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THE PIPER

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'If we have in our intellectual world to-day much confusion, we have also a rich promise.'

The Chancellor's Installation Address, 1938

Welcome to this year's Autumn issue of *The Piper*, which deals with two very different aspects of what the University Library has to offer.

One of these aspects is the traditional focus on books and related materials, represented by a most interesting article on John Buchan in this year of the 150th anniversary of his birth. The University of Edinburgh has extensive holdings relating to Buchan, and the article focuses in particular on his relationship with the University.

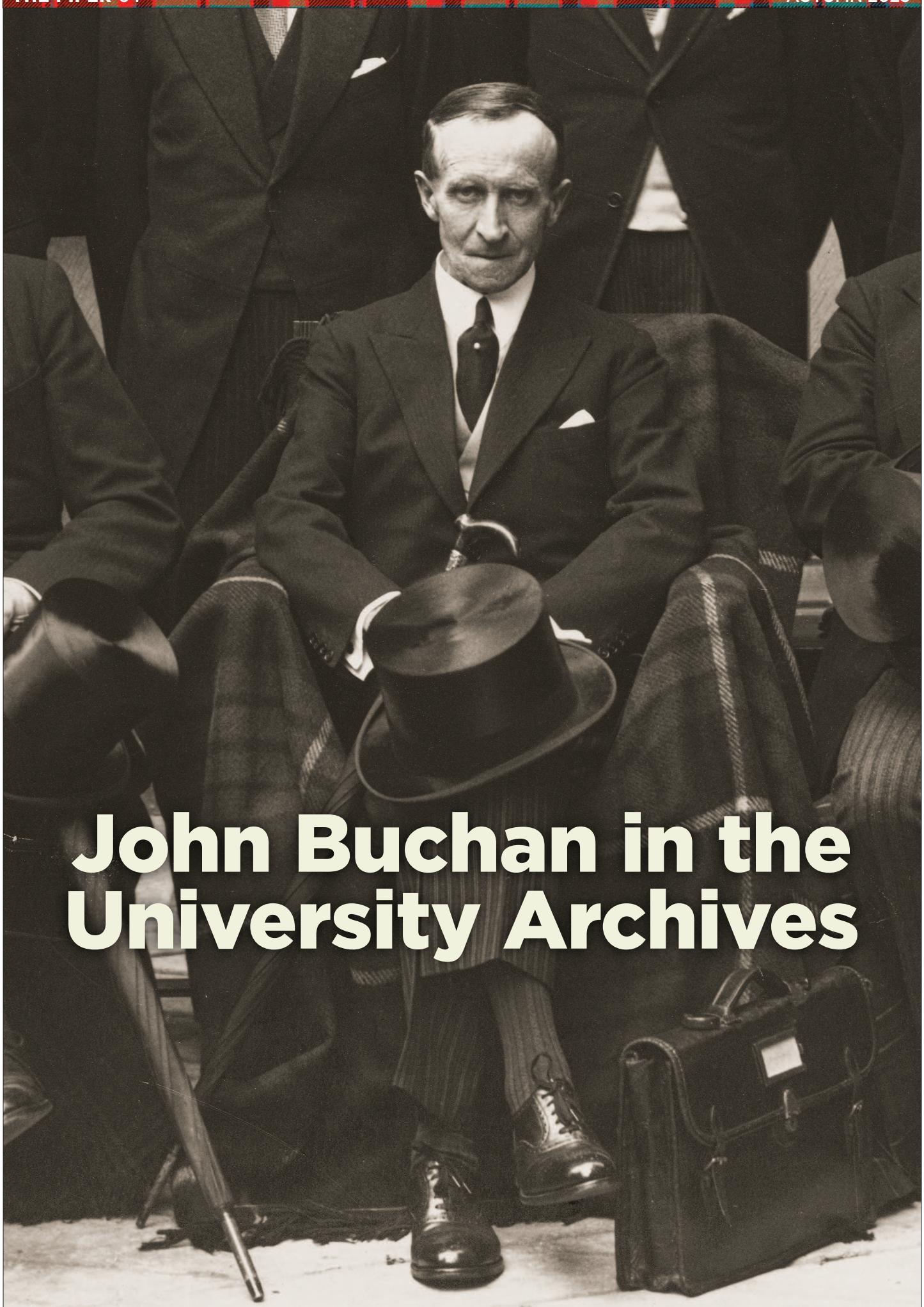
The other article, on 'Prescribe Culture' and 'Morning Light', sets out how, in the past few years, the University has developed a new way of using its Heritage Collections to support the mental wellbeing of students and members of staff, something which most of us will not have been aware of.

