

# Annual Report

Year ending September 2021



# Objects

Founded in 1752, Belfast Charitable Society is the city's oldest known charity which was incorporated in 1774 by an Act of Parliament of Ireland. In 1996, to ensure that the Society was "able to serve the present day and likely future needs of the community", a new Act of Parliament, 'Belfast Charitable Society Act', was passed. It sets out the objects, powers, constitution and management of the Society. The Objects of the Society as stated in the Act are:

- (a) To pursue all or any charitable activities which advance the interests or are for the benefit of persons appearing to the Society to be disadvantaged, primarily in Northern Ireland, including the care of the elderly, the relief of poverty, homelessness, distress, infirmity and sickness and providing for the educational and other needs of such persons; and*
- (b) To participate in and encourage all forms of co-operation among appropriate parties which are calculated to achieve any of the objects mentioned in paragraph (a) above.*



Lord Mayor of Belfast with residents from Clifton House at the Benn Dinner December 2021



Social Supermarket in North Belfast



Launch of Mary Ann McCracken Foundation with David Olusoga

**Front Cover:** Lord Mayor of Belfast at 250th Anniversary of the laying of Clifton House foundation stone, August 2021

# BELFAST CHARITABLE SOCIETY

(Established 1752, Incorporated 1774)

## President

Sir Ronald Weatherup

## Board Members

Mr David Watters (Chair)

Mr William Osborne (Hon Treasurer)

Mr Alan Money Penny

(appointed Hon Secretary Jan 2021)

Mr Ian Elliott (appointed Jan 2021)

Mr Colin Graham

Ms Diane Graham

Mr Nicholas Harkness

Mr Matthew Higgins

Mrs Norma Sinte

## CLIFTON HOUSE CENTRE LTD

(Incorporated 2010)

### Directors

Mr Colin Graham (Chair)

Mr Philip Hall

Mr Matthew Higgins

Mr Erskine Holmes

Mr William Osborne

## MARY ANN MCCrackEN FOUNDATION

(Incorporated 2019)

### Directors

Mrs Norma Sinte (Chair)

Mr Les Allamby

Ms Angila Chada

Mr Colin Graham

Ms Paula Reynolds (Company Secretary)

Ms Diane Graham

Dr Margaret Ward

Mr David Watters

## MANAGEMENT TEAM

Chief Executive Officer - Ms Paula Reynolds

## Chair's Report

In August 2021, we were privileged to mark the 250th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone of Clifton House. This served as an important reminder that the building and organisation have been at the forefront of the development and delivery of philanthropy in Belfast and beyond for generations.

The organisation has sought to address disadvantage since 1752 through rebellions, financial hardships and pandemics. The latter, COVID-19, continued to shape the delivery of our work in this reporting period but as always the Society has responded well within a changing environment while keeping an eye to its longer term goals and sustainability.

In terms of the physical building, the Society with the support of the Heritage Recovery Fund Northern Ireland (Department of Communities), completed a revamp of the internal central block; ensuring its maintenance and creating an opportunity to display our history in new ways. I was delighted that we used this opportunity to present the names of 1,070 children from **the** mid-1800s who had called the poorhouse 'home', and even more affected by the poignancy of sharing the names of over 650 people who had died in the poorhouse but had not been given headstones or been registered elsewhere. I was also pleased by the introduction of new augmented reality technology which immerses visitors in our stories and in those inaccessible areas of the building, for example by virtually opening up the basement as a cotton spinning room created by Joy and McCabe to skill up women and children from the late 1770's.

We cautiously welcomed others back into Clifton House (working within government guidelines) to visit, hire event space and as new tenants. In recognising the importance of the building in Belfast's philanthropic journey we encouraged other funders to operate from here, securing as tenants the Halifax Foundation for NI and the newly established James Kane Foundation – Society staff are also instrumental in the delivery of services to this new entity. Our role in the development of the Funders Forum for NI drew to a close but our influence was substantial with our CEO's spell as chair culminating in a conference which examined how funders can help a post pandemic community and voluntary sector and encourage positive climate change for the good of wider society.

