

Bailies of Bennachie

Annual Report 2024



BAILIES *of* BENNACHIE
A VOICE FOR THE HILL

It is almost hard to believe that twelve months have elapsed since my last report. And it is a joy to share our many successes with you.

We are now a few years out from COVID and Storm Arwen. It now offers us a bit of distance to see back to those days when it took extraordinary effort by the board of the day to hold the Bailies together through online meetings and at a time when we could not undertake our traditional outdoor activities. We thank that board for keeping us going. As you will now see, the wind is refilling our sails.

This time last year, we were still enjoying the afterglow of our 50th anniversary celebrations and the variety of things we undertook in that celebration. The year was capped off by receiving the RSPB Nature of Scotland Community Initiative Award. This was especially gratifying as it was the result of a public vote.

2024 has been a more traditional year, if such a thing exists, but that has not meant business as usual. In every part of our charity, we are undertaking new activities and projects that align to our motto, i.e. to provide a 'Voice for the Hill', and tap into the ideas and energies of our members, volunteers, support team and trustees. In some areas we are in uncharted waters for the first time in our history.

Again, our year was capped off by the receipt of an award; this time the Kings Award for Voluntary Service (KAWS), coined as the MBE for charities. Again, we are very grateful for this recognition at a UK wide level.

We welcomed two new trustees this year, David Caney and Graeme Ralph. We wish them every success in helping the charity achieve our ambitious goals for 2025 and beyond.

It is timely to reflect on how the roles and priorities of trustees changes over time. Every day the board

is presented with new challenges and opportunities, some that could not have been anticipated even three or four years ago. We need to steer through these issues and continue to make competent decisions to promote our aims that are relevant for our time and circumstances. It will ever be thus and, if anything, that is what attracts a person to be a trustee.



If you feel that you can devote some time, knowledge and enthusiasm for the good of Bennachie, please contact me to find out what is involved in becoming a Trustee and make your contribution to the future of the hill.

None of this would be possible without the unflagging dedication from our trustees, volunteers and support team and we are indebted to their hard work. I thank them for their support. In closing, I can report that the Bailies are firing on all cylinders and we look forward to a successful 2025.
chair@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk



Peter Stock - Chair.

“These activities and achievements have only been possible due to the excellent relationships we have with local landowners for which we thank them for their trust and cooperation.”

My fellow trustees have provided details relating to these activities throughout the rest of this report, but to highlight a few:

- A volunteer's morning held in January to thank and recognise volunteers from all of our teams, and share with them some of the successes that they contributed to.
- A full and productive series of work parties (totalling more than 1100 hrs on the hill) under our Outdoor Coordinator, including several 3rd party work parties hosted by us.
- Development of our electric work parties, whose team members have been trained in the use of our new suite of battery-operated power tools.
- Procurement and deployment of a defibrillator for use by events on the hill.
- Our first Field for Wildlife planting (not as successful as we had hoped but not for lack of trying).
- Another successful archaeological dig by our Bennachie Landscape Projects Group (BLPG).
- The preparation of the Colony Management Plan.
- Revised Colony Trail leaflet and revised signposts.
- Commencing the deployment of information boxes at key sites on the hill – Cairn Couttie and Shepherd's Lodge so far.
- Started planning for a major path repair / reinstatement.
- Several successful walks by the wildlife group.
- The development of a draft environmental strategy for the hill.
- Closer ties with local charities such as the Garioch Heritage Centre.
- First Aid Course to certification level held free for volunteers in June.
- Significant progress of the digitisation of our paper archive into our bespoke website – digitalbennachie.org.
- A big push on updating our membership records to ensure alignment with our current legislative obligations.
- Release of the latest revision of our governance, including improvements to our event management planning and execution.
- Selected a supplier to build a new and modern website in 2025 to attract our lifeblood, new members and volunteers.

Timeline Path Upgrade Project

The condition of the paths has been an ongoing concern to the Bailies for a number of years. In 2020, we initiated the Hill Warden Scheme to better record the state of each named path on Bennachie, monitor its degradation and identify essential repairs.

As with the rest of the world, COVID rather derailed the ability of the landowners to undertake the needed repairs. Emerging from COVID, the landowners no longer had the budget for large expenditures necessary for all paths, and have had to severely prioritise their spending on other areas.

The Bailies saw there was really no option but to grab the baton and see what we could do for the hill and walkers visiting it. We are incredibly fortunate to have been given financial legacies and donations over the years, the donors of which we know would have wanted them directed towards the hill.

