

Cafe Connect Episode 14_mixdown.mp3

Voiceover [00:00:03] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen.

Dr Chris Croly [00:00:11] Well, hello, ladies and gentlemen, and thanks very much for joining us and the latest episode of Cafe Connect. So Cafe Connect is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen and in this series we bring you the latest research that's been undertaken at various different departments at the University of Aberdeen, and we will talk to the people who are leading the research themselves. So today, I'm very happy to be joined by my colleague, Professor Keith Bender. Keith is, professor of political economy. Is that right, Keith?

Professor Keith Bender [00:00:42] Just of economics, not political.

Dr Chris Croly [00:00:44] Oh, right. OK. So, yes, political economics is actually part of the topic that will be covering today, and this is a really interesting podcast, which I'm very excited about because it's going to take in the history of the university, in the history of political economy as a discipline and look at one of the major characters or figures in Aberdeen's life in the early to mid 20th century, Sir Thomas Jaffrey. So that's probably a good starting point, Keith. So who exactly is Sir Thomas Jaffrey?

Professor Keith Bender [00:01:18] Yeah, wonderful. Thank you for the introduction, Chris. I'm more than happy to talk about Sir Thomas. So Sir Thomas, I think, is an unfairly forgotten figure, an unremembered figure in Aberdeen's history, particularly in the early 20th century, he was, as I'm sure, no doubt, get to talking about he was one of the most fundamental businessmen, philanthropists within the city in the early part of the 20th century. And it as I do more and more research, it's amazing how involved he was in so many different aspects of both the city's life, but also the University's life.

Dr Chris Croly [00:01:58] No, absolutely. And you're quite right. He is one of these figures who occupy a unique pantheon in that he was so important at the time and yet is relatively little remembered today, which is a great shame considering the legacy that he has actually directly affects Aberdeen today. So it is probably worth talking about the family Jaffrey because that's one of the biggest names in the history of Aberdeen. We know Jaffrey family goes back 16th 17th century, very much associated with the Estate of Kingswells. They were prominent in society in Aberdeen: one was a Lord Provost of Aberdeen, they were very big in the Quaker tradition in Aberdeen as well. Are these the same Jaffrey's or is it different branch, do we know?

Professor Keith Bender [00:02:49] That's a great question. And I've done a bit of research on it. And there's one strand of the research done by a relative of Sir Thomas, a gentleman named Stephenson Brown. He's actually now in San Francisco in the States. I actually have been in contact with him and he's looked back into the family tree. And he has Sir Thomas as being related to the Jaffrey's who were so fundamental in the sort of 17th century in Aberdeen and Kingswells. I've seen some other research that says maybe there's a different branch, but, you know, it wasn't an overly common surname. So I wouldn't be surprised if there is some linkage there. If anybody sort of knows and does research on this. I should mention, too, that the name changed. So the 17th century Jaffrey's the surname was ay, whereas it looks like Sir Thomas himself was the one that changed it to to ey. Or maybe it was his father, not exactly sure. I'd love to know why that was the case, but it looks like there was a bit of a name change there.

Dr Chris Croly [00:04:00] OK, I mean, it's very interesting, the name change. That's something again is a sort of common theme in the history of Aberdeen - that kind of fluidity of spelling. Well, that's certainly the case very much historically. And, of course, you know, to the fact that they may not be the same branch of the family. And it does become more complicated the further back you go, especially by the fact that there was a paucity of names: they were all Alexander Jaffrey son of Sir Alexander Jaffrey, brother of Sir Alexander Jaffery, Cousin of, so it can be difficult to disentangle exactly who's who. But the point there is Jaffrey, regardless, remains an important theme in the history of Aberdeen. And so Thomas Jaffrey, whether from that family or a cadet branch stands in the tradition, certainly as important. So, yes, you mentioned banking, his career was Aberdeen Savings Bank?

