



## Trustees' report 2022 (2021/22 year)

### A year of recovery

After our difficult year in 2020/21, when we spent most of the season closed on account of Covid, our 2021 season ran for the full duration, albeit with much reduced visitor numbers.

Because of the investment made possible by the grant funding provided to museums to mitigate the effects of Covid, we were able to enjoy the benefits of the new heating and lighting in the museum as we opened the doors again to our visitors. This year, though, we introduced controls on visitor numbers – requiring visitors to book online or, for passers-by, to book at the museum, so that we could restrict access to just one family group at a time. Within the museum, we implemented a regime of regular cleaning and sanitising after each visitor group. We also maintained distance and protection between our museum assistants and our visitors. These measures, although a bit of a curb on spontaneity, were clearly welcomed. An added bonus was that by restricting the numbers of people entering the museum at one time, our assistants were able to greet each group individually and provide an introduction to the museum – something which we have carried forward to 2022.

We continued the same exhibition by Thomas Keyes from 2020 into 2021, enabling more people to see and appreciate the remarkable work of this very talented local artist and historian.

We reported last year on our George Bain project, funded by Creative Scotland and Museums Galleries Scotland, to develop and extend our exhibitions of the work of George Bain. Starting last year with a combination of dance and animation to bring Celtic art to life, it followed on this year with the development of an interactive website to make works from our George Bain collection available to a wide audience. It also was designed to encourage artists and craftspeople world-wide to contribute to the collective understanding and celebration of Celtic art. It included on-line workshops involving artists and craftspeople to demonstrate how they approach their work – these workshops attracted audiences from around the world, many of whom now continue to follow the work of the museum.

The highlights for the 2021/22 year can be summarised as:

- A continuation of the fascinating **exhibition**, “The Book of Kells – some mysteries revealed” in which local artist Thomas Keyes worked with us to reproduce a scriptorium in an early medieval monastery (perhaps Rosemarkie?) – Thomas even reproduced the pigments, vellum and tools the scribes would have used, and went on to replicate pages from the Book of Kells itself. This was set alongside a scene depicting the desk of George Bain, who also studied the Book of Kells in great detail, and developed an understanding of the geometry underlying the Celtic art contained within it. In our downstairs exhibition, Thomas Keyes added to our exhibition of Pictish

art by suggesting how geometric methods could have been behind the design of the Rosemarkie cross-slab and other stones in the exhibition. Side by side, the exhibitions showed the comparison between Bain's analysis of Celtic art and Keyes' analysis of Pictish design.

- Excitingly, the new **George Bain Celtic Art Collection website** (grant-aided by Museums Galleries Scotland) was completed during the year and was launched shortly afterwards. It now enables people to subscribe, practitioners to show their own Celtic art work, and GHM to promote the hundreds of Celtic art items in the George Bain collection. See the site at <https://georgebain.groamhouse.org.uk/>
- In a parallel activity, we signed up with **Art UK** and started to load images of many of our George Bain items onto it. See our entry at <https://artuk.org/visit/venues/groam-house-museum-6601>
- Our programme of **Lectures**, temporarily discontinued due to Covid, were re-instated, but this time using Zoom to deliver the lectures to an online audience. This has proved to have two significant benefits – it means we can invite speakers from a wide geographical area to participate, and equally our audience is not limited to the local community. The net result is that audience numbers have risen, and the lectures now generate significant income for the museum.
- **Property** – we reported last year that we had been given notice to vacate the premises on the Rosehaugh estate where we store our collections. During the year we pursued many options for a replacement location, including a portacabin and a near-derelict cottage in Rosemarkie. We commenced the process of seeking to acquire the cottage through a Community Asset Transfer, but eventually concluded that it was not ideal, and there was some local community opposition to it, so shortly after the end of the financial year we abandoned it. But we did succeed in acquiring Groam House itself from the Council – something we had been trying to do for a considerable time. And in the 2022/2023 year we secured a property for our collections, and potentially much more.
- **Volunteer** numbers remained steady, despite many of them not being able to participate actively on account of residual concerns about Covid. As always we need more volunteers, who 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.
- **New ways of working** – we reported last year how we had started to use Zoom for our own meetings, and social media for maintaining social contact amongst our volunteers. This year we continued to develop these – as seen in the lectures (above), and in holding more of our meetings on-line.
- The **shop** continued to excel – with the shop team selecting a wonderful range of items, relevant to our collections and as far as possible, the work of local craftspeople. In line with our new ways of working, we continued to develop our on-line shop capability. This year we introduced a new till system which enables us to keep better track of stock and to manage the shop revenue better.
- The Highland **Pictish Trail** project, which was started last year, was completed this year. Groam House Museum was an active participant in the project steering group, and features strongly in the trail. The museum undertook the development of a mobile phone app to enable visitors to take a self-guided tour of the new Trail. As an offshoot of this, the museum also started to prepare a mobile phone app to provide a walking tour of Rosemarkie. See the Highland Pictish Trail at <https://highlandpictishtrail.co.uk/>

- We continued to work with other museums as a member of **Museums and Heritage Highland** – a charitable group which represents museums and the heritage sector in the Highlands. We participated in various of MHH's activities, including the very successful Highland Threads exhibition (see <https://highlandthreads.co.uk/>), the Highland Pictish Trail (see <https://highlandpictishtrail.co.uk/>), and a number of podcasts (see <https://highlandobjects.wordpress.com/the-podcasts/>).
- After almost a complete year unable to hold any of our usual **fundraising events**, we finally started to get back into the swing with the first book sale and coffee morning in March. This marked a return to a near-normal programme of events for the 2022 season.
- Finally, hardly a highlight, but we can't let an account of this year pass without noting with sadness the **resignation of Carola Martin-Smith** from her administrative post with the museum. We were very sad to see her leave her post, but very relieved that she was not giving up her volunteering role with us. In the new financial year we were able to recruit a replacement, Charlotte Leggatt, who is settling in to the role extremely well.

## Future Developments

Shortly after the close of the financial year, the museum secured a property on Rosemarkie High Street, thanks to one of our Trustees purchasing the property with a view to leasing it to the museum. The property is just a very short distance from Groam House itself, and provides the potential not only to provide the storage and workshop facilities we need, but also to offer some additional space for exhibitions and workshop activities involving local people.

At the same time we have built on earlier work to develop a long-term plan for the museum, by involving local consultants and advisers, and of course our own staff and volunteers, in mapping out a vision for the future of the museum. We hope to complete that work and to be able to report on it in the year ahead.

Altogether, 2021/22 has been a year of considerable achievement despite the on-going challenges of Covid, and one in which Groam House Museum continues to develop its long-term sustainability.

Prepared by A D Maclean, Chair, on behalf of the Board of Trustees  
20 November 2022