And last, but by no means least, this note gives me the opportunity to express the warmest gratitude of the *Friends of Edinburgh University Library* to Fiona Graham, who, over a period of about 25 years, has produced this lovely magazine; her achievement is there for all of us to see, just by looking at the previous copies of *The Piper*, which are accessible at <https://friendsofeful.wordpress.com/the-piper/>

Dr Lucinda Byatt, who has been a member of the Committee for some time, has kindly agreed to take on the role of editing *The Piper* from now on, starting with this issue.

Louise Gardiner
President, Friends of
Edinburgh University Library





John Buchan in the University Archives

Opposite.

Close-up of the Chancellor, Lord Tweedsmuir, at the opening of the Surgical Library, University of Edinburgh, in 1938.

Below.

Thomas Nelson book covers of Buchan's novels *Prester John* and *Salute to the Adventurers*.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of writer and statesman John Buchan on 26 August 1875. Buchan is strongly represented in our archival collections, both as literary adviser to the Edinburgh publishers Thomas Nelson, whose records we hold (Coll-25), and as Chancellor of the University from 1937 to 1940.

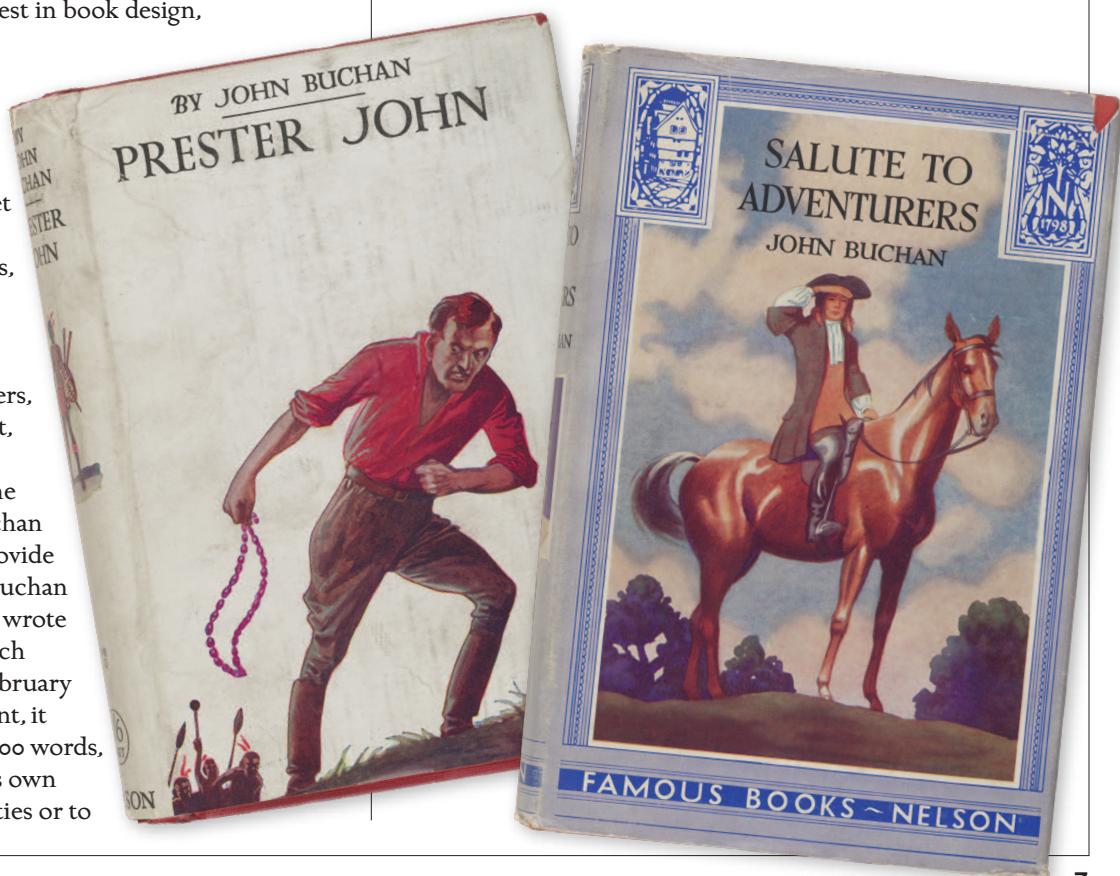
Buchan joined Nelson in 1906, at the invitation of his Oxford University friend Tommie Nelson, grandson of the firm's founder. Buchan was engaged to marry Susan Grosvenor and welcomed the chance of a steady income after a precarious early career juggling writing, politics, and the Bar. As Nelson's London agent, Buchan's main task was to reinvigorate their fiction roster, scouting and commissioning contemporary authors. He launched the revolutionary Sevenpenny Library of cheap but high-quality reprints of modern copyright novels. Almost as radical were the Two-Shilling Novels, works first published by Nelson but selling at reprint prices, which included Buchan's own first best-seller *Prester John* (1910).

