



**Minute of the Annual General Meeting of Groam House Museum,
held by Zoom,
on Thursday 9th December 2021, 7.30pm**

Present:

Trustees: Doug Maclean (Chair), Paul Pritchard (Treasurer), Barbara Cohen, Lynne Mackenzie, Richard Hotchkis

Members: Diane Cobden, Steve and Jean Hogben, Magdalene Maclean, Carola Martin-Smith, Gill Silver, Megan Stubbs, Elaine Ogilvy, Alastair Morton, Tracy Chudley

Apologies: Nigel and Stephen Murby Wright
Jill Harden

Proxy: Mary Smyth

1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed those attending and introduced the agenda. The agenda had been sent to members prior to the meeting, and both the draft accounts and Trustees' report had been made available on-line through the Groam House website. Apologies were given as noted above.

2. Minute of previous meeting

The Chair presented the minute of the previous meeting held on 3rd December 2020 and asked for any corrections or comments. There being no objections or corrections the minutes were proposed for acceptance by Paul Pritchard, seconded by Jean Hogben and accepted unanimously.

3. Reports

3.1 Treasurer's report

The Treasurer had provided the accounts for the period ending 31 March 2021 through the website and presented his financial report for the year.

KEY POINTS ON ACCOUNTS TO 31ST MARCH 2021

The treasurer noted that due to Covid the museum had hardly been open during the year to March 2021. However, the museum was fortunate to benefit from a number of grants, in particular from the government and Highland Council (as the museum was

classified as hospitality). Thus, although income from traditional sources was significantly down the museum was still able to end the year with a surplus.

The Independent Examiner has completed his review of the Accounts. They will now be submitted to the OSCR.

Reserves

- o Unrestricted Reserves at £32,100 (2020: £26,411)
 - Of which £15,000 in a Designated General Reserve
- o Restricted Reserves at £7,449 (2020: £9,163)
- o Project Expenses to be recovered from MGS £13,164 (2020: £0)

Income

- o General activities £6,859 (2020: £15,219) - a decrease of 55%
- o Shop activities £4,352 (2020: £23,613) - a decrease of 82%
- o Unrestricted Grants £36,272 (2020: £6,272) – an increase of 578%
- o Restricted Grants for specified projects £32,580 (2020: £31,382)

Expenses

- o General activities £25,283 (2020: £27,462) – a decrease of 8%
- o Shop Activities £3,345 (2020: £16,295) – a decrease of 79%
- o Restricted Grants on specified projects £47,459 (2020: £22,609)

Main Financial Impacts on Income resulting from COVID

- o Donation income £5,141 (2020: £9,851) – a decrease of 48%
- o Group Visit Fees £0 (2020: £886) – a decrease of 100%
- o Events & Lectures £0 (2020: £3,736) – a decrease of 100%
- o Shop Margin £1,007 (2020: £7,318) – a decrease of 86%

The above total a reduction in income of just over £15,000 primarily as a direct result of COVID on the operation of the Museum. However due to being able to access Government related COVID business grants of £30,000 during the year the museum was able to more than offset the income shortfall. This has enabled the museum to move into the following financial year in a strong position where the impact of COVID continues to have a negative impact on income.

The accounts as presented were noted.

In reply to a query from Gill Silver, the treasurer said that income since March 2021 is much improved but is still down on pre-pandemic years, particularly shop takings and donations.

3.2 Trustees' reports

Reporting on the activity of the museum, the Chair presented a report on behalf of the board. The report had been made available on the website in text form, but the Chair used a PowerPoint presentation to deliver the key points.

The short summary was that 2020-21 had been a challenging year, but that we came through! As always, the highlights for the museum are its exhibitions and this year we had a two part exhibition by Thomas Keyes. Upstairs was given over to 'The Book of Kells – some mysteries revealed' in which Thomas reproduces what a scriptorium in the Rosemarkie monastery may have looked like, even creating his own vellum, pigments and tools – and achieves remarkable copies of pages from the Book of Kells. Downstairs we had 'Pictish sculpture – some mysteries revealed', where a video by Thomas demonstrates the geometry behind some of the stones – including the Rosemarkie stone, which he recreates using ruler and compasses only.

Sadly, our normal fund-raising activity was completely obliterated by Covid – no events, lectures or even a coffee morning. But we were able to obtain £30,000 in grants as a direct result of Covid. We still managed to keep engaged with the community – for example our scarecrow event which was a bit of fun that brought people together – and we used social media to keep our volunteers in touch with each other and involved with the museum throughout.

Work on the project to digitise items in the GB collection and to create an interactive website to engage with a world-wide audience, funded by grants from Creative Scotland and MGS, continued throughout the year. A grant of £8000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund was used to create a portable history exhibition. This included training volunteers in photography, interpretive writing, scanning equipment and the creation of local history exhibitions. Further grants were received from MGS to replace heaters, lighting, dehumidifiers and add loft insulation to make the museum more sustainable in the long term and to fund the PPE equipment we needed in order to open.

