



The  
**FIRST  
GREAT  
CHARITY**  
OF THIS TOWN

BELFAST CHARITABLE SOCIETY AND  
ITS ROLE IN THE DEVELOPING CITY



Edited by Olwen Purdie

# ANNUAL REPORT

Ending September 2022





Benn Dinner 2021



Springboard Opportunities



Women's Role in Society: The Experience in Afghanistan

## OBJECTS

Founded in 1752, Belfast Charitable Society is the city's oldest known charity which was incorporated in 1774 by an Act of the 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.

# Belfast Charitable Society

(Established 1752, Incorporated 1774)

## President

Sir Ronald Weatherup

## Board Members

Mr David Watters (Chair)

Mr Alan Money Penny (Hon Secretary)

Mr William Osborne (Hon Treasurer)

Prof Alastair Adair (appointed Jan 2022)

Mrs Siobhan Brown (appointed Jan 2022)

Mr Ian Elliott

Mr Colin Graham

Mr Nicholas Harkness

Mr Matthew Higgins

Mrs Norma Sinte

## Clifton House Centre Ltd

(Incorporated 2012)

### 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

Mr David Watters

Dr Margaret Ward

## Management

Ms Paula Reynolds - Chief Executive

## Chair's Report: Then & Now - 1752 - 2022

I continue to be honoured and humbled to be the Chair of the Belfast Charitable Society. Each year of my tenure seems to welcome another astonishing milestone in the organisation's life – and this year, August 2022, saw its 270th anniversary.

We marked this momentous achievement by producing 'The First Great Charity Of This Town' – a volume of essays, that take as their focus the work of our Society, the global connections that influenced its thinking and the societal issues it sought to address; while also providing valuable insights into the wider social, economic and political life of nineteenth-century Belfast of which the Society became such an iconic part.

The essays remind us that so much has changed in 270 years, yet so much has remained the same. 270 years ago, provision of welfare was limited to say the least and it was in this context that our original organisation was created. Today, the provision of welfare is a fundamental tenet of our daily life but provision falls short for many. Certain geographical areas and groups continue to remain vulnerable and more susceptible to poverty and disadvantage. The Society has therefore had to change what it does and how it works to continue to address similar needs.

The Society's primary concern in 1752 was destitution and sickness. Even before the Poorhouse was built we were proactive in identifying and addressing the social and economic needs of the poor across main areas of care: diet, health, education and 'industry'.

Our work was characterised by innovation, delivering activities such as: running lotteries to fundraise; spearheading comprehensive education and training; developing community health provision; developing physical assets eg the building, water infrastructure, the cemetery; and utilising our assets to tell others about disadvantage eg using the Boardroom to entertain and appeal to the more wealthy of Belfast society.



David Watters  
Chair

Today, 270 years on, both the primary focus on disadvantage and innovation exists but in different ways. I am proud to present this report that illustrates this in our most recent operational year.

This report reviews how we encourage and influence philanthropy and fundraising in 2022 working with others to generate more resources and deliver them effectively. It highlights our contribution to improving access to education and breaking down barriers for those outside of the normal pathways to it, including our support for Northern Ireland's new communities who strive to settle and contribute to life here. It details how the Society uses its assets – time, treasure and talent – to catalyse regeneration in areas blighted by decay and deprivation; and the report also demonstrates how we continue our tradition of telling our stories and reminding those who are better off about the needs of the less fortunate.

All of this work is developed and delivered by the Society and its two subsidiaries, Clifton House Centre and the Mary Ann McCracken Foundation, and through an array of trusted partnerships and collaborative ventures.

As I summarise the year's highlights in this short report I am as ever delighted with our achievements. I am indebted to the 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, appearing to read "David Waters". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

*"The Society that was founded centuries ago to address disadvantage and to assert a responsible civic conscience continues to do so with authority and determination to this day".*

Professor Mary McAleese, Former President of Ireland, at launch of

'The First Great Charity of this Town.'

# Finances, activities, and impact of Belfast Charitable Society and its subsidiaries

## *Encouraging and Influencing Philanthropy*

The Society continues to **encourage and influence philanthropy** in its 270th year. It works with others to generate resources to be directed towards addressing disadvantage – these collaborations promote effective delivery and innovation.

In this year a total of £150,000 was allocated in direct BCS grants. The next few pages of this report will summarise these projects, outputs, and impacts they achieved; it is of note that these grants immediately leveraged a further £450,000.