Professor Keith Bender [00:04:53] Sure. Right. So that's where that's where he sort of made his name. So. So Thomas Jaffery, Sir Thomas Jaffrey was born in 1861 in in Aberdeen. His father was also named Thomas Jaffery, you were just mentioning the lineages and he was he was more working class. So he was a railway inspector on the Great Northern Railway, Jaffrey Sir Thomas had four sisters and a brother, the brother was actually University of Aberdeen graduate. He became a minister in the free in the Free Church, had charges in Falkirk and Edinburgh. He unfortunately died relatively early. But, you know, clearly, education was an important aspect of the Jaffrey family. That said, I have no idea of where Sir Thomas was educated. There's no information in the in the graduate roles of either the University. I can look at the graduate roles of the Grammar School, and he wasn't there even though his brother did go. But what I do know is that he did start an apprenticeship at actually the north of Scotland Bank, which was another relatively large bank and in the northeast part of Scotland, sort of started working himself up from a clerk, from a clerk to a to an accountant, but then moved to the Aberdeen Savings Bank, which was an older, more established bank within the within the city and the surrounding area, such that by 1892, he sort of worked himself all the way up in the Aberdeen Savings Bank to become the actuary, which was really the head person that dealt with the management of the of the bank.

Dr Chris Croly [00:06:38] So effectively the most senior position at the bank.

Professor Keith Bender [00:06:40] Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Dr Chris Croly [00:06:42] And I'm just I always get slightly confused as to which banks, which the north of Scotland Bank that was in in the Castle Gate, it's not the Archibald Simpson building, is it the one across the road, the High Court?

Professor Keith Bender [00:06:53] That's correct. Yes. That was the high court building. There were a lot of different branches of Aberdeen Savings Bank, but the one that Sir Thomas was most known for was the building of a new headquarters on Union Terrace in 1896. And you can still see if you go to Union Terrace, you can still see on the sort of the top of the building carved into the granite savings bank. And that bank was designed by William Kelly, who was a very well known architect in the city, worked a lot with the University, but also built the Union Street Bridge with all the so called Kellie's cats, the leopards that that are up there. So, so clearly, they were they were also working in the same in the same circles.

Dr Chris Croly [00:07:41] And actually, yes, you're quite right. I had forgotten the savings in that building. It's been so long since I've actually been down Union Terrace. Well, partly because as we record that we are in the middle of a pandemic. So our last chance to be

there, or fewer chances to be there I should say. And also the fact that half of it is actually closed off just as Union Terrace Gardens are being developed. But he's much more widely involved in the history of the world through philanthropy.

Professor Keith Bender [00:08:15] Yes. So being the sort of chief operating officer, the actuary of the largest bank in Aberdeen, and under his lead, the Aberdeen Savings Bank, became the fifth largest savings bank in the entire country, the entire UK. You know, it was a substantial role that that he had, but he clearly felt an affinity for his hometown. And philanthropy, as you mentioned, was a huge part of him giving back to the city that I think he really he really loved. So he was involved in many, many sort of smaller things. He was very involved in the Royal Horticultural Society, he and his wife, Margaret, to his first wife, Margaret, who was very involved in sort of nursing education, in teaching blind kids. But his sort of major philanthropic activities, one he was part of in the mid 1920s, there were a number of hospitals around the Aberdeen area, but there was a big push to have a more centralised set of hospitals in the Forster Hill area. So what has now become a very Aberdeen Royal Infirmary? And there was a big push to raise money for this. And it was a it was a nationwide push, interestingly, for that the Cowdrey's that we know Lord and Lady Cowdrey, which are big benefactors of the city, we're also a key part of that. But Jaffrey and Margaret ended up giving £25,000 in 1927. And just before we came on, I did, you know, as good economist, I did.

You know, what does that mean today? Well, that means about £1.6million in today's in today's money. So, you know, a substantial amount of the funding come came from Thomas Jaffrey so so, you know, he was certainly very generous with his money, but he was generous with his time as well, and that's probably best exemplified by his being the chairman of the Aberdeen Art Gallery for over 20 years from 1928 to 1951. And he was absolutely central in in building on some momentum that was already going on in the art gallery, but really kind of transforming that in the early part of the 20th century to make sure that it lived up to its full potential. So there's a great quote by Harry Townsend, who was the curator, the long time curator of the art gallery at that time, and he said that Jaffrey moved the gallery from being a small provincial museum to become one of the leading galleries of the kingdom. And he really did spend a lot of time going and looking at art, raising money for the purchasing of art. He donated he was himself was an art collector. He had a very large house, Edgehill house and timber that had its own art collection. So a lot of pieces came from that. And after he passed away, there was a fund that was also set up. That's part of the art gallery resources. And so a lot of pieces of work, pieces of artwork have been generated through that. So, again, a very fundamental person in Aberdeen for one of the kind of shining jewels of what Aberdeen culture is about.