We continued to provide some services online. These included our popular lecture series with Dr Éamon Phoenix, which this year



included talks relating to the centenary of Northern Ireland. The online medium enabled us to draw a huge audience (over 400 people) to hear Professor David Olusoga talk about the interwoven complexities and complications of Philanthropy and Slavery. The event was organised for the Society's AGM in January 2021 to officially launch its Mary Ann McCracken Foundation.

The Foundation's work began to gather momentum in the year, raising Mary Ann's profile through a series of events with other interested parties in a month long celebration of her 250th anniversary, and invigorating her legacy by exploring issues such as Modern Day Slavery and women's role in trade unionism here.

Our direct philanthropic work continued with support for families in crisis, new communities and in response to urgent need. Our joint five year loans programme came to a close but its impact on resourcing grassroots work that addresses social and economic disadvantage has carried on across Northern Ireland.

Our work to catalyse regeneration using heritage assets within the local area continued. Our robust relationships with a range of local stakeholders enabled this to succeed. We played host to meetings with Minister Mallon and numerous government and statutory sector officials to explore large scale physical and social deprivation change. This year marked the end of the first phase of this work and the introduction of a visioning phase that allows all to consider its sustainability.

In light of this work, the Society utilised its resources to affect real change while securing its own asset base. We purchased property with the intention of enhancing the North Belfast City Centre gateway and to provide for those struggling with homelessness. We invested time, skill and money in assessing the viability of the redevelopment of a significant Northern Ireland landmark that could substantially change the outlook of our local area.

As I summarise the year's highlights in this short report, I am as ever proud of our achievements. I am indebted to my President, Board, Committees, staff and volunteers and to all of our partners and funders who collectively enable so much to happen.

I commend to you this report for the year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "David Watson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

# Treasurer's and CEO's Report - Finances, Activities and Impact of Belfast Charitable Society

The Society's first strategic aim is to lead and influence how philanthropy is delivered and developed in Belfast and beyond.

## Grants

£130,000 was awarded to address disadvantage and this created leverage of almost £4 for each £1 Belfast Charitable Society (BCS) donated in the following themes:

*Empowering education in North Belfast* - within this theme the Society gave assistance for direct 'early intervention' work with families in crisis: support for two part-time workers who delivered one-to-one assistance to 81 families (including 157 children) and linked those families to over 65 public, community and voluntary sector organisations' services. Families received behavioural support for children, 82 of whom have an ASD or ADHD diagnosis – an additional challenge to ensure focus on how these children adapt to the world around them. BCS also provided £8,000 for vouchers which were distributed to 95 families (including 212 children) for food and essential utilities.

The Society supported an area wide choir, giving young people access to alternative learning environments, collaborations and a fun way to develop skills in music. Engagement for many was life changing - enabling celebration and exploration of other's cultures and performing at prestigious events.

The Society financed the establishment of a North Belfast social supermarket to support families living in systemic poverty to develop skills, knowledge and confidence to address this challenge. As a community food club, 20 local families get access to food, baby and personal care products at a reduced cost for a 12-week period and a range of services to help to manage budgets, build personal and family capacity while also reducing societal food waste.



## Grants

Under its second theme: *Enabling new communities to integrate into the local populations*, the Society supported the Horn of Africa's People Aid NI's One Child, One Device project, a COVID-19 response project targeted at digital poverty among young people from ethnic minority backgrounds. 180 young people were provided with broadband and 120 laptops.



Its third theme, *Reducing Isolation of Older People* further funding was allocated to AgeNI's Check-In and Chat service enabling vital support to older people in the Belfast area. A pool of 50 community volunteers was recruited and, in the year, received 83 referrals and made 459 calls to older people who, due to ongoing social distancing restrictions, were cut off from families, friends and the connections they enjoyed before the pandemic.