The hill has some of the highest footfall of any outdoor destination in Scotland. We therefore consider investment in Bennachie's footpaths a high priority for both the hill and its visitors. Waiting for Bennachie's paths to become a national priority would have taken years, so if not now, then when...

Reviewing our potential path projects, it was

decided that the upgrade of the Timeline path from the Colony Path to the treeline was the preferred and most deserving project. The main reasons are the poor condition of this section of the path combined with its popularity and the large number of visitors that would benefit.

The Bailies initially started to investigate major hill path upgrades in late 2022 / early 2023 and started sharing ideas with the landowners. In February, Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) contacted the Bailies regarding a new way of doing projects on their land. This would allow community groups such as the Bailies to fund the projects and FLS would then manage the project from design through to completion with their staff and preferred contractors. We then set up a subgroup to



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review this proposal. A follow up meeting was held with FLS to understand in more detail their suggested way of working and it was agreed this was acceptable to the Bailies.

Following a site visit in spring 2024, it was agreed to engage a contractor in completing a design study and costing for the work. This report was a very valuable resource for the Bailies in giving us insight into the physical works required, the potential costs, the key decisions and the schedule. This was completed and the design study submitted to FLS for approval by the various stakeholders.

Following a later site visit in autumn with FLS, it was discussed that an alternative contracting model, successfully being deployed in other FLS regions, could also

be beneficial to all. This is where we would engage the path contractor and retain an independent consultant to manage the contractor. We had a meeting with a recommended consultant. We went through in detail how the project would be executed from concept design and costing, selection of contractor, completion of the work and handover of the completed path to FLS. We decided this was the best and most expedient way to progress the project.

Budgets for the scope of work were approved at our 2024 business meeting in November. The design and consultant work is expected to commence early 2025, with physical path upgrade work scheduled for Autumn 2025.

Willie Linklater, Trustee-Projects.



Website ^{Project}



Willie Linklater, Trustee - Projects.

Following both internal and external feedback we decided it was time for the website to receive a significant upgrade.

Discussions have highlighted the need to appeal to and attract new members and volunteers, our lifeblood. The site must be modern, eye-catching, easy to navigate and present the best of the Bailies work, and we do have a lot of good news to share!

Another key requirement for the website is to generate revenue to support us with funding of projects going forward, via an online shop and the facility for donations, and the purchase of publications and calendars.



We selected potential suppliers and issued them an invitation to tender package. They all responded, and the standard of proposals was impressive.

The bids were reviewed against a selection criteria scoring matrix that had been developed prior to receiving the bids. Further clarifications were held with two potential suppliers who could not be split. From this the contract was awarded to CP&Co.

Budget for the work was approved at our 2025 business meeting in November with work commencing in January 2025 with completion in the Spring. We are excited to see the results - keep an eye out for our brand new online presence in the coming months.

Project Information Boxes

It has long been the desire of the Bailies to share information about the hill, its history, its geology, etc. Indeed, it is one of our founding motives. We have undertaken initiatives in the past by establishing the Colony Trail flyer and app. The

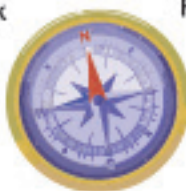
signposts for that trail have been renewed this year. Our Junior Bailies web page provides a much-complimented resource on all aspects of the hill, targeted primarily at young people but full of accessible information for all ages.

Cairn Couttie

Cairn Couttie is the name given to a small homestead, which was surveyed and partially excavated in 1999. The nearby place name 'Cairn Couty' features on the 1857 plan called 'New scheme of division of the Commonly of Bennachie'. At that date, the house was still occupied, but it seems that the occupants left a year or so after the division took place in 1859. The 1857 plan indicates that the homestead was still without a formal access road.

Kaleyad

The main part of the house was built of carefully coursed masonry, of which the lowermost courses remain. It is small, measuring about 8m by 5m. Inside, a hearth was found built into the west gable wall, still containing peat. Carefully laid flagstones surrounded the hearth. There was also evidence for the use of coal. A stone-lined drain was found in the north-east corner of the house.



A kaleyad is situated immediately to the west of the house, the ends of its walls abutting the house's west end. Walled fields are located north and south of the house. The one on the north, the larger of the two, backs onto the house. On the south, a loosely cobbled area at the house's front door separated it from the smaller field. These fields were still designated as arable when O.S. surveyors produced their 1886-1888 map.

