

East Lothian Antiquarian & Field Naturalists' Society

Visits and talks programme for the 2026 / 27 season

VISITS Members only

Field naturalist visit to St Abbs Head on Saturday 6th June at 2 PM

This visit will be guided by the Society's Field Naturalist advisor John Hunt. The spectacular cliffs at St Abbs are owned by National Trust for Scotland and are designated as a National Nature Reserve. The cliffs provide for great views of over 60,000 nesting seabirds of 10 different species. Additionally the fresh water Mire Loch and grassland provide additional bird and botanical interest.

Small but attentive group of attendees. Logistics worked out fine. In spite of a poor weather forecast there was no rain although windy conditions were a bit of a challenge. Between the coastal cliffs and sheltered Mire Loch John Hunt was able to provide an informative commentary. Field naturalist aspects of the Society's endeavours amply justified.

Return visit to Papple Steading on Wednesday 22nd July at 10.30 AM

The Society has enthusiastically supported the amazing rescue of one of Scotland's finest farm steadings. We are delighted to have been invited for a return visit by the owner and visionary George Mackintosh after the project's formal opening. Members will enjoy teas, coffees and cake followed by a presentation by George Mackintosh on Papple's restoration journey. This will be followed by an opportunity to explore the buildings including those showing agricultural heritage and the Demarco Gallery. Finally there will be an optional opportunity to visit the Wildflower Meadow which is close by. Transport assistance to the Meadow will be available if required.

Extremely successful with near capacity attendance, George Mackintosh had prepared a much more detailed agricultural development historical "backstory" which was well received. Thereafter GM took the time to give detailed accounts of the different aspects of the Papple Steading

initiative. The fact that GM is a farmer's son enabled him to embellish farming accounts with real examples.

Private tour of the 17th century Newhailes pleasure garden on Saturday 26th September at 2.30 PM

The Society is delighted that Members have been offered a free invitation to a private tour of the Newhailes estate. Hitherto it has been little known that the estate that surrounds the house is a time capsule of pleasure garden design from the 1700's. Unlike most grand estates in Scotland it was never "Victorianised" and so offers a unique opportunity to see how our forefathers took the ideas of the Enlightenment and their experience of the Grand Tour of Europe and reflected them in a Scottish landscape. The event will conclude with tea, coffee and sweet treats in the glasshouse. Whilst the visit will be complimentary there will be a £6 charge for the refreshments. Note: for those who have not visited the house, a discounted rate of £12 has been offered. Personal booking on one of the scheduled tours in the morning would be required, mentioning that you are part of the ELAFNS PM garden tour.

Private visit to St. Mary's Church, Whitekirk on Sunday 11th October

In 2021 the Church of Scotland put up this church for sale and it was sold to a newly formed Trust: the Whitekirk New Life Trust. St. Mary's Whitekirk has stood for over 700 years. It was first constructed as a project of gratitude by the Countess of Dunbar who believed that she had received a miracle of healing at the holy well attributed to St. Baldred. The church and the ground upon which it sits has been both a place of home and refuge and of beauty and restoration. It's long historical past has included connections to popes and kings, pirates and revolutionaries, artists and multitudes of ordinary folk. On the day a Trustee will provide a tour of the church, inside and out, together with a talk on its history. To conclude refreshments will be provided.

TALKS all welcome.

Venue Holy Trinity Church, Haddington

**Dr Dave Cowley, Historic Environment Scotland: Saturday 24th
October 2026**

“East Lothian Iron Age life.”

Dave Cowley is an archaeologist in the Survey and Recording Group where he manages a programme of archaeological mapping. He has a particular interest in the populations and lives of those who inhabited East Lothian in the Iron Age period 1000BC and Ad 1000. Members will benefit from his extensive research whilst undertaking a PhD at Ghent University.

**Professor David Purdie, Hon. Fellow at the Institute for Advanced
Studies in the Humanities (IASH), The University of Edinburgh:
Saturday 14 November, 2026**

“Newhailes and The Enlightenment”

Professor Purdie is a medical Professor Emeritus of Leeds University. He was appointed an Hon. Fellow of IASH in 2012. His fields of interest cover the scientific and literary components of the Scottish

Enlightenment, especially those of Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns and David Hume. Professor Purdie is a much renowned speaker and Members will be informed and entertained by his talk, which will of course complement the Newhailes visit.

**Professor Javier Martin-Torres, Chair Professor of Planetary
Sciences and Astrobiology, Northumbria University: Saturday 12th
December 2026**

**“Beacon of Brilliance: Lord Kelvin and the Royal Society of
Edinburgh: A 200 Year Legacy of Genius and Symbiosis”**

Professor Javier Martin Torres is a NASA award-winning theoretical physicist with interdisciplinary research interests, including astrobiology, planetary sciences the emergence of life as well as space and weather hardware development. But on this occasion his passion will be directed at William Thomson, aka Lord Kelvin who remains one of the most luminous figures in the history of science. The talk will trace his extraordinary journey from a ten-year-old university student in Glasgow

to the Second Wrangler at Cambridge, and ultimately to the Chair of Natural Philosophy at the University of Glasgow, which he held for an astonishing 53 years. Kelvin's revolutionary contributions to thermodynamics, the dissipation of energy, vortex motion, and countless other fields fundamentally reshaped our understanding of the physical world and laid the foundations of modern physics and engineering.

Andrew Ayre, Project Director for Wilson's Tales: Saturday 16th January 2027

"Wilson's Tales of the Borders: historical, Traditional and Imaginative"

The Wilson's Tales Project was created to stimulate a revival of a wide community of interest in "Wilson's Tales of the Borders". The Project raises awareness of these heritage Tales, their historic context and content and provides a platform for contemporary artists of all types to respond to and re-tell them.

Professor Simon Bell MCLI, Personal Chair of Landscape and Wellbeing, The University of Edinburgh, Saturday February 6th

"The importance of contact with landscape for our health and wellbeing"

To cover historical development and some of the research evidence and practice linking the importance of contact with landscape for our health and wellbeing. In relation to East Lothian - to include aspects of the life and principles and practice of John Muir.

**Jackie Sangster, Learning Manager, Historic Environment Scotland,
Saturday 13th March 2027**

“Scots Women who chose to challenge”

This talk will take a wander through archive material to meet ten Scots women who have made a mark in their respective fields such as in politics, law, medicine, the arts and the world of sport.. Some faces will be well known, whilst some lesser known, but nonetheless inspiring individuals. East Lothian women are not excluded - such as “the good women of Seacliff” pushing the boundaries and the aircraft maintenance women of East Fortune airfield.

Ian Hardie

Events Manager

September 16th 2026