**Funders Forum**  
for Northern Ireland

In working to Promote Philanthropy the Society facilitated the development of the Funders Forum for Northern Ireland and chaired the transformation of this network of independent and semi-independent funders. It was an extremely busy time with numerous meetings, research, website development and a conference. The latter was a ground breaking look at how funders need to consider their role within civic society and their influence on the shape of the sector which supports those most in need and how they can assist in effecting climate change.

Also under the theme of promoting philanthropy, Clifton House took on the operational responsibility of the James Kane Foundation. The sole charitable purpose of the Foundation is in the advancement of education via grant-making, education and training.

**JK**  
The James Kane Foundation

# Using Heritage to Catalyse Regeneration



The Society chairs the *North Belfast Heritage Cluster*, a network of 14 organisations with important heritage assets and associated social histories, which have influenced the development of this part of Belfast for generations.

The Cluster's main project, *Great Place North Belfast*, is led and part funded by the Society and managed through a strategic partnership with Ulster University. The project's overarching aim is to address disadvantage and catalyse regeneration in the local area using the individual and collective heritage assets. The project receives substantial funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

This year saw the completion of the first three year phase of the project, the outputs of which are presented below with some detail on the wider strategic work delivered. In the year the project also received a further year's funding to continue its work and to help vision and look to the future for this very significant partnership.

## Outputs



**37 Cluster member meetings hosted providing a shared decision-making platform for Cluster members to come together, input their ideas, review the project finances and work through Cluster projects in a collaborative way.**



**All Cluster members benefited from the completion of an organisational health check, baseline survey and bespoke action plan to determine the level of support required to build internal capacity.**



**27 seed fund grants with a combined value totalling £17,100 were invested across Cluster members to support projects linked to digital marketing, event hosting, asset management, built asset restoration and heritage development.**

# Using Heritage to Catalyse Regeneration

## Outputs



**Nine Outline Business Cases completed to allow Cluster members to review their financial position and inform applications for new revenue and capital investment; and prompted vertical engagement within each member organisation.**



**A Great Place North Belfast website (<https://greatplacenorthbelfast.com/>), Twitter account and Facebook profile were set up to share the works of the Cluster and its supported projects. Between them they share 1,871 followers as of September 2021.**



**The Cluster organised major events including a widely publicised launch and the ‘Our Heritage Our Future’ learning event in February 2020 which was attended by 55 people including members, their trustees and representatives from government departments, statutory agencies and Belfast City Council.**



**The Cluster organised formal high-level workshops with the Minister for Infrastructure (2), the North Belfast Area working group (2), the Lord Mayor (1) and a several further conversations with individual elected representatives from all the Northern Ireland political parties.**



**And at least 29 strategic engagements raising the profile of the Cluster, leveraging external expertise and developing working relationships with key partners, including QUB, PRONI (Public Records Office Northern Ireland) and the Belfast Junctions Working Group which involves representation from the Department for Infrastructure and the Department for Communities, the Belfast City Council.**



**#GreatPlaceNorthBelfast**

# Using Heritage to Catalyse Regeneration - Strategic Projects

**Urban Design** – established to produce a set of guidelines for use by owners/developers/planners to inform development opportunities in Clifton Street, this project has developed into a detailed consideration of the urban fabric of the local area. Under the Society’s guidance, the Cluster commissioned expert advice to design an option for the road and street layout to suit the hierarchy of pedestrian, cyclist and public transport in a way that is sympathetic to this place - this has been presented to [the Minister for Infrastructure](#).

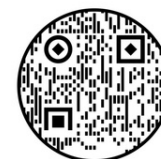


**Archive Development** - working with the member organisations to develop and scale their archival capacities. Based on best practice this work enables Cluster members to manage their archive resources, make them accessible to others and help sustain the history of each organisation.

**Telling Our Stories** - utilising the stories of the Cluster’s people, buildings and artefacts to inform a range of campaigns to build up the accessibility of archives and histories. These campaigns have been themed around ‘Reflections and Connections’, ‘Great Women of North Belfast’ and ‘Celebrating Diversity’. There have also been successful collaborations with NI Screen and PRONI.