House

From the 1851 census, it seems that Mary Emslie and her children, 13-year old Margaret and 8-year old Robert, may have lived in the house. The family had two lodgers, Alexander Lindsay, a fish cadger from Tannadice, Forfar, and his wife, Mary, both 50 years of age. Mary Lindsay suffered from ill health and, in 1857, Alexander's horse died, preventing him from trading fish. The Inspector of the Poor of Oyne instructed the couple to move, but they were still in residence when, in November 1860, their house was declared uninhabitable. Alexander and Mary went to live in part of Widow Cooper's house elsewhere in the Colony.

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It was our desire to try to use technology through QR codes to provide a modern, comprehensive and dynamic way to access information on the hill. Unfortunately, the mobile phone coverage on the hill was intermittent to non-existent. It is our hope that coverage will improve over time and we can implement this across the hill in the future.

As a stop gap, we have adopted Info-Boxes; an idea we saw deployed at Foveran Nature Reserve. To

date, we have had five made, two of which have been installed at Cairn Couttie and Shepherd's Lodge. These have been put out over winter to monitor resilience to weather, vandalism, etc. The remaining three will be deployed in the spring.

Peter Stock, Chair.

It's been a very productive year for work parties and as ever, the Bailies are very grateful to all volunteers – old and new. As a newbie myself, joining in November 2023 I have found the Saturday Sessions always very friendly and sociable. I have learnt new skills and a lot about how the paths in particular get maintained.

In addition to the regular Saturday events (held on the first of the month), we now have electrical tools and small groups have cleared key paths such as Heather Brig and the Gordon way.



before
&
after



Health & safety has been at the forefront during all work parties, particularly so when using the electrical tools. Those operating the brush cutters and hedge trimmers have all undergone the Lantra training and as ever, Hugh Fraser has been our captain in directing operations, keeping everyone on their toes and ensuring that we do our work not only keeping ourselves safe but also the general public. Whilst there has been an inevitable capital cost in acquiring the electrical tools, we have managed to keep the running costs down with good maintenance and house keeping. For example, batteries can't be stored in our container as the temperature can get either too hot or too cold.

A number of volunteers have also attended the first aid courses, funded by the Bailies and we hope that new and existing volunteers will undertake the training offered. We hope never to need to use it, but have invested in a defibrillator, which is carried during every work party.

Again, from a personal perspective, it has been very encouraging to see the paths clear of overgrown heather, bracken and the occasional tree. Certain other areas like the Shepherd's L edge have been made more accessible and we aim to carry this on in 2025.

Previous work party Trustees have been Peter Stock and Willie Linklater whilst I took over the role in October. Hugh Fraser will continue in a reduced capacity as outdoor coordinator which includes planning the work parties (scope and prioritisation), preparation of documentation, interface with landowners and leading the Work parties on the day. Hugh has maintained his approach to engaging volunteers and always makes newcomers feel very welcome. Throughout the year he has been extremely positive and encouraging. We are lucky to have him. During 2024, we clocked up over 1100 hours of volunteer time, as well as continuing with the 'corporate' work parties.

Work this year has included the normal path maintenance on different areas of the hill and maintaining the main Colony Sites. Cross drains and water bars have been cleared of debris and plants to alleviate erosion issues. This has certainly been a learning experience for me and in many situations it's a case of 'many hands make light work' and often, a problem has been solved with a 'group brain storm'.

I can also announce at this time an exciting development to start work on repairing some of the drystone dykes around the Colony area and a number of volunteers have been enlisted to do some training prior to carrying out work. As ever, health and safety will be at the forefront of any work the Bailies has a hand in.





Work Parties

We are always welcoming new volunteers and it is a simple process to join our group. To sign up, follow the link below and complete the online volunteer form. Work parties take place on the first Saturday (weather permitting) of each month from March to December inclusive. We would really like to hear from you. Should you require further information please contact info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk.

David Caney - Trustee, Work Party Coordinator.





Kailyard

This year a group of Bailies volunteers continued to look after the Shepherd's Lodge kailyard. Sited just next to Shepherd's Lodge croft, the kailyard is a recreation of a small 19th century croft garden that helps us imagine what the Bennachie landscape would have been like in the past. Now in it's 8th year, we have been raising varieties of fruit crops that might have been grown in the past and looking after the area surrounding the kailyard for the benefit of everybody.

