

The Wealth of Nations at 250: Understanding Prosperity and Development in the Modern World

8 – 9 October 2026: The Royal Society of Edinburgh

All sessions in the Wolfson Lecture Theatre. Breaks and the reception will take place in the Wellcome East & West.

Day 1 – Thursday 8 October 2026

9.00-9.15am Welcome

Alex Trew (University of Glasgow)

Graeme Roy (University of Glasgow)

9.15-11.15 Session 1: The Division of Labour

Chair: Tuuli Vanhapelto

Jacques-François Thisse (UCLouvain)

Adam Smith and the City: Urban Development in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales with J. Vernon Henderson (LSE) and Leigh Shaw-Taylor (University of Cambridge)

Douglas Gollin (University of Oxford & Tufts University)

Adam Smith Goes to Africa: Spatial Frictions, Smallholder Agriculture, and Structural Transformation

Robert C. Allen (NYU Abu Dhabi)

The Historical Origins of the Division of Labour

Jane Humphries (University of Oxford & LSE)

The Invisible Hands of Women and Children in Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations

11.15–11.45 Break — Wellcome East & West

11.45–13.15 RSE Enlightenment Roundtable

Chair: Graeme Roy (University of Glasgow)

Sheila Dow (University of Stirling)

Thomas Ahnert (University of Edinburgh)

Deirdre McCloskey (Cato Institute)

Robbie Mochrie (Library of Mistakes)

Eoin McLaughlin (Heriot-Watt University)

13.15–14.30 Lunch — Wellcome East & West

14.30–16.00 Session 2: The Progress of Opulence

Chair: Jarkko Harju (University of Glasgow)

Oded Galor (Brown University) -- *presenting remotely*

The Wealth of Nations: Origins of Prosperity and Seeds of Inequality

Gareth Austin (University of Cambridge)

Causes of the Wealth of Nations: Economic Development Over Time and Space

Nancy Qian (Northwestern University)

The Agricultural Wealth of Nations

16.00 RSE Reception — Wellcome East & West

(TBC) Conference Dinner

Day 2 — Friday 9 October 2026

09.30–11.00 Session 3: The Invisible Hand

Chair: Eugenio Proto (University of Glasgow)

Tim Besley (LSE)

Moral Sentiments in Market Economies with Maitreesh Ghatak (LSE)

Sascha O. Becker (University of Warwick & Monash University)

Religion and the Wealth of Nations after 250 Years

Uwe Sunde (LMU Munich)

On the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations: Longevity, Institutions, and Patience with Margarita Gatsou (LMU Munich)

11.00–11.30 Break — Wellcome East & West

11.30–13.00 Scottish Economic Society Policy Roundtable

Chair: Tanya Wilson (University of Glasgow & President, Scottish Economic Society)

Tim Besley (LSE)

Jane Humphries (University of Oxford & LSE)

Stephen Aldridge (Communities and Local Government)

Gary Gillespie (Scottish Government)

13.00–14.30 Lunch — Wellcome East & West

14.30–16.00 Session 4: Systems of Political Economy

Chair: Sai Ding (University of Glasgow)

TBC Joachim Voth (University of Zurich)

Conflict, Colonialism, and the Wealth of Nations: Reflections on the Political Economy of Long-Run Growth

Xiaodong Zhu (University of Hong Kong)

Between the Invisible Hand and the Grabbing Hand: The Ebb and Flow of China's Growth

Deirdre McCloskey (Cato Institute)

Smith and Liberalism Made the Modern World

16.00

Close — Wolfson Lecture Theatre

Alex Trew (University of Glasgow)

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