**North Belfast Heritage Trail** - QR codes have been placed outside each Cluster building which provide access to the website and hence the unique stories and history of the building and organisations in picture and audio form. A brochure and map of the Trail were produced and made available for European Heritage Open Days.



**North Belfast Festival** - planning and organisation for the Look North festival, "a high-quality three day multi-arts festival" in February 2022 to celebrate the rich heritage, literary and arts and talent of North Belfast.



# Barbour Fund Grants

The Society continued to manage funds on behalf of others, particularly the Barbour Fund. As the Fund drew to a close in the period, the Society chose to allocate its own resources to extend the Fund for a further year. The infographic below presents what the original six year programme achieved.

## Addressing Disadvantage

### Training Courses

4 new training courses with 55 participants in tourism, security, hospitality, and warehousing. 32 trainees immediately secured jobs on completion of courses.

### Bursaries

10 bursaries awarded to students in health and social care courses. 2 bursaries awarded to students in Psychology and Medicine at QUB.

### Youth and Skills Development

At least 120 students outside of mainstream education received resources and opportunities to help gain qualifications in vocational and educational courses.

## Addressing Isolation

### Older People Living Independently

Over 1,000 older people living independently benefited from activities including outings, crafts, talks and tours.

### Older People Helping Others

265 older people volunteered to help others of their age in tidy ups, preservation works, Christmas wrappings and befriending.

### Older People in Care Settings

240 older people in Residential and Nursing Homes benefited from environmental improvements and socially from activities, eg music, gardening and art.

## COVID-19 Response

### Family Support

As a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, 13 families were provided with school uniforms and support to prepare for a return to school.

### Children with Learning Difficulties

12 families were supported with sensory boxes to help children with emotional regulation and challenging behaviour.



## Building Better Futures Fund: Loans

In working to address widespread social and economic disadvantage the Society had partnered with Community Finance Ireland and the Building Change Trust to enable community and voluntary sector groups to avail of social finance (loans) and to encourage them to think about financing projects in a different way.

This year saw the completion of that loan programme, the Building Better Futures Fund (BBFF), which since its inception in January 2017 had approved £1.34 million across 71 projects. The total value of drawdown was £1.17 million across 62 projects. The Society redeemed its total contribution of £410,000 in April 2021, nine months earlier than planned, due to the impact of the pandemic and the associated government grants and availability of loans.

The geographic and sectoral spread of the BBFF loan disbursement was excellent. Loans were accessed by community organisations providing vital services and facilities in urban and rural areas including Belfast and L'Derry, rural County Tyrone, County Down and County Armagh. The loans supported rural village regeneration groups, sports clubs, social enterprises and sectoral providers of counselling, childcare, community transport and family support.

All projects met economic and social need. The BBFF support also helped borrowers to fill short term funding gaps so that vital services could be preserved, and it enabled organisations to redevelop and improve existing facilities thereby providing better quality services in their local communities.



## Finances, Activities and Impact of Clifton House Centre Limited

The Society's subsidiary, the social enterprise Clifton House Centre Limited, delivers on the second strategic aim of the organisation: to preserve and promote the heritage of the Society; to inform, educate and entertain; and to profile the work of the Society thereby raising awareness of its philanthropic past and the work it does to address disadvantage today.

COVID-19 continued to disrupt trading activity. Restrictions in terms of social distancing created reluctance to meet in person and led to a reduction in room hire income and tour numbers. The social enterprise secured essential funds enabling a revamp of the Centre (as noted in the Chair's Report and as seen in photographs below) and enabled detailed market analysis and the creation of an augmented reality tour. This tour allows visitors to 'see into the past' and what daily life looked like in the poorhouse. It is one of the first of its kind for heritage tourism in NI, and has generated significant interest and been widely acclaimed within the heritage sector.

The funding also enabled international audience development through our successful social media activity, eg USA visitors increased by 20% and Canadian by 30%. The activity also allowed our existing audiences to access our offerings online.

The grant also enabled the creation of additional office space and saw a new tenant, Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland, base themselves in the building, adding to our aim of making Clifton House the 'Home of Philanthropy' in Northern Ireland.