Our year started with a group visit on a beautiful day in early February to add a bracken mulch and carry out repairs to the fence, which is made of

locally-sourced brash and similar materials. Strengthening was added to the north side by way of poles made from last year's cut back of the laurel next to the main path. Later in the summer we were surprised to find that the poles had established and begun sprouting new leaves themselves! Our brash fence may yet become a laurel hedge.

Other work on the kailyard continued well and we achieved good crops of soft fruit including black, red and white currants, raspberries and gooseberries. One of the gooseberry plants appeared to die back but managed to reinvigorate itself later in the summer.

We tried a further experiment in growing kale itself,

“we achieved good crops of soft fruit including black, red and white currants, raspberries and gooseberries.”



using Colin Shepherd's locally sourced kale seeds. They germinated and grew on very well and were planted out with help from two visiting archaeologists from Sweden in May. Unfortunately, by July, it appeared that a deer had entered the kailyard, munched the kale down to its stumps and helped him/herself to some raspberries at the same time. Barry Foster created a broom barrier to protect the much diminished plants and we were delighted to see them regrow strongly – only for pests unknown to take them again by late autumn, when they would have been ready for picking. We can say it was a wholly successful experiment in learning about the importance of probably daily pest control

for the crofters of the past.

We put a call out for new volunteers this year and were delighted to welcome a few new people to the rota alongside our stalwarts. If you would like to help look after the kailyard, or be included on the mailing list for updates, please email us at info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk.

Jo Vergunst, Kailyard Project.



The Bennachie Landscapes Project Group (BLPG) had another busy year with our mission to research and promote the heritage of Bennachie.

During 2024 we made great strides in implementing the Colony Management Plan. New signposts were installed to align with an update to the Colony Leaflet. The Colony app is now available on both IOS and Android platforms, and we have installed new information boards around the Colony.

In 2025 we hope to have a Colony monitoring programme in place that will allow us to keep a close eye on the Colony buildings and how they are presented. We are intending to extend this programme to other archaeological sites on the Bennachie Landscape to ensure the integrity of these sites is protected for generations to come.

During the summer a team of intrepid volunteers led by Iain Ralston continued our archaeological excavations on the Pittodrie estate. We made a big effort this year to promote the dig so we could recruit some new volunteers. This was a great success and we had many new faces getting stuck into the interesting work in the trenches. We also had a visit from some young people from Inverurie Academy who thoroughly enjoyed the experience; they even managed to find some pottery! We intend to make arrangements for this to happen again in 2025.

The ongoing excavations at Druminnor Castle continue to both confound and confuse. The team are now 12 years deep into this project, updates on which are provided on page 14.

Looking forward to 2025, during the summer we are planning on excavating a fascinating longhouse site on the slopes of the hillside that was discovered

by Barry Foster a few years ago. The site has been covered by windblown trees the last few years, which have now been removed, so if you have been following the TV program Digging for Britain on the BBC and fancy having a go at Archaeology this year, please contact us, we would love to have you as part of the team.

One of the highlights of the year came in May when Mary Spencer from Ohio visited the Colony with her husband Philip and nephew Peter Crane. Mary is the great, great, great granddaughter of Alexander Littlejohn and Elizabeth Kesson who lived at Shepherd's Lodge for over 40 years until their eviction in 1878 - guiding Mary round what remains of the land where her ancestors worked so hard to create a home for their family was a heart warming experience.

Earlier in the year members of the BLPG successfully transcribed the division of the common documents that were donated to the Bailies in 2023. The group are now about to embark on transcribing 150 pages from the Erskine Documents that were discovered in the Special Collections Library at the University of Aberdeen. These are a rather random collection of documents dating from the 18th century, including one from 1609!

We are on track to publish our latest book in spring 2025, 'The Cultural Landscapes of North East Scotland', which will complement our other volumes. This new publication contains chapters on many exciting pieces of work that we hope will ignite imaginations and inspire people to learn about how the landscape we call home has been lived in and worked on over the millennia.

info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk

Allan Will, BLPG Trustee

“We are on track to publish our latest book in spring 2025, The Cultural Landscapes of North East Scotland.”

Pittodrie

The 2024 season saw a return to the cottage, new work in 'the bog' and tidying-up operations on the 'mound'. Work on the mound appeared to confirm that the use of the area for the kilns during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-centuries destroyed any solid evidence of prehistoric activity, if any had occurred there.