The museum had been well-served by its Directors/Trustees – starting the year with a board comprising Doug Maclean, Barbara Cohen, Paul Pritchard, Lynne Mackenzie, Sylvia Macdonald, Alastair Morton, supported by Helen Avenall. During the year Jan Donald and Richard Hotchkiss joined the board whilst Alastair Morton stood down so that at the end of the year the board comprised Doug Maclean (Chair), Paul Pritchard (Treasurer), Barbara Cohen, Lynne Mackenzie, Sylvia Macdonald, Jan Donald and Richard Hotchkiss. Helen Avenall continues to provide support.

The Chair paid tribute to all the volunteers, the lifeblood of the museum and without whom it would not exist. He also thanked the museum staff, Jo Clements (GB Curator) recently back at work after an extended period of sick-leave, Carola Martin-Smith (administrator) and Jenny Brogden (GB project administrator) for their continued hard work. Jill Harden (former Trustee) stepped in to cover for Jo's absence and has done a sterling job despite many other commitments.

The Chair summarised what has been happening since the year end, including the reopening of the museum for limited hours and for a limited group size on a booking only basis (using Art Tickets), Museums and Heritage Highland which is going from

strength to strength, the soft launch of the new Pictish Trail, including a self-guided tour app developed by GHM and the publishing of the Groam House cook book! The new website for the GB collection has been launched and the museum has participated in wider events such as National Storytelling, Art Fund. Visitor numbers and income are increasing, the shop is looking great and doing good business.

The issues facing the museum were summarised. The museum has to vacate Balintore in the near future and possibly Rosehaugh in the next few years. Collections are remote from the museum, making it difficult for volunteers and the local community to access and which limits the extent to which we can run workshops and skills-development activities. Therefore the board is looking at options to replace the existing storage and office and expand the workshop/meeting facilities. To this end, Groam House is currently exploring the potential acquisition of Mill Cottage on Bridge Street for use as store, workshop, and area for volunteers and local people to engage with our collections and with local heritage. Highland Council are planning to sell the cottage as it is not financially viable to turn it into social housing and as such it would likely become a holiday home. We are looking at acquiring the cottage using the community asset transfer (CAT) process. This is only at an exploratory stage – the museum is seeking feedback on funding, and feasibility. A proposal will be put to Members in the new year if/when the Board considers it a worthwhile venture. A process of community consultation is ongoing; so far just under 80% of responses have shown support and those against almost all cite the lack of social housing which is outside our control.

Finally the Chair thanked all those who make the museum possible:

- All the members for continuing to support us
- Our volunteers for making us what we are
- Our paid workers for supporting us so wholeheartedly
- Our Trustees for achieving so much in difficult circumstances
- Our Members, Angels, 100 Club members, visitors for the financial and other support you provide
- Our grant providers and supporters, The Highland Council, Highlife Highland, Museums and Galleries Scotland, National Lottery Heritage Fund, ArtFund
- Everyone who makes Groam House great!

4. Trustees standing down under the three-year rule

Lynne Mackenzie and Paul Pritchard were standing down this year but were immediately re-elected for a further year.

5. Trustees standing down other than under the three-year rule

None

6. Appointment of New Trustees

No nominations had been received.

7. Plans for the future – possible acquisition of Mill Cottage; acquisition of Groam House; future direction.

The possible acquisition of Mill Cottage had been covered already in the Trustees' reports. Gill Silver asked if we knew what the asking price for the building would be.

The Chair pointed out that when buying under CAT there is no asking price and we simply make an offer. However, we would expect to make an offer in the region of the most recent valuation (which was circa £65,000) on the basis that the money will be available for the council to use on housing elsewhere. Once purchased, significant renovations are required, plus the addition of an extension, so total cost is likely to be in the region of £250,000. Purchase of the property relies on grants which we are applying for (specifically SLF) and various funders are being approached to help fund the renovation/extension works (e.g. MGS).

The Chair said that the purchase of Groam House for the museum, for a nominal sum of £1, is finally happening and could be finalised by March.

Jean Hogben asked about the possible extension of Groam House into the courtyard. The Chair stated that we are still looking into that, with a view to having a glass frontage so that the Rosemarkie Stone is permanently on display. This would also allow the top floor of the museum to be extended and a toilet to be added. Steve Hogben voiced concerns about possible vandalism. Tracy Chudley pointed out that other stones are displayed in glass buildings elsewhere, e.g. the Sueno's Stone which is on the edge of a housing estate in Forres. The Chair said that we still have a long way to go before we need to consider this.

8. Re-appointment of Tim Wickens, FCA, MSc, Chartered Accountant as Independent Examiner of the Museum's Accounts

The Chair once again paid tribute to the valuable assistance of Mr Wickens and recommended his re-appointment. The meeting agreed unanimously to the re-appointment of Tim Wickens.

9. AOCB

Carola Martin-Smith thanked the Chair for all the work he has done for the museum.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 20:26.