*“The Experience the Poor House Augmented Reality Tour was fascinating and a really innovative way of using the site and modern technology. You could look through doors and around corners to see different areas as they would have been in the past. This was a really interesting way to not only talk about but SHOW the past to visitors.”*

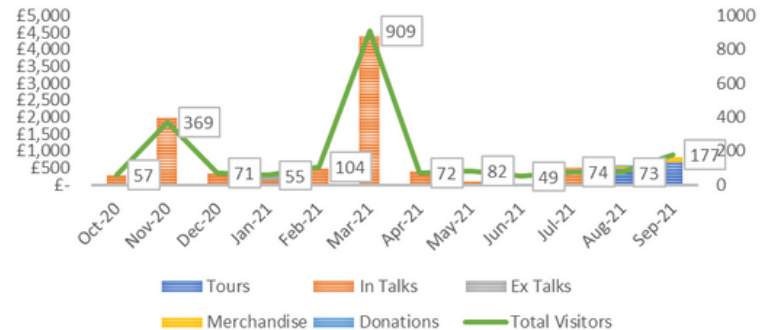
**Bridget W. (Tripadvisor)**



## Clifton House Heritage Centre Visitors and Income Breakdown

- 2,125 visitors attended talks and tours - a monthly average of 174; an increase of 7% compared to last year. Understandably given the restrictions associated with the pandemic the breakdown was 268 tour visitors compared to 1,857 online talk attendees.
- The combined income generated by the tours, talks, merchandise and donations was £10,110; a 21% increase from last year.
- The breakdown of this income was as follows: tours - 11%; talks - 86.5%; merchandise - 2%; and remaining from donations.
- The peak month for visitors and income was March 2021.
- 857 visitor postcodes were collected and geocoded. Exactly as last year, 17% (nearly a fifth) of visitors were from the Belfast South parliamentary constituency which represented the highest geographic visitor share. The next and third highest visitor share were Belfast North (10% and 86 visitors) and North Antrim (9% and 78 visitors). These findings demonstrate that our heritage product is connecting well with local users and audiences again.
- In contrast, 9% of the postcodes were from outside the UK whilst 6% were from other parts of the UK which also represents a growth in the number of people engaging with our heritage offering from outside Northern Ireland. A shift to online delivery has clearly provided scope to widen the audience base and connect with heritage interests living overseas or other parts of the UK.

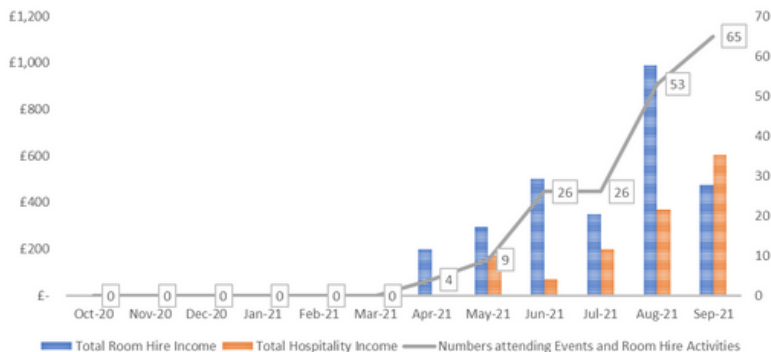
**BREAKDOWN OF INCOME VS VISITORS  
2020/2021**