Ongoing excavation of the cottage saw more of the structure uncovered in order to obtain an enhanced ground plan. This work was hampered by the extensive array of roots from the mature sycamore growing over the north gable-end wall of the building. But, Iain Ralston's clever use of ropes and tarpaulin attached to the tree did mean that much of that part of the site was sheltered from the worst of the season's heavy downpours. Sadly, it could not keep the ferocious midges away!

Across the Craigwell Burn a new area was opened and the truncated remains of an enclosure dyke were found. This survived well on the east side where downwashed soil from the land above had protected it from nineteenth-century salvage operations. That period of work saw the recycling of the pre-nineteenth century landscape remains to construct the present stone dykes marking the planned fields of that time.

The south side of the enclosure dyke survived as very slight remains that needed to be investigated in greater detail. It seems likely that the dykes represent the bounds of an enclosed field associated with Craigwell Croft. This small tenant farm is known to have been in existence in 1636 because of its inclusion in a rental of that date. How much older than that is unknown owing to a lack of documentary evidence. However, archaeological excavations by the team in previous years indicates that this part of the hill has seen periodic settlement from at least the 11th century. The dates come from Tim Kinnaird (University of St. Andrews) who took soil samples and subjected them to OSL (optically-stimulated luminescence) analysis.

However, the prize for most dogmatic archaeologists must go to the intrepid explorers beavering away, up to their hocks in water, peat and sticky, gungey clay further up the Craigwell Burn.

Work in previous seasons had suggested this boggy area may be archaeological in nature. Andrew Wainwright and his intrepid team discovered what may be the wooden remains of a structure embedded and preserved in the waterlogged clay. It is hoped to have these samples analysed in due course. Pollen cores taken by Ed Schofield of the University of Aberdeen, along with ecofacts from the kilns analysed by Jackaline Robertson of AOC (Edinburgh), are helping us to understand the tree species present on this part of the hill at different periods in the past. This, in turn, will help to inform future tree planting strategies.

A more complete report of the Pittodrie excavations is presently being published together with other papers given at last year's (2023) landscape conference. Publication is due in the spring. See Oxbow website for further details.

Report by Colin Shepherd, photo by Iain Ralston
BLPG.

Druminnor

Some surprising and exciting results were revealed by the optically-stimulated luminescence sampling, performed by Tim Kinnaird (University of St. Andrews) in late 2023 - sampling that involved immersion in cold November muddy water. The dates from various features around the site indicate that Druminnor was a seriously fortified 1.5 acre site in the mid 13th century. When the present work commenced 12 years ago, Druminnor was considered to have been a fairly typical, northern Scottish, 15th century 'renaissance palace'. That it had been an impressive and substantial Forbes fortification in the 13th century was unexpected.

Excavation outside the 15th century barmkin wall held further surprises. Rather than revealing the continuation of the accompanying ditch, the excavation went deeper and deeper, down to the base of a substantial 13th century quarry. This, it is presumed, provided the stone for the foundations and superstructure of the massive 'Old Tower'. The existence of this structure is known from cartographic and documentary records but was, sadly, destroyed in 1800 by an 'asset stripper' who bought-up and demolished castles to sell the stone. It is suspected that the early 19th century planned village of Rhynie may have been built with the stone from Druminnor and the nearby Lesmoir Castle that suffered the same fate.

The extensive re-planning that has occurred on the site over the intervening 800 years has left the archaeological layers rich in the remains of lime mortar. The knock-on effect of this has provided an environment in which bone has survived very well. This is very rare in the North-east where the acidic soils rapidly destroy such remains. Edouard Masson-Maclean of the University of Aberdeen is kindly analysing these bones with the hope that they

will shed important environmental light upon the livestock of the region across the centuries.

Members of the Aberdeen Young Archaeologists Club visited twice this year and got stuck into the excavations. On their second visit the older members helped in retrieving bone from the 13th century layers beneath the present car park, whilst the younger ones began the more arduous task of cleaning a 19th-century trackway, prior to recording. Many thanks to them all for their impressive efforts. Thanks also to Alex Forbes for permitting us to dig up his wonderful gardens! A short report for the international journal, *Medieval Archaeology*, regarding the important new dating evidence is in preparation and will be published in the autumn.

The stone feature in the centre of the photo below is the mid-15th century barmkin wall with entrance way. To the right, Andrew is recording a section of the fill of the 13th-century quarry.



Behind Andrew, overlying the wall, is 17th century cobbling, laid after the wall had been demolished. Behind Megan and Phil, just under the baulk, is earlier cobbling dated to the same period as the wall. In the background is the spoil heap - excavated entirely manually.

