



## Trustees' report 2023 (2022/23 year)

### A year of further recovery

After our difficult year in 2020/21, when we spent most of the season closed on account of Covid, and our 2021 season in which we had to limit visitor numbers, at last in 2022 we were able to return to something more like normality, though still with much reduced visitor numbers..

This year we were able to remove the booking system for visitors, though we continued to limit the size of groups entering the museum at a time, and to sanitise the museum after each group. Our biggest challenge was in volunteer numbers – some of our volunteers were still reluctant to meet with the public in the confined space of the museum, and some others simply did not wish to continue as attendants. As a result we had to limit our opening hours, and this may have had a negative impact on the number of visitors we were able to welcome to the museum. However, there was a positive side to this – with lower visitor numbers, we were able to greet each set of visitors individually, and to offer a brief introduction to the museum and its collections. This had the effect of encouraging visitors to stay longer, with the average length of stay increasing markedly from previous years by a factor of 2 or 3.

The upstairs exhibition in 2022 featured “Storyways to the people of Rosemarkie” a compilation of some of the fascinating stories from the past hundred years or so in the local area, created with funding provided by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which also provided for us to develop new sections of the website to reflect this historical content.

The highlights for the 2022/23 year can be summarised as:

- Introduction of a new local history exhibition “Storyways to the people of Rosemarkie”
- Visitor numbers reached 3000 in the year – still along way short of pre-covid levels, but associated with this was an average spend of nearly £6; Thirty percent of visits were Scottish, 31% from the rest of the UK, 19% from Europe and 20% from further afield.
- The **George Bain Celtic Art Collection website** (grant-aided by Museums Galleries Scotland) which had been completed the previous year, continued to grow in popularity and use, and we continued to provide new input to it. See the site at <https://georgebain.groamhouse.org.uk/>
- Work on cataloguing the **George Bain collection** continued apace
- Our programme of **Lectures**, temporarily discontinued due to Covid, continued during the year, 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 finally succeeded in purchasing Groam House from the Highland Council for a token sum, after several years of negotiation. We also cancelled our application for a Community Asset Transfer of a property on Bridge Street in Rosemarkie, which we had intended to use as a storage facility for our collections. Later in the year, a property on the High Street, close to the museum, came on the market, and we started negotiations to secure a lease on the property. We intend to use it to replace the storage facility at the Rosehaugh Estate (which we had been given notice to vacate) and also to enable us to provide workshops and other interactive sessions centred round our collections.
- **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 to the sense of wellbeing which volunteering offers.
- 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. We also sought to reduce the value of stock held by the museum, including making more use of “sale or return”.
- The Highland **Pictish Trail** project, which was completed last year, was fully launched this year, with new signage and publicity supporting it. Groam House Museum was an active participant 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 developed a mobile phone app to provide a walking tour of Rosemarkie, and an internal tour of the museum itself. 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.
- After almost a complete year in 2020 unable to hold any of our usual **fundraising events**, we were able to re-instate something approaching our normal timetable of events this year, providing much needed resources for the museum.
- **Business development strategy** – faced with the challenges post-Covid and the rising costs of living, we built on earlier strategic development work to come up with a plan for the sustainable business development of the museum. This was greatly facilitated by our museum administrator Charlie Leggatt who helped us through the process, work which was completed in 2023 by our new Museum Manager, Cindy Campbell.
- **Rationalisation of exhibition programming** – our programming group, which oversees the plans for, and development of, our annual exhibitions, took the bold step this year of making the process of exhibition development more sustainable. This will mean that the basic structure of the exhibitions will remain largely the same for year to year, with relatively minor changes in the items on display and in the interpretation panels.
- **Outreach work with schools and pupils** – with the arrival of Andrew Newton as a new volunteer, he has made great progress in engaging with local schools and involving young people in the museum; his knowledge of the history of Roman and

Pictish times has proved invaluable, combined with his ability to bring past history to life.

## Trustees

The five Trustees who were present at the start of the year continued through to the end. These were:

Doug Maclean (Chair)  
Barbara Cohen (Vice chair)  
Paul Pritchard (Treasurer)  
Richard Hotchkiss  
Sylvia MacDonald

We were very pleased to welcome back Alastair Morton as a Trustee, from December 2022 onwards, meaning that we had 6 Trustees at the year end.

## Future Developments

During the current year (April 2023 onwards) much has been done to prepare the new property on the High Street for use by the museum; a complete redecoration followed some structural repairs to make the building wind and water-tight, and the building started to be used for meetings and workshops. Funding bids were submitted to provide funding for the physical move of the collections from Rosehaugh to the new property, and at the time of writing, the outcomes of these bids are yet to be determined. It is expected, however, that the move of the collections will take place either in early spring 2024 or later in the year.

Altogether, 2022/23 has been a year of considerable achievement despite the aftermath of the effects of Covid, and one in which Groam House Museum continues to develop its long-term sustainability. Visitor numbers are increasing, the percentage of foreign visitors is gradually returning to pre-Covid levels, we continue to benefit from a wonderful group of volunteers (our "Groamies"), and from our two part time staff members.

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