## Clifton Conference and Event Attendance through Room Hire Activities

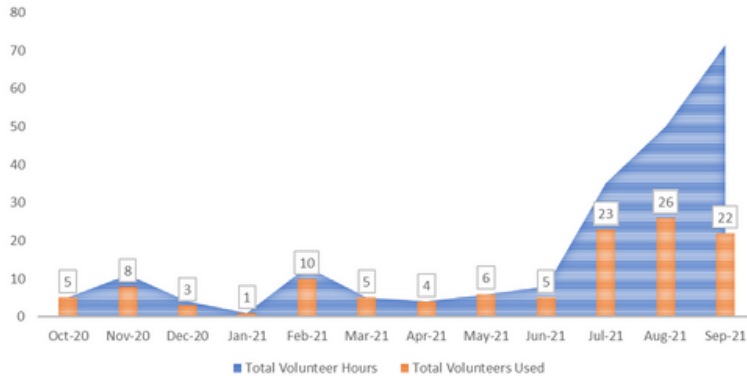
- The Centre welcomed a total of 183 users attending various conferences and events or availing of its room hire facilities. In the previous reporting period October 2019 to September 2020 the figure recorded was 1,268.
- The highest number of users in one month was 65. This was in September 2021. The lowest was zero - this was recorded every month from October 2020 to March 2021, demonstrating the full impact of the restrictions as Clifton House was unable to safely open its facilities for outside users.
- Room hire income for the reporting period was £2,810 with hospitality income of £1,415. These figures were down on last year but can again be explained by the challenges of facilitating large indoor gatherings during the pandemic.
- With restrictions easing and public confidence growing, the graph shows how there has been a rising trend of event attendees and income in the final reporting quarter.

EVENT ATTENDEES/INCOME OCT 2020 - SEP 2021



# Clifton House Heritage Centre Visitors and Income Breakdown

VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITY OCT 2020 - SEP 2021

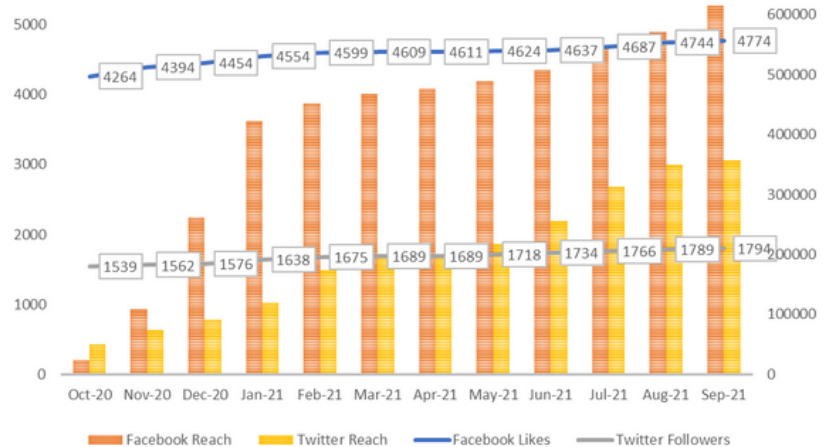


## Volunteering Capacity

- The average number of volunteers providing their time per month was ten, with the highest number of 26 recorded in August 2021.
- This volunteering activity is equivalent to a combined total of 213.5 voluntary support hours and a voluntary input value of £2,135 from October 2020 to September 2021. This was calculated using the National Lottery Heritage Fund’s lowest proxy rate of £10 per hour.

## Social Media

- The number of Twitter followers increased by 16.6% from 1,539 to 1,794.
- The Facebook reach increased from 22,661 to 614,820 whilst the Twitter reach increased from 50,300 to 356,757 over the same period.



## Finances, Activities and Impact of the Mary Ann McCracken Foundation



The Society's third aim is to develop the Mary Ann McCracken Foundation. The Foundation aims to advance the education of the public about her life and works and to work in the spirit of her legacy. It receives a grant of £5,000 from Belfast Charitable Society and generates income from talks, tours and events.

Originally incorporated in June 2019, the Foundation was formally launched in January 2021. The BAFTA award winning broadcaster and historian Professor David Olusoga spoke on the 'Legacies of Slavery' to over 400 attendees. The talk provided context for Mary Ann's abolitionist activities and examined the continued impact of slavery and racism today. The event helped to feed into the development of talks and the new tour script at Clifton House. The Foundation met with Invisible Traffick, No More Traffick and Hope for Justice charities which are tackling issues around modern slavery and human trafficking.