Report by Colin Shepherd, photo by Iain Ralston

The Bennachie Wildlife Group is an informal group which anyone can join and take part in the various wildlife orientated talks and walks which are organised. Information about events is sent to those on the group e-mail list giving them priority for booking as numbers are usually limited (see below on how to add your name to the mailing list).

The first of the events in 2024 was in February with a walk looking at Bryophytes (mosses and liverworts). This was led by Petra Vergunst, a local ecologist. The walk began at Donview Centre and with so many interesting bryophytes to see only ventured a little way along the trail! Petra introduced the group to what mosses and liverworts are, how they grow and live and how to identify them. It was a very informative morning into this fascinating group of plants.

It was hoped by late March that spring weather may have been enjoyed for a walk at Afforsk Loch led by Lizzie Bacon however it was cold with intermittent rain showers. The aim of the walk was to look for signs of otter and other mammals in and around the loch. Otter spraint and tracks were evident and the gruesome sight of toad skins indicated the presence of otter as they eat the insides leaving the toxic skin behind. Toads (live ones!) were also seen in the loch with the males piggy backing on the females – a true sign that spring had sprung despite the cold weather. After exploring the loch the walk continued to the sight of a nearby badger sett where obvious signs of earth digging at the entrance holes was observed. It was a very successful morning.

An early morning Dawn Chorus Walk in late April was led by John Wills from the Donview Centre. The 5.30am start was worth it to experience the chorus of birdsong. Song thrush and chiffchaff were on full volume, occasional robins, wrens, warblers and a drumming woodpecker were also heard – in total fifteen species of birds were recorded.

A Bioblitz was arranged and led by David Bale and John Wills at the end of May.

Members of the group recorded the range of plant species and their percentage cover in a 2x2 metre quadrat in a pinewood on Pittodrie Estate. The event aimed at engaging the group in surveying plants to identify their botanical communities. A standard bird recording system was used to note the species and numbers of birds singing in the vicinity of each survey location. It is intended to hold further Bioblitz events around Bennachie to gain a more detailed knowledge of the vegetation and bird communities and their distribution.

Helen Rowe, Marr Countryside Ranger led a very enjoyable moth ID morning in late August at Donview. Light traps had been set up the night before both at Donview and Rowantree and the array of moths lured in were identified by Helen and other 'moth experts' before being released.

Autumn was the ideal time for a Fungal Foray around the pinewoods at the Bennachie Centre expertly led by Toni Watt and held in conjunction with Grampian Fungus Group. A wide variety of sizes, colours and shapes of mushrooms were identified and their biology and ecology explained. Over the course of about four hours the group only covered about half a mile due to the abundance of fungi! In total an amazing 53 species were identified.

The Wildlife Group have a programme of events for 2025. If you'd like to add your name to the mailing list please email us or complete the registration form by following the QR code below.

Lorna M Bell
Trustee, Wildlife.

info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk.





“15 species of birds were heard during the dawn chorus, including wren, willow warbler, chiffchaff, blackcap, blue tit, great tit, siskin, jay, carrion crow, wood pigeon, great spotted woodpecker, robin, blackbird, song thrush,



Wildlife



The King's Award for Voluntary Service

The Bailies are extremely pleased to report that we have been awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service (KAVS) in 2024. Created in 2002 to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee and previously known as The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS), the award has been shining a light on the fantastic work of voluntary groups from all across the UK for many years. Equivalent to an MBE, KAVS is the highest award given to local voluntary groups in the UK, and they are awarded for life.

The Bailies were nominated in September 2023 by a member of the public. We were interviewed by members of the Lord-Lieutenant of Aberdeenshire's team in February. They were very complimentary of our activities at the time. It all went quiet until early November when we were advised of our success, one of only two awards given in Aberdeenshire.

In 2025, an award ceremony will be arranged where the Lord-Lieutenant, Sandy Manson, will make the formal presentation. This will be combined with our annual Volunteers Day.

As a charity reliant on the energies and efforts of our volunteers at all levels of the organisation, we are particularly appreciative of this recognition. This award comes on the back of our RSPB Nature of Scotland - The Community Initiative Award which we received last year as a result of a Scotland-wide public vote.