The 5,250 letters from or to Buchan in our Nelson Archive – including a box of 500 discovered in the writing of this article! – show, however, that he had a much wider remit. As a trained barrister, he drafted contracts and advised on copyright law. He devised advertising strategies, briefed the sales force, and developed the quarterly *Nelson's Bulletin*. He took a keen interest in book design, commissioning illustrators, inspecting dummies, and proposing visually striking ideas for covers and frontispieces. He expanded Nelson's international market with series of French, German, and Spanish classics, and was planning a Russian series when the First World War broke out.

With both Nelson brothers, Tommie and Ian, at the Front, and a third partner George Brown commandeered by the Munitions Department, Buchan was left in sole charge. To provide work for Nelson's printers, Buchan devised and single-handedly wrote *Nelson's History of the War*, which appeared in 24 parts from February 1915. A staggering achievement, it eventually ran to over 1,200,000 words, with all profits (and Buchan's own royalties) going to war charities or to

the families of enlisted Nelson staff. The *History* attracted Government attention, and Buchan was soon gazetted to France himself, as a Second Lieutenant in the Intelligence Corps, where he organized frontline visits for foreign journalists and politicians. By 1917, he was back in London as Director of the Department of Information, co-ordinating foreign (particularly American) propaganda. As Department-headed letters in our archive show, he somehow found time to pursue day-to-day Nelson business. Even more extraordinarily, he wrote four best-selling novels during the War, including *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Greenmantle*, and another Nelson exclusive *Salute to Adventurers*.

Buchan suffered severe personal losses during the War, including, on the same day (9 April 1917), his brother Alastair and Tommie Nelson. After the War, relations became strained between Buchan and the surviving Nelson brother Ian, who disagreed over the firm's future direction. The Sevenpennies were discontinued in favour of renewed emphasis on Nelson's traditional strength in educational literature. With Henry Newbolt, Buchan co-edited Nelson's Teaching of English and Teaching of History series, and published editions of nineteenth-century poets. For fiction, Nelson increasingly relied on Buchan himself. Although Hodder & Stoughton now