Dr Chris Croly [00:11:50] Absolutely. I mean, there's a number of points that podcast should be ruined off in Europe so much. Just just to get back to the staggering figure of the comparison to of one point six million was the effective comparison that you used. That was from his own money. That was from somebody who came from what we would describe as working class and then, you know, possibly without a formal education at the University of Aberdeen or wherever else. But, you know, through his own hard work, had, you know, raised himself to that position. And then to give that level of money back is fantastic.

Professor Keith Bender [00:12:28] Well, exactly. It would be very easy, particularly at that time. Right? I mean, 1927, we're sort of getting into the, you know, OK, so it's still about the roaring 20s. But, you know, it is a time when, you know, things economically are not looking so, so great. But to give that money to the to the city so that it could build a set

of hospitals that were fundamentally about maternity and children's hospitals initially and then more broadly just shows the level of philanthropic culture that that he had.

Dr Chris Croly [00:13:02] And very much you also get a sense, just what I sense when you were talking, how he fit it into tradition in Aberdeen know the art gallery as you see the great institutions of operating. And obviously that philanthropic thing as well is taking up subscriptions amongst the great and the good and the successful in the city, this was how ventures were funded at the time. Yes, he's very much in that tradition and indeed at the forefront of it. So, but it's not just the city, it's not just town but also gown - there's also very much the relationship with gown, with the University of Aberdeen.

Professor Keith Bender [00:13:44] There is and it's interesting to conjecture a little bit about why there was that link, because, as I said, there's no record that he ever actually attended the University, his brothers did. So there was a there was at least a loose cannon there. And maybe there are two ways to sort of think about it. One is that he was first appointed to court as part of an advisory committee on commerce, which would make sense to have the maybe the leading banker in Aberdeen to be part of that. But I think there's a more fundamental thing as well. So, that happened in about 1924 or so. But earlier, the development of political economy as a kind of discipline had already started within the within the University. Interestingly, it started a little bit later in in Aberdeen that it did than the other ancient universities. So Edinburgh and St Andrews and Glasgow all had political economy degrees by the middle part of the eighteen hundreds. But that wasn't followed in in Aberdeen. Interestingly, what started the idea in Aberdeen was for candidates for the Indian Civil Service Exam. They needed to set a certain number of lectures in in political economy and I think mostly for financial reasons, the university thought, well, we can offer some of those and decided to go ahead and do that in 1901 to offer a series of lectures to help these candidates prepare. Now, interestingly, they didn't go out and try to hire somebody who taught political economy. They actually what they maybe volunteered or somebody volunteered. The Professor of systematic theology actually gave the first set of lectures in political economy anyway, because that was a success. They did actually hire a lecturer in political economy and they ended up broadening out the offering to not only those who were setting the civil service exam, but also importantly to bank clerks within Aberdeen. And I can't find any direct linkage, but surely Jaffrey would have known at least that some of his bank cards were we're getting educated at the University. And so I could see where he was really very interested in in that linkage. So he gets on the court with the Advisory Committee on Commerce and then he becomes the rector's assessor on the court and is on the court from 1924 until 1937.

Dr Chris Croly [00:16:16] Yeah. Actually, I must put my hands up here. In a previous podcast I recorded with Bernie Crockett, Lord Provost of Aberdeen, I think I mistakenly described him as rector. I should have said he was rector successor at that point. So political economies, I think it be worth just saying a little bit on exactly what you mean by political economy.

Professor Keith Bender [00:16:37] Sure. Yeah. So political economy, if you kind of go back in time, as all good economists should go back to Adam Smith, the, you know, the famous 18th century moral philosopher and early political economist sort of hailed as the father of modern political economy and economics. But what really, although he's been interpreted many different ways and the Wealth of Nations is the most famous book has been interpreted in many ways. The idea of what Smith was really about was thinking about economics and economic thinking and behaviour in the round, thinking about the context that economic behaviours and decisions occur at all levels, both from a very micro

level to firms to governments and international interactions. And that was always the tradition that the economics in in Scotland had held to, as well as actually in Oxford and Cambridge as well. But during the latter part of the eighteen hundreds, early 19 hundreds, there was a split in economics between this kind of more holistic, contextual way of thinking about economics to a much more mathematically oriented, theory based type of economics called neoclassic what has become neoclassical economics. And so that is is the split. Now, neoclassical economics, interestingly, has been the kind of dominant paradigm within economics over the last 20 or so years, although I think we're seeing a movement back to this more contextual idea of what political economy is about. But certainly if we have time, if we get into some of the different chairs, the this tension between political economy and economics sort of plays out through the history of the chairs.