**The King's Award
for Voluntary Service**

The MBE for volunteer groups

Education

The Bailies continue to promote all aspects of education and learning about the hill, its flora, fauna and history through our Junior Bailies website, overseen by Jock o'Bennachie (www.juniorbailies.org.uk). Intended for all ages, the format is made intentionally inviting to children of primary school age, their parents and teachers.

We take our responsibilities towards young people very seriously; this year we commissioned an independent safety audit of the site. The audit was undertaken by I Am Learner, an education, technology & management consultancy company based in Scotland. They work for international clients (e.g. UNESCO, World Bank) across many critical issues in education, technology and project evaluation. We include relevant extracts from their Executive Summary here:

"This review of the Junior Bailies of Bennachie website is intended to provide the Bailies of Bennachie with, primarily, a provable level of due diligence should they encounter any issues or claims that might be raised about the website in the future. The review also sought evidence of the suitability and appropriateness of the content held by the Bailies Junior website for use both by schools and by the general public. In addition, issues were examined in relation to the overall quality of the website and, on the basis of our review, a number of recommendations are offered on matters such as safety and security, site navigation, user experience and content with a particular focus in each case on young users of the site.

From the perspective of experienced educators, the first impressions gained were of a site that, self-evidently, has been designed to help people of all ages to learn about and appreciate the outdoors in the particular part of Aberdeenshire dominated by the peaks of Bennachie and its surrounding landscape. With a specific focus on children, young people and their parents, the website aims to inspire everyone to enjoy and appreciate the outdoor environment.

In relation to safety and security, it is clear that, almost without exception, all of the content reviewed is unequivocally safe in every relevant way for young users. ...

In reviewing navigation across the site, it was found to be relatively easy to plot a course through the site and to browse effectively, since the menu structure is simple and coherent. There might be some merit in considering a simplification of the menu structure, particularly in relation to those parts of the website that present the extensive and broad range of resources that the site has to offer.

The User Experience in relation to the site was examined against an accepted set of criteria. Some specific recommendations are made in the belief that they will improve the accessibility of the website (especially for partially-sighted visitors) and enhance the educational value of the site both for young people and for their teachers.

In terms of the undeniable wealth of content on the site, all of it was found to be relevant, accurate, intelligible and, undoubtedly, of educational value. An 'organic' quality to the way in which the site has been developed and grown was discerned, with the same content often made available in multiple locations across the site. However, it was recognised that each instance of each repeated item of content had been placed where it is for a good reason in terms of context or for educational and instructive purposes."

We are delighted with this conclusion which reinforces the consideration and effort put into creating and populating the Junior Bailies Website. All recommendations made by I Am Learner were actioned immediately.



Income & Expenditure

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	2024	£	2023
Membership and donations	3,734		1,549
Publications	5,283		4,829
Grants	-		672
Bank interest	9,843		12,903
Dividend income	53,197		51,115
TOTAL INCOME	72,057		71,068
Publications	2,796		2,771
Governance costs	12,687		10,668
Payments relating directly to charitable activities	40,353		11,740
Bennachie archaeological digs	12,581		8,248
Co-ordination support	23,603		11,640
Investment manager fees	14,703		13,728
Costs relating to 50th anniversary	-		14,804
Equipment and other ancillaries	13,053		7,541
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	119,776		81,140
Net (expenditure) / income	(47,719)		(10,072)
Net gains on investments	39,449		66,833
NET MOVEMENTS IN FUNDS	(8,270)		56,761
Fund balances brought forward	2,320,243		2,263,482
FUND BALANCES AT 31ST DECEMBER	2,311,973		2,320,243

Treasurer's Report



It is our policy to keep healthy reserves so that we are in a position to help fund activities and major projects in relation to Bennachie. Each year the trustees consider whether the reserves remain sufficient to enable this possibility, and in general we aim to limit spending on annually recurring items, excluding investment manager fees to roughly the level of income from dividends, bank interest, membership subscriptions and other sources of income.

Our income for the year was £72,057 which includes dividend income of £53,197 and bank interest of £9,843. In 2023 our income was £71,068.

Expenditure increased in 2024 to £119,776 compared to £81,140 in 2023. This increase in expenditure was mainly due to costs in relation to work party support including the purchase of electric power tools and associated training, together with significant costs to revalidate our membership records and archive our historic records. Partly offsetting this was the 50th anniversary costs that were incurred in the prior year.



The net movement in funds for the year was a reduction of £8,270 and year end funds amounted to £2,311,973.

