



## Trustees' report 2020

### A successful year

Groam House Museum is a registered Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), whose charitable status is founded on advancement of the arts, heritage, culture and science (A), education (B), and community development (C)

Once again, we are able to report a year of significant successes, as it continues to offer new and exciting exhibitions addressing purposes A, B and C), develop its core collections (addressing A), engage with the local community (addressing C) and succeed in obtaining significant funding for innovative projects (addressing A, B and C).

The highlights for the 2019/20 year can be summarised as:

- Two well curated **exhibitions**, in addition to our permanent exhibition of Pictish sculpture, the spring exhibition was "Found in the Ground" – an exhibition of items found in the local area, and in the summer, "Crafting the Celtic" – an exhibition of work of craftspeople whose work has been influenced by Scottish artist, George Bain, in commemoration of 50 years since his death. For the past three years, we have created virtual tours of our main exhibitions, so that people who can't visit our upstairs exhibition area in person can do so on-line.



- Imaginative and successful **fund-raising events**, led by the events and fundraising team and supported by the catering team, have raised more than £4000 this year in community-based activities including second hand book sales, a plant sale, craft day, Ceilidh of Dreams storytelling, harp and singing event, and participation in other local events.
- On-going **support to local schools**, through direct engagement and in offering loans boxes of items as teaching aids.
- Successful bid for £70,000 of **funding** from Creative Scotland and Museums and Galleries Scotland, for a three-pronged project. It offered skills development in the animation of Celtic designs in video and dance, culminating in a performance in front of the ruins of

Fortrose Cathedral of community-based dance and animation (“Unravelling the Celtic Knot”) using our collection of the work of George Bain as inspiration, and the digitisation of part of the George Bain collection coupled with the development of a new website. In total the project aims to share the creativity of Celtic art through George Bain's collection.

- Development of an initial **business development** plan which will be developed further in the following year to provide a robust business plan for the museum to ensure its long term resilience and sustainability.
- Continuing work to document, catalogue and photograph the thousands of items in our **collections**.
- Much-needed **repairs** to the exterior of the museum building, supported by our first-ever **crowd-funding** venture, which together with other fund-raising generated over £3,500 towards the £6,000 cost.
- Four new **Trustees** were elected at the 2019 AGM, with two standing down.
- **Volunteer** numbers are good but we need many more. Our existing volunteers are the lifeblood of the museum. The volunteers themselves do much to ensure a strong cohesion and camaraderie which contributes the sense of wellbeing which volunteering offers.
- **Visitor** numbers remain steady at around 5,600 with donations of around £10,000 and income from the shop of around £7,000.
- **Feedback** - we retain our 4-star rating with VisitScotland, and equally positive ratings with Google and TripAdvisor, supported by very positive comments in our visitors’ book; visitors particularly comment on the quality of our volunteers who staff the museum.
- Our two part-time **staff** (George Bain Curator and Museum Administrator) support us well, and since November, former Trustee Jill Harden continues as volunteer curator for the Pictish and local history collections, and Helen Avenall joins us as the professional museum mentor.
- Although not directly the responsibility of the museum, two of the museum Trustees and two museum members established a charitable trust to take over responsibility for the **public toilets** in Rosemarkie and Fortrose, to save them from being closed by The Highland Council. As a result, the toilets which visitors to the museum rely on, remain open.

## Exhibitions

We continued to offer two exhibitions in the season, one based on local history and aimed primarily at local people, and a second based on our George Bain collection and aimed at a wider audience. The first, “Found in the Ground” featured items found in the local area over the years, including items found by detectorists as well as those found by other means. It ran from the start of the season to mid May, when we opened our exhibition on “Crafting the Celtic – the legacy of George Bain 50 years on”. The exhibition brought examples of 21st-century Celtic craft inspired by Bain together with Bain’s archive. Each craftsperson featured in the exhibition works in a medium in which Bain also worked: woodcarving, painting and knitting design. The work of



each craftsperson realises Bain's vision of a living, creative Celtic craft in a different way. 50 years after Bain's death, the work of these contemporary craftspeople showed his continuing influence on crafting not only the objects, but also our ideas about Celtic design.

This year, the board of Trustees made the important decision to establish a forward planning group for exhibitions, looking to a three-year planning horizon. This has been carried forward by the new Board of Trustees following the 2019 AGM.

## Funding

Our funding comes from a variety of sources, the gift shop, donations, fund-raising events, grants visiting tour-groups and the summer lecture series. The gift shop is our largest source of income thanks to the tireless efforts of the retail team, and to the decision made by the Trustees this year to invest more heavily in shop stock.

Donations, legacies, payments by visiting tour-groups membership fees, the 100-Club and the lecture series are all valuable and steady sources of additional income and public engagement. In addition, we continue to receive a grant from The Highland Council, but the future of this grant support is uncertain, given the difficult challenges facing the public sector.

Our fund-raising events, coordinated by the events and fundraising team, continue to generate significant income for the museum, as well as provide important social interaction for the local community. We included our "faithfuls" of second-hand book sales and a plant sale this year, venturing for the first time for one of our book sales into Dingwall, which proved a successful move. In addition we offered a craft day and took part in the St Boniface Fair and the Black Isle Gathering, both in Fortrose. Our events always include delicious tea, coffee and home-baking, which are a great draw.

An important decision by the board this year established a £15,000 reserve within the overall budget for the museum. This too has been carried forward by the new board of Trustees.

## A sense of direction

The museum is required to develop and maintain an up to date development plan – detailing how it proposes to develop its collections and its functions as a museum. This is a necessary part of maintaining our status as an accredited museum.

This year, in addition to our development plan, we started to draft a business development plan – looking at the museum as a long-term business, which requires to plan for its financial sustainability. Given the Covid-19 pandemic which started to appear towards the end of this reporting year, the need for a plan for resilience and sustainability became even more apparent. We now plan to take this forward in the new year, by developing a robust business plan for the museum.

## Future Developments

- The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in lock-down by the end of this reporting year, so plans for opening our exhibitions in 2020 were in considerable doubt. However, plans were in place for an exciting new **exhibition** jointly developed by Groam House and local artist Thomas Keyes, around the Book of Kells.
- The Museums and Galleries Scotland (MGS) funded **project** to digitise some 500 items in the nationally recognised George Bain Collection got underway this year and will continue well into 2020/21. The new website will bring the world to Rosemarkie!

- **Pictish Trail** – there have been plans for many years to further develop the Easter Ross Pictish Trail which currently includes sites at Rosemarkie, Nigg, Shandwick, Hilton, Tarbat and Edderton, to extend the scope and provide some form of web presence and mobile self-guided tour. Funding for such a development is now in place, and the museum will actively participate in the development of the trail in the coming months.
- During this reporting year, **Museums and Heritage Highland** became registered as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) officially taking over from the former Highland Museums Forum. It has developed into an organisation to represent, serve and support all museums and heritage bodies in the Highlands, and we will continue to play an active part in supporting it. Two of the museum's trustees are trustees of MHH.