Dr Chris Croly [00:18:26] Well, indeed. And I think that you're quite right. That's what we want to go next. Re-establishes this chair of political economy at the University and early 1930s is it?

Professor Keith Bender [00:18:38] 1920, actually 1920 with the establishment of it, the first chairman. Nineteen twenty one.

Dr Chris Croly [00:18:44] OK, so I guess it's the legacies of the various holders of the chairs that would be worth noting since there's been seven holders?

Professor Keith Bender [00:18:54] Seven holders of the chair. Exactly. So the first chair was Sir Alexander Gray, who was originally from Edinburgh. He was very much in that vein of political economy, his interests, at least in terms of teaching and research, were really about economic thought and how people think about economics and the way that they try to describe economic behaviours. And so he was he was quite fundamental in driving those economic discussions about economic thought, and he had one of the early sort of big textbooks on on thought around economics. There's a great quote to about him after he passed away in the Scottish Journal of Political Economy, they gave a little biography, an obituary of him but the author said the dismal science is altogether livelier and more vivid habitation for those of us who knew Sir Alexander, so he clearly was influential in his teaching and research. The other interesting thing about Alexander Gray is he may be more popularly known in Scotland for his poetry. He was quite the poet, both writing in English and Scots and interestingly, Doric as well, although Dundonian Doric, because that's where he was from, but also translating very dramatic poems into English and Doric as well. As well, so, so clearly has had both an influence on both economics, but also popular culture within Scotland,

Dr Chris Croly [00:20:43] You say he was appointed in 1921 and you've got some fairly major economic developments happening quite soon after this.

Professor Keith Bender [00:20:50] Exactly, and he certainly with the, I guess, two things that clearly the Great Depression and World War, I guess, coming out of World War One, there's also the rise of communism. And he has some very interesting thoughts about socialism and comparing it to other forms of economic, how you set up an economy and what you regulate and what you don't. So he was quite influential in thinking about how economies should be set up at those, as you say, very kind of tumultuous times in terms of the economy.

Dr Chris Croly [00:21:32] Yeah, sorry I jumped in there.

Professor Keith Bender [00:21:35] No, that's absolutely fine. So the next chair then then after Gray left to go take up a chair at Edinburgh was a gentleman named Lindley Fraser. So he was an Oxford, he was from Scotland, but Oxford educated. He also was where he was educated in the classics not so much in economics, but it was interested in economics. But this idea of rhetoric and economics were sort of key to him, too. So he was also very much interested in economic thought and how economists kind of express themselves. The language that economists use now, like Sir Alexander Gray, beyond just this fundamental discussion within economics, he's known outside of economics for a very specific thing because of his linguistics background. He was fluent in German, and so he was seconded during World War Two to go down to the BBC and be part of the German language sort of propaganda arm of the BBC and excelled at doing that. And there are stories about how Germans who are not particularly, you know, for the cause of of what Hitler and Nazism was trying to do, really relied on hearing this soft spoken but very articulate German voice coming over. So interestingly, he fell in love with this and he ended up staying down in in in London, working for the BBC and really thinking a lot about propaganda and rhetoric and doing all those things that he was really interested in.

Dr Chris Croly [00:23:13] I mean, it helps just highlight the fact that we actually see political economy itself is about context about how these Chairs and the discipline and the people who study and the researchers themselves never existed in a vacuum at all was part and parcel of society and in so many different ways that that can neatly underlines that point.