Following the Foundation's first AGM, a panel discussion on 'Women and the Writing of History' was held. Contributions from Dr Margaret Ward and the Archive and Heritage Co-ordinator focused on how women, including Mary Ann McCracken, have been written out of the past. Attendees were encouraged to think critically about how narratives are formed and altered over time. The discussions formed the basis for a new talk delivered as part of 'Mary Ann McCracken 250'.

## Finances, Activities and Impact of the Mary Ann McCracken Foundation

The Foundation had postponed 'Mary Ann McCracken 250' due to COVID-19 in 2020. Instead the commemorations took place in June and July 2021 with a series of events developed in partnership with key stakeholders (Linen Hall Library, National Museums Northern Ireland, Francis Hutcheson Institute and Reclaim the Enlightenment).

The key event was 'A Tale of Two Women', delivered on 8 July 2021, by Baroness May Blood, 'a modern day Mary Ann'. Baroness Blood spoke of her experience as a woman in the Trade Union movement, and her lifelong fight for the needs and rights of people in Northern Ireland and beyond.

During the reporting period the 'Mary Ann McCracken's Belfast Map' was published, featuring sites in Belfast with strong links to Mary Ann and her family. It formed the basis of a walking tour that starts at Clifton House and follows the footsteps of Mary Ann - exploring her life, family and philanthropic activities. The walking tour was launched on her birthday. Public tours run every Friday from July to October.

The Foundation provided bursaries to support two PhD researchers at Ulster University who researched areas that align to the interests of Mary Ann in the modern day context. One seeks to understand how smart cities transition from exclusive to inclusive environments at a socio-economic level through the sharing of big data; and the other considers how clay therapy can help improve women's body image and wellbeing.

The Foundation engaged with a number of individuals researching Mary Ann's life including two playwrights, Billie Traynor and Claire McMahon, and the actor/director Paul Oakley Stovall. Paul is interested in how Mary Ann's story intertwined with the abolitionist Fredrick Douglass's time in Ireland.



## Thanks

Belfast Charitable Society and its subsidiaries, Clifton House Centre and Mary Ann McCracken Foundation, would like to take the opportunity to thank its members, clients, volunteers and partners and all of those who have supported its work in addressing disadvantage including:

**174 Trust**

**Age NI**

**Ashton Community Trust**

**Association of Charitable  
Foundations**

**Barbour Family**

**BBC Children In Need**

**Belfast City Council**

**Belfast Hospital School**

**Belfast Junior Chamber of Trade**

**Belfast Metropolitan College**

**Belfast Orange Hall**

**Carnegie Library Oldpark**

**Cathryn McWilliams**

**Community Finance Ireland**

**Consarc Design Group**

**Department of Foreign Affairs,  
Dublin**

**Dr Eamon Phoenix**

**Dr Margaret Ward**

**Eric Barfoot**

**Feile an Phobail**

**Francis Hutcheson Institute**

**Fredrick Street Meeting Place**

**Great Place North Belfast**

**Halifax Foundation for Northern  
Ireland**

**Indian Community Centre**

**Irish Academic Press**

**LFT**

**Linen Hall Library**

**Lord Mayor of Belfast**

**Milbern Trust**

**National Lottery Community Fund**

**National Lottery Heritage Fund**

**National Museums Northern Ireland**

**Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund  
for Charities**

**Northern Ireland Environment Link**

**Northern Ireland Institute of Fundraising**

**Northern Ireland Water**

**North Belfast Working Men's Club**

**Public Records Office**

**Queen's University Belfast**

**Radius Housing**

**Reclaim the Enlightenment**

**Redeemer Central**

**St Anne's Cathedral**

**St Malachy's College**

**St Patrick's Boys School, Jesuit Order**

**St Patrick's Church, Donegall Street**

**Ulster University**

**Unitorah Trust (Old Annesley St Synagogue)**



Clifton House is home to our archive, heritage and conference centre, residential home and sheltered accommodation. The Centre is available for hire for a variety of events , including meetings, conferences and receptions. Public and private group tours of Clifton House and Clifton Street Graveyard are offered throughout the year.



For more information on our services, please visit our Website, Facebook or Twitter or contact us on 028 9099 7022

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