Investment Policy and performance

The overall objective is to hold investments to generate income and provide capital growth in the medium to long term. The investment managers, Rathbones are instructed to maximise the return of the investments, consistent with an acceptable level of risk as agreed by the trustees. The trustees meet Rathbones at least annually to review performance of the investments.

The portfolio ended the year with a market value of £2,070,329 which includes a net gain on investments over the year of £39,449. The trustees recognise that the stock market continues to be volatile and that gains or losses in one year may be cancelled out by losses or gains the next year. As noted above, the overall objective is to generate income and provide long term capital growth and discussions with the investment managers are focused on this achieving this.

Alan Henderson, Trustee Treasurer.

Members

Part of our charity obligations (for OSCR) saw us undertake a huge amount of work during 2024. We attempted to contact every single one of the 2600 members on our books at that time, to ensure that we had their correct details and up to date email addresses, along with permission to hold their data for GDPR. Sadly, we were informed of many members who had moved or passed away. There are still many non-responses, over 1500, who will be marked 'inactive' and be taken off the membership list by the AGM 2025, leaving an up to date figure of some 700 members, mostly contactable electronically.

Facebook followers are sitting around 5500 and Instagram at around 500. With regular posts going out on these channels and our website, hopefully a number of these followers will convert to members and contribute to the Bailies as there are several projects which require funds to progress.

During the clean-up exercise, we had some lovely conversations with members who have great memories of their time as members and we recognise these contributions. Mr Barbour from Oyne reported that he had been persuaded by Algy Watson and James McKay to be one of the squad who carried the original signposts up on the hill; hard work, but so many folks have appreciated the signage over the years. Former Treasurer Alexander Michael Neely has now moved to Berkshire, reported of the "bridies to die for" at the picnics along with dancing at the informal ceilidhs. He is looking to catch up with Bailies members in England too.

George Pollock, age 95, now of Coventry, tells us that he entered a poetry competition a few years ago where the poem had to start with "I wandered lonely as a" and he won second prize. He went on saying that he had based it on a climb from the Rowantree Car Park, bypassing Mither Tap, over Craigshannoch and down the other side to Oyne. He also shared his story "A black sunrise" which we will post on our website and social channels in due course. We share George's prize-winning poem with you here:

Silence

I wandered lonely as a mist
That drifts between the crags
And masks their jaggedness.
They say there's no such thing as silence.
A singing hiss or muffled throb remains.
But they who say it, have they climbed
Craigshannoch's peak?
Where no sound dares.
No roller-coasting joyous pipit's cry,
Nor curlew's plaintive warble.
A crystal dewpond marks the place, they say,
Where tears were gathered from a warrior's face,
His maiden faithless, tired of feuds afar.
You think there's no such thing as silence?
Then climb Craigshannoch's peak.

Sadly, we have confirmed the passing of some members, but family members have shared great stories. Jim Anderson of Ellon passed his degree, then becoming a lecturer at the University, studied the geology of Bennachie. What a great way to justify being on the hill!

And lastly, Charles Gill reported that he and his brothers were originally signed up as life members some time in the early 70s by their grandfather, Dr James Gill, who claimed to have come up with the name Bailies of Bennachie. He added that "none of us are local now, but climbing to the Mither Tap is an absolute requirement whenever we visit the area." This was echoed by many of the members when contacting us, so lovely to know that feeling is shared by us all.

Keep the stories coming and enjoy being a Bailie of Bennachie!

Stella Gauld (L) Karen Noble (R).



52nd Annual General Meeting

Members only are warmly invited to attend the fifty-first Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Bailies of Bennachie, at 19:30 on Thursday 20th March 2025, to be held at the Garioch Heritage Centre, Loco Works Road, Inverurie, AB51 4FY.

The AGM will also have a TEAMS link to allow for remote access for those members outside the local area or prevented from physically attending. This link will be emailed to you on the receipt of a request mailed to info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk

An open forum will take place after the AGM. Apologies and questions in advance can be sent to Bailies of Bennachie, Garioch Heritage Centre, Loco Works Road, Inverurie, AB51 4FY, or email: info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk

Existing Trustees:

- David Bale
- Lorna Bell
- Alex Doig
- Alan Henderson (Treasurer)
- David Caney
- Graeme Ralph
- Willie Linklater (Secretary)
- Peter Stock (Chair)
- Allan Will (BLPG and Deputy Chair).



Become a Member.



Make a Donation.



The King's Award for Voluntary Service

The MBE for volunteer groups



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