

Groam House Museum Curatorial Annual Report for 2019: Exhibitions, Collections and Projects

This year has seen us launch two very successful temporary exhibitions:

- At the start of the year volunteers developed '*Found in the Ground*', which focussed on the great variety of prehistoric and historic items gathered from the fields around Rosemarkie, Fortrose and beyond. Archaeological field-walking, metal-detecting and gardening have given us hundreds of artefacts: fragments of Pictish sculpture, a gold ring, small enamelled medieval pendants, prehistoric arrowheads and a polished stone axe. Feedback has been extremely positive – we look forward to being able to involve others in future displays of local history and archaeology.
- Our summer exhibition was the work of Jo Clements, our George Bain Curator and freelance consultant. She researched and created '*Crafting the Celtic – the legacy of George Bain, 50 years on*'. This brought together the art of three exciting contemporary craftspeople with that of George Bain. It featured Lucy Hague (knitting designer), Anneliese Peebles Gonzalez (wood carver) and Thomas Keyes (artist). Their work has been inspired by George Bain's research and the interviews that were provided on headsets in the exhibition brought their approaches to their crafts to life. The numerous comments left in the notebook give an indication of the enjoyment that this display engendered.

To enable the display of one of George Bain's items in this exhibition – an intricately painted wooden bowl – the museum applied for a grant from the Association of Independent Museums. This paid for the conservation treatment of this beautiful piece, along with that of a leather-seated stool. A comparison of the before and after photographs reflects the expertise of the conservator, Will Murray – he has revitalised this wonderful object.

There has been much activity around the rest of the collections too.

- During 2019 the Board has been pleased to accept items for the collections from local people and to acquire items through the Treasure Trove process. They have included a photograph album associated with the Reddigan family who lived in Rosemarkie area in the 1940s-1980s, and the 17th century gold 'posy' ring (with the help of a grant from the National Fund for Acquisitions).
- Behind the scenes volunteers and our George Bain Curator work on Mondays and Thursdays to bring the collection management up-to-date. When we started this project in 2017 there was a back-log of over 3,000 items in the local history and George Bain collections that had not been catalogued. In some instances they hadn't even been officially registered as belonging to the Museum's collections. This project is approaching its final year, so that by 2021 our objects, photographs and archive papers will have been entered into the museum's database, photographed and appropriately stored. This will enable us to take the next steps of sharing the collection via the web and with new displays both here and further afield.
- Volunteers have also been working on the associated information that is held by the museum on themes and objects related to the collections. A student from the UHI Archaeology course has been sorting out the archaeological material, as part of a

Highland-wide project run by ARCH for the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. And a couple of other volunteers have been sorting through the research papers gathered by our former curator, Susan Seright, related to items in the local history collection. There's an amazing wealth of data there which we'd like to share more widely through the website during the next couple of years.

From a broader perspective, we are grateful to Alison Boyle of the Highland Museum of Childhood at Strathpeffer (our museum mentor) and Lorna Cruickshank of HighLife Highland (our independent museums adviser) for their input and support over the year. They've helped the museum complete the revision of its environmental policy and will be asked to advise on the revisions of policies and plans for accessibility and collections development to ensure that we continue to fulfil Accreditation standards.

We're also pleased to have become more involved in HighLife Highland's project to re-energise the Highland Pictish Trail, from north Sutherland, round the coast, to Inverness. And we're looking to re-establish closer links with the Tarbat Discovery Centre at Portmahomack as part of this scheme.

And finally, after months of preparation, Groam House Museum was delighted to hear of the award of a major grant from Museums Galleries Scotland and Creative Scotland. *Sharing the Creativity of Celtic Art through the George Bain Collection* aims to digitise items that have been inspired by Celtic art and share them on the web. It will involve volunteers and others in creating interactive media - via dance sessions, animation workshops and digital training, all influenced by craftspeople and artists. It is a very exciting step forward for the museum, enabling us to employ a Project Officer from January 2020 for 3 days a week, until spring 2021 to ensure successful outcomes.

Jill Harden