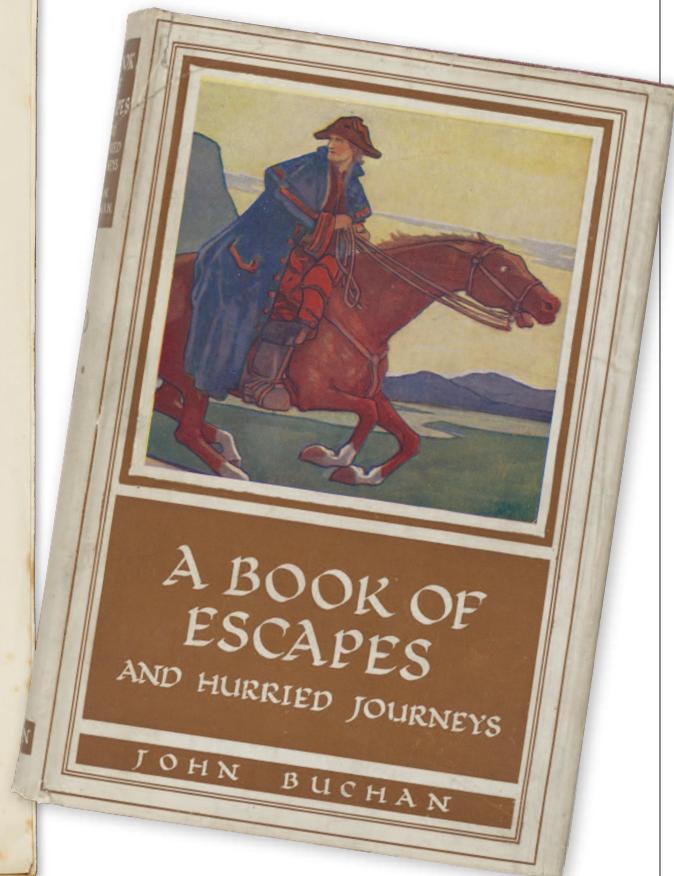


**Left.**

Artist's rendition of a proposed cover for 'Holiday Reading'.

Below.

Thomas Nelson book cover of Buchan's novel *A Book of Escapes*.



published the first editions of his novels, Nelson published the reprints. Buchan also wrote three biographies (of Sir Walter Scott, Lord Minto, and the Marquis of Montrose) for Nelson and four *John Buchan Annuals* of real-life adventure for the Christmas market, including *A Book of Escapes* and *Hurried Journeys*.

When Buchan left Nelson in 1929, he was already actively involved with Edinburgh University as one of three MPs for the Combined Scottish Universities (1927–35). When J. M. Barrie, Chancellor of Edinburgh University, died in 1937, the Senate considered but rejected Buchan as the official candidate to succeed him. They felt that the Chancellorship was incompatible with Buchan's role as Governor-General of Canada (1935–40), and that it would be unseemly to expose a royal representative to a public contest. Instead, they nominated Philip Kerr, Marquess of Lothian, to the displeasure of the Medical School, who were perturbed by Lothian's recent conversion to Christian Science. The Dean of the Faculty of Medicine privately invited Buchan to stand for the Chancellorship, without clarifying that he would be fighting the official candidate. In the event, Buchan won easily, but, as the Senate had predicted, incurred Royal displeasure. Buchan was installed as Chancellor on 20 July 1938 during a leave of absence from Canada. He gave a speech, 'The Interpreter's House' on the role of the modern university, particularly stressing the importance of the emerging social sciences.

Later the same day, he presided at the opening of the University's Surgical Research Laboratory. Sadly, this was the sole duty he performed as Chancellor. He died in Canada on 11 February 1940, shortly before the expiry of his term as Governor General. Had he lived, he would doubtless have brought the same boundless energy to the Chancellorship as he did to every other sphere of his life.

Paul Barnaby
Modern Literary Collections Curator

Sources/Further Reading

Andrew Lownie, *John Buchan: The Presbyterian Cavalier* (London: Constable, 1995).

Kate MacDonald, 'The Diversification of Thomas Nelson & Sons: John Buchan and the Nelson Archive, 1909–1911', *Publishing History*, 65 (2009), 71–96.

Kate MacDonald, 'John Buchan, Publisher', in *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland, Volume 4: Professionalism and Diversity 1880–2000*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 188–90.

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Janet Adam Smith, *John Buchan: A Biography* (London: R. Hart-Davis, 1965).

The Library in Health Improvement

The Wellbeing Collection

In 2023 the library's new Collections Strategy included a priority objective to establish and promote collections to support wellbeing. Over the last two years a plan to develop a Library Wellbeing Collection has been taken forward by a group of library staff, University Wellbeing Advisors and EUSA representatives. As a result, the new Wellbeing Collection space in the University's Main Library in George Square opened in May 2025.

The Wellbeing Collection provides a physical space for library users to take some time away from their learning and research, with over 500 wellbeing books in the Main Library and access to a wealth of online wellbeing resources. The Collection contains online and print resources relating to all aspects of wellbeing, including but not limited to depression, eco-anxiety, exercise, general wellbeing, happiness, loneliness, relationships, self-esteem, sleeping well, and University life. The Wellbeing Collection can be browsed in the Main Library and items can also be discovered through the Wellbeing Collection webpage (<https://library.ed.ac.uk/library-wellbeing-collection>), which provides access to a Wellbeing Collection Resource List and a LibGuide for Leisure and Wellbeing.

Hannah Mateer
Associate Director Collections Service

Below.
The Wellbeing Space in the Main Library.



