

Trustees' report 2024 (2023/24 year)

First, I would like to introduce myself as the new chair of Groam House Trustees since January 2024. I have taken over from Doug Maclean who retired after many years as Chair and who led Groam House admirably through some difficult times. I became a volunteer at Groam House on moving to the Black Isle in 2019 and a Trustee in 2021. Earlier in my life when I lived in Manchester, I was involved with Saddleworth Museum again as a volunteer and Trustee. Saddleworth lies on the Pennines between Oldham and Huddersfield with lots of textile and transport history.

The second thing I would like to highlight are changes in our personnel. Jo Clements left Groam House after many years involvement with the George Bain Collection. We are indebted to her contribution and wish her well for the future. Charlie Legatt, our museum manager throughout most of 2023/24, left us in March to work in the commercial sector in Cromarty. She was succeeded by Cindy Campbell who did great work organising our volunteers and developing our long-term Strategy Plan. Unfortunately, she had to move away from the Black Isle to near Inverary for personal reasons and so had to resign. Again, I would like to wish them both well for the future and thank them for their contribution to Groam House. Our new Manager is Aila Schafer, who I believe most of all will have met and has an excellent background in the museums world.

My third highlight is that we have completed our Strategic Plan for the next five years. This sets out what we hope to achieve exploring our heritage and history, our place in the community whilst at the same time ensuring our long-term viability and sustainability. Groam House has been successful in obtaining grant finance for several projects and we intend to continue that. Having a strategic plan is now essential in any application but it also serves to keep all of us involved in Groam House focused on our objectives. The strategic plan should be available on the website but is also available to any Member who asks for it.

But to return to a summary of our financial year 2023/24. It should be described as **A year of normality**

I think it is fair to say that the summer of 2023 saw us return to normal after the traumas of COVID years 2020/22. Visitor numbers were up to 4,000 still short of the levels of 2019 but a large increase of what they were during COVID.

That said, one of the biggest issues facing Groam House is an adequate number of volunteers available to open Groam House to the public seven days a week during the summer months. Up to 2019, GHM was open for 6 hours a day based on two shifts. So far we have been unable to return to that owing to that shortage. As a result, we can only operate on the basis of one shift only. There is little doubt in our minds that the more we are open, the more visitors will come through our doors and

the more revenue we earn through donations and shop sales. In 2023 we did employ a paid member of staff to open in the morning during the peak summer months. The extra revenue we earned did cover the costs and showed us that longer opening hours are important to us.

The highlights for the 2023/24 year can be summarised as:

- The **upstairs exhibition** – “The Celtic Knot” designed to show how artists continue to use celtic design in contemporary art work.
- **Visitor numbers** reached 4,000 in the year continuing the recovery toward pre-covid levels. The distribution of the numbers remains roughly the same as before, 30% Scottish, 30% from the rest of the UK, 20% from Europe and 20% from further afield.
- The **George Bain Celtic Art Collection website** continued to grow in popularity and use; see the site at <https://georgebain.groamhouse.org.uk/>
- Work on cataloguing the **George Bain collection** continued apace
- Our programme of **Lectures** goes from strength to strength. The use of Zoom to deliver the lectures to an online audience has proved to be a major benefit to GHM. We are inviting distinguished speakers from a wide geographical area and our audience is not limited to the local community. This not only results in greater publicity for GHM but also the lectures generate significant and increasing income for the museum.
- **Property** – as stated in last year’s report, we now own Groam House outright. But the major development on the property front has been the lease taken out on Arndene on the High Street in Rosemarkie. The negotiations started in 2023 but have now been completed on the same terms as our lease on Rosehaugh. This has enabled us to replace Rosehaugh with Arndene as the home of our collections. This has two major advantages; it is very close to Groam House making it so much more accessible and is in much condition than Rosehaugh. The move was complex and required funding which was provided by MGS and ?. This has now been completed and we look forward to developing Arndene and our collections for workshops and community use.
- **Volunteer** numbers remained steady, and as always we are delighted by their enthusiasm and hard work. Inevitably, as mentioned above, we need many more to enable us to open for longer hours and generally help us to develop Groam House.
- 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”.

- Our **fundraising team** continue to do excellent work holding a number of events throughout the year including our well established book fairs and craft fair. Groam House is indebted to them and we hope they continue their good work in the future.
- **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

All six Trustees who were present at the start of the year continued through to the end. I would like to thank them all for their hard work in the year. The Trustees were:

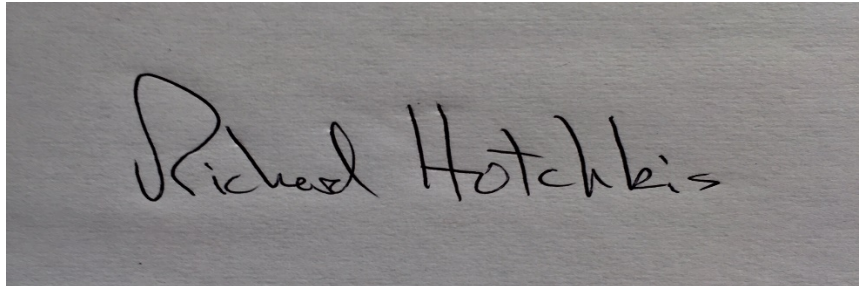
Richard Hotchkis (Chair)
 Barbara Cohen
 Paul Pritchard (Treasurer)
 Doug Maclean
 Sylvia MacDonald
 Alastair Morton

Future Developments

The emphasis during the current year (April 2024 onwards) has been twofold. The first is ensuring the financial sustainability of Groam House through increasing visitor numbers, donations and improved shop sales. The second has been the transfer of our collections from Rosehaugh to Arndene on the High St in Rosemarkie. We successfully achieved funding for this, and the move is almost complete as I write. Again, thanks must go out to the fantastic team who accomplished this move without a hitch and within budget.

In summary, 2023/24 was another year of consolidation and achievement. As Doug Maclean said last year and I would like to repeat, Groam House continues to benefit from a wonderful group of volunteers (our "Groamies"), our part time Museum managers and of course our visitors without whom Groam House couldn't survive.

Prepared by Richard Hotchkis, Chair, on behalf of the Board of Trustees

A photograph of a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored surface. The signature reads "Richard Hotchkis" in a cursive, slightly slanted script.

15 December 2024