Professor Keith Bender [00:23:33] Yeah. The next chair was a person that had been around at Aberdeen for a long time, Henry Hamilton. He was actually an economic historian. So, again, this idea of the context being important, but he was the one that really pushed forward political economy was still a small department at that time prior to Hamilton coming along. But because he was quite a good administrator and worked his way up through the University hierarchy, he was able to obtain a lot of resources in order to expand the department, to add multiple lecturers and researchers, again, to do a lot with respect to building the framework by which now we see a much larger, much larger, larger department. He was followed then by Max Gascón, who was actually famous before he became an economist. He was a decorated war veteran from World War Two. He flew in bombers over Europe. But he was maybe the first of the more neoclassical leaning kind of economists. So while he was quite interested in policy, his research was more, more along those lines of thinking quite mathematically and quite specifically. Now, he started off doing research on banking, which Jaffrey you would have no doubt been very, very happy with. But his sort of claim to fame was really he was here during the time of the North Sea oil discoveries. And so he was the first one to write one of the central sort of thought pieces about what oil might mean to not only Scotland in general, but to the North-East of Scotland in particular. So the Gascón Report is is quite a famous piece written that that really kind of kick started this this research and interests that that that we all have in energy over the last 40 years.

Dr Chris Croly [00:25:32] So, yeah, that's a fair point. I was about to say with the appointment of was the fourth holder. Yeah, I wanted to put it in that context for sort of decades, this was clearly the 1970s. Yeah. And it's interesting. And he's more towards the theoretical side, almost just on the cusp of Thatcher, a very different age as well, which I think is fair to say, maybe relies more on the theory as well.

Professor Keith Bender [00:25:58] Well, exactly. And it was during his tenure as the Jaffrey chair that that the department followed many other departments. So we weren't alone. But moving from a department of political economy to a department of economics, which was much more of the trend at that point, because more and more the the discipline was moving away from the contextual and to the theory and the applied theory that the neoclassical economics is known for. After Gascón We had a series of really two Jaffrey chairs who were much more focussed less on, again, the broad context and much more about labour market economics.

Interestingly, there was a big, big shift during that time. So Peter Sloan was a long time Jaffrey chair. He was also, again, very influential within the University and served on court and was a Vice-Principal for a long time. He was both the Labour economist and interestingly, an early adopter of sports economics and the European Sport Economics Association last year named their enterprise after Professor Sloan. So very influential with within those areas of labour economics and sports economics. And then Tim Bombi followed Professor Sloane for about 14 years. Again, very much a labour economist, although interestingly, towards the end of his career, I think he started broadening out more. He developed right after the Quinten centenary, the five hundredth anniversary of the university. The university put on a whole series of interdisciplinary modules, and he developed one that was called the Health and Wealth of Nations. So thinking very broadly about what does it mean, what does Wealth of Nations actually mean more than just the cash, the money that the society has? And he's developed a whole research programme on on economic history and thinking about labour contracts and in a historical sense, so you start to see the pendulum starting to shift back a little bit with Professor Bombi and then the most recent chair, Professor Kathy Matanya, the first woman chair of the Jaffrey chairperson, first chair, female chair in economics here at the university. She has kept that pendulum going. While she's interested in labour market issues, she's really interested in the context in which those labour market interactions between workers and firms are influenced by the broader context of both the decisions that governments make about welfare policies and that kind of thing, but also importantly, how trade and globalisation impacts all of that. So, again, moving back to that really big context of thinking about economic interactions.

Dr Chris Croly [00:28:45] Yeah, and just as you mentioned global there, it was playing through my mind, Amazon, the huge multinational firms which exist almost divorced from government in a sense. You know, and there must be a real response to that as well.

Professor Keith Bender [00:29:02] Exactly. Yes.

Dr Chris Croly [00:29:03] Yeah. Yeah. Well, you know, half an hour goes so quickly Kieth, and that's a fantastic introduction to, you know, Sir Thomas Jaffrey, as you say, you know, a figure who we should pay more attention to, partly because of his established political economy, partly because of his philanthropy towards Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and the Art Gallery, of which we we see today actually one of the other legacies that we can physically go and see and touch today we never touched on was that the Elphinstone Memorial, which is outside King's College Chapel. And there's probably a whole podcast to be had to the memorial itself, but it's been fascinating. Thank you very much. Normally and pre-pandemic times in the cafe, we would encourage question and answer from the audience, and we still encourage that in a virtual sense. If you have a question, please email us at peru@abdn.ac.uk, and we will happily forward that on. But in the meantime, Keith, thanks very much.

Professor Keith Bender [00:30:06] Thank you very much. I really enjoyed it.

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