Photograph: @edunilibraries Instagram



Photograph: Laurence Winram

Prescribe Culture

Established in 2019 after a successful pilot programme, Prescribe Culture is the University of Edinburgh's flagship initiative for supporting those living with mental health difficulties and/or the impact of loneliness and isolation, through heritage and culture-based, non-clinical support programmes.

Prescribe Culture was born out of a stat shared, in 2018, at a university health and welfare event, suggesting demand on the University's Counselling Service had risen by 22% in the previous academic year, 2017–18. This need was further evidenced through follow-up consultations with GPs at the Richard Verney Health Centre (serving the student population), the Director of Student Wellbeing at the University and a number of University Counsellors, Wellbeing Advisors, and the Disability Services team.

Also in 2018, the then Director of NHS England had highlighted the positive impact of social prescribing on reducing pressure on NHS appointments and budgets. Social Prescribing is about addressing the social determinants of ill health by supporting patients to access community assets.

With the wonderful assets of the Library and University Collections, the Heritage Collections Civic Engagement Service decided to experiment, initially on-campus, to see if what was working for predominantly the older population across England, might work for the student population at the University of Edinburgh.

Prescribe Culture's pilot programmes, Prescribe Culture Gatherings and Programme 6s, were launched in 2019 and, overall, stakeholders agreed it brought significant positive impact to the target service users and supported it becoming an embedded offer.

Prescribe Culture went online during COVID lockdowns and continued providing mental health and social connection support, remotely. Since 2021, the service

has been open for referral and self-referral for both campus and local communities. External referral partners include organisations such as Access to Industry, Headway East Lothian, North Edinburgh Community Mental Health Services, and Edinburgh Community Link Workers affiliated to Health Centres across the city.

In 2025, the Prescribe Culture Service continues to deliver Programme 6, Prescribe Culture Gatherings and is about to deliver the first programme specifically for men's mental health, Notable Difference, and is working on a new programme for those facing bereavement, for 2026.

Also in 2025, Prescribe Culture partnered with the University Chaplaincy to support a new wellbeing resource, 'Morning Light', created by Honorary Quaker Chaplain, Lesley Morrison.

The primary objectives of Prescribe Culture programmes for the individual are to:

1. Provide mini respite from the symptoms of anxiety, stress, depression, burnout and/or loneliness
2. Increase sense of connection to the world around us and/or others
3. Improve overall sense of mental wellbeing
4. Consider heritage and cultural engagement activities as a tool for the future management of episodes of challenging mental, social and emotional health.

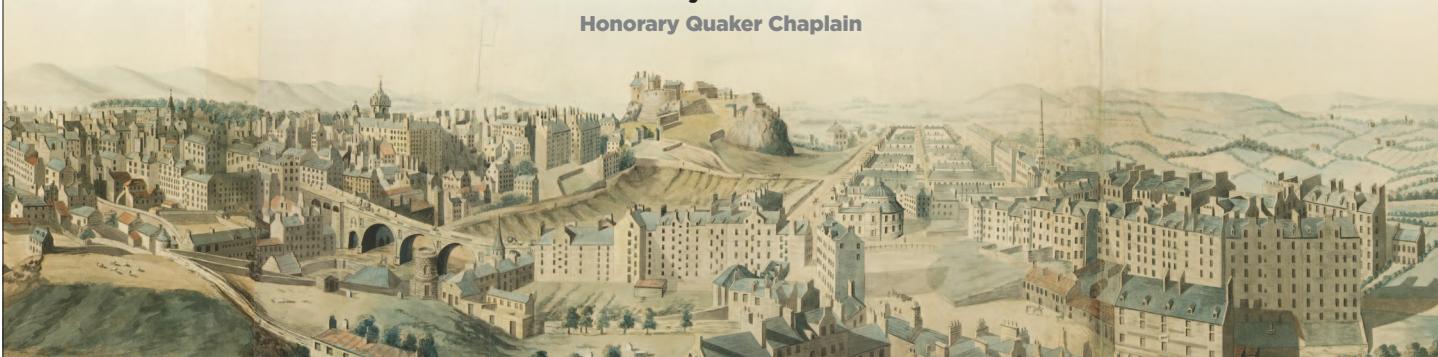
More details of the service are available via the link: <https://library.ed.ac.uk/heritage-collections/in-the-community/prescribe-culture>

Ruthanne Baxter

Civic Engagement Manager / Prescribe Culture Lead Heritage Collections

Lesley Morrison

Honorary Quaker Chaplain



Opposite below.
Robert Barker's 'Panorama of Edinburgh from Calton Hill' (1792), detail.

