small-scale projects, we are very proud of the splendid heritage of the school and, among our projects, have developed a unique oral history project, which will become embedded in the future curriculum, to capture the tales of our alumni for posterity. The Trustees meet five times a year to consider applications for funding from pupils and staff. [Trust Projects & Grants](#)

The latest report has recently been issued, and it is always worth considering a donation or a legacy that will help the Trust continue their valuable work.

.....and Alumni team

The Trust's Alumni team is keen to widen engagement with former pupils, maintaining a database of former pupils, looking after alumni archives and playing a key role in facilitating alumni events such as 'Gillespie Gatherings', class and year group reunions, talks, visits etc. The Alumni team invite former pupils to join the database and support and contribute to alumni related activities.

We are also very keen to encourage anyone who is also interested in our work to get in touch as we would welcome another one or two members to our team. We only meet a few times a year, all online, and perhaps a little bit of physical help at any of our events—only once or twice a year.

Memorabilia

The story of the presentation watch earlier in the newsletter was very interesting to read and see, and we are very appreciative of Maureen's help in bringing the story to you all.

We do have some wonderful medals and badges and photographs in our collection, but there is probably much more held by individuals, and maybe with another lovely story too.

If you have anything that you would like to share with us, please feel free to contact us. Even if you don't want to part with the item, we would love to be able to see it at our next gathering on 5th October, and are quite happy for it just to be on show for the day. If you have photographs, and are happy for us to do so, we can scan them and let you safely keep the original.

We are particularly keen to have items from the last 50 years, so next time you are in the attic.....!