Below.
The Sea and Winter Sky (1969) by John Houston.
Talbot Rice Memorial Collection,
University of Edinburgh Art Collection

Morning Light



'Those who seek land have to spend a long time out of sight of the shore'

André Gide

Every week of semester, the Chaplaincy publishes, on its website and social media, an inspirational quote, along with an image from the Library and University Collections and a brief reflection. The aim is to share a little positive light with members of the University at the start of their day. Lesley is always happy to receive suggestions for quotes and if any members of Friends of the Library would like to help the Morning Light project source images from the Collections, she would be very appreciative.

Links to the Morning Light webpage are available here (<https://chaplaincy.ed.ac.uk/welcome/blogs-podcasts-reflections/morning-light/morning-light-1>), so you can explore the suggestions for last academic year and the current session and get a sense of the offering that has been created with support and inspiration from the Library and University Collections. Lesley and the Morning Light project are grateful for the collaboration with Ruthanne and Prescribe Culture which has so enriched this initiative.

Morning Light, Week 1 (September 2025)

The start of a new course, or a new year, can feel exciting but also daunting. Along with the challenges comes uncertainty which can be difficult. From uncertainty, however, can emerge creativity and progress. It is perhaps comforting to know that most people struggle with uncertainty, some hiding their struggle more effectively than others.

Enjoy the challenges, and the year.

Lesley Morrison is the Morning Light Project Lead and is a retired GP who continues to work with the first-year medical students on projects addressing compassion, climate change, peace, and justice. She is on the board of Medact (www.medact.org), is co-editor of *Tools of the Trade*, a little book of poetry gifted to all Scottish medical graduates, and has published a book, *The Wellbeing Toolkit* for doctors.

Right.

Brass Bees and Flocked Moths (2018)
Jessica Gasson, Flocked Brass.

**Events**

We look forward to welcoming you at our in-person events. If you have any suggestions or comments regarding the 'Friends' programme and other activities, then please let us know by contacting our Administrator, Alason Roberts (A.Roberts@ed.ac.uk).

20 November – Join us at our 2025 Annual General Meeting for a presentation of the Library's activities at the launch of its annual report *Re:Connect 2025*. There will be refreshments afterwards and the chance to meet other Friends. The AGM will be held at 3pm in the Main Library.

Spring event 2026 – We look forward to a presentation of South Asian artworks in the Library's Heritage Collections. Details will be circulated.

If you have changed email please inform our Administrator so you receive the latest information. You can also check forthcoming events on the website: <https://friendsfeul.wordpress.com>

George William Penrose, Lord Penrose (1938–2025)

Lord Penrose, who died on 1 May 2025, was President of the Friends from 1994, when he took over from Sir Alan Hume, until 2001, when he stepped down and was succeeded by Lady Caplan. The Friends were honoured when another of Scotland's leading judges accepted his election as President, three others having preceded him over the years. During his Presidency the Friends actively continued their important programmes of purchasing additional materials for the Library research collections, especially the papers of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle; modern Scottish writers including Hugh MacDiarmid, Norman MacCaig and George Mackay Brown; the English writers Robert Nye, W. H. Auden and Arthur Koestler; Sir Roderick Murchison's geological map of Scotland and other books and papers by individuals among the University's science and medical history; an archive of papers of the Ferretti family of Ancona, 1580–1745; a newly-published (in 2000) facsimile of the *Book of Kells*; and archival items on the University's own history, such as an illuminated testimonial presented by student societies to Principal Sir William Muir on his retirement in 1903. They also helped fund the much-needed new exhibition cases for the Library's refurbished exhibition hall.



The Piper is the magazine of the Friends of Edinburgh University Library, and is published twice a year.

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Exhibition reminder

Rooting: Ecology, Extraction & Environmental Emergencies in the University's Art Collection

Closes on 15 November 2025

Main Library Exhibition Gallery, George Square.

Monday to Saturday, 10am–6pm

Library updates newsletter

Library Updates is a monthly online newsletter, sharing the latest news on library services, resources and projects.

<https://library.ed.ac.uk/library-news-events/library-updates-newsletter>

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