Alongside the Society’s own grants, it delivered support through a series of managed funds. This year saw:

- Barbour Fund year 6 completed and year 7 funds allocated. Year 6 supported: a range of students at Belfast MET in Health and Social Care, QUB Biosciences degree, and the Hospital School GSCE courses; families with low incomes and older women to provide food for their homes through social supermarkets; and a physical safe space for teenagers from different backgrounds to come together to enjoy health and wellbeing activities – ‘Building Bridges’.
- The new Hunter Smyth Fund began with a grant to create space for those with dementia and their carers to avail of within the Old Library Trust in L’Derry. This project was also funded by the Society’s Thomas Howard Fund as it addressed the needs of older people.
- The delivery of The James Kane Foundation involving both the provision of corporate services and the delivery of at least £170,000 worth of grants to improve education, enhance employability and encourage economic opportunity.



Barbour Fund Project



The Society provided support to the Funders Forum for Northern Ireland to ensure the progression of policy development and operational work for this group of independent grant makers from across Northern Ireland. Best practice was shared and trusted partnerships were built upon which ultimately led to joint funding opportunities. The collective strength of the Forum enabled access to the strategic decision makers such as the Department for Communities, the Joint Forum and UK wide funders to affect change, particularly in relation to funding for the cost-of-living crisis.

In encouraging philanthropy, work was completed with some high-net-worth families and organisations to develop plans for their giving.

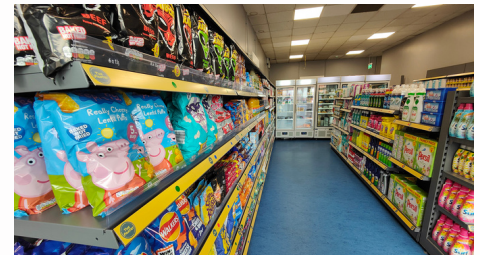
The Society, and its subsidiaries, have generated income through a series of grants in the past year including:

- Department for Communities, Covid Recovery Employment and Skills Initiative to support the work of Clifton House Centre and create a much-needed resource to take forward the work of the Mary Ann McCracken Foundation, for a three-year period.
- Department for Foreign Affairs support for the autumn/spring talks that focus on reconciliation.
- National Lottery Heritage Fund, a further one-year support to enable ongoing work with local heritage asset owners (more detail later in the report).



Building Bridges

**Funders Forum**  
for Northern Ireland



Social Supermarket



North Belfast Creative Digital  
Technology Hub



ANAKA Women's Collective



Cost of Living Crisis

### *Supporting Education and Skills*

The Society, since inception, has recognised the importance of **education and skills for all**, particularly for those who seek to increase income generating opportunities and make positive life changes. In endeavouring to enable and empower others to attain more skills and qualifications the Society has, in this year, supported:

- The North Belfast Digital Technology Hub - a first for Northern Ireland and available to all post primary schools in this area. The hub is equipped with the latest technology and facilities to deliver digital and collaborative skills needed for the creative industries now, and in the future, and creates model classrooms that deliver the curriculum in new ways.
- ANAKA Women's Project - a collective of women with real life experience of the asylum system. Our support provides for two education workers who help newly arrived refugee women and their children; teach English; and identify where there are gaps in provision for their community e.g English language lessons for 16-25 year olds.
- Early Intervention Services - works across North Belfast helping with all aspects of family life including school advocacy, benefit advice, parenting skills and access to other services. Almost 300 individuals were supported in the year: 85 families benefitted from one-to-one support, building skills and solutions that enable families to ensure children are educated.

- North Belfast post-primary school bursaries - 86 students across the area availed of support to continue with education. 31 were assisted financially to enable them to attend university with a further 20 accessing information on future choices; others were supported to remain in school with additional support for mental health issues and clothing.
- Building Leadership - working with Common Purpose, 70 young people / potential leaders across Northern Ireland participated in a course that provided access and learning to the different sectors that make up our economy.
- Horn of Africa People Aid laptops - ongoing support for the provision of digital devices to help young people and their families access education and engage with the essential services provided for their community.
- Springboard Opportunities - matched with the Barbour Fund – support was provided for young people aged 18-24 from North and West Belfast, who are not in education, employment, or training. They received help to develop new skills, get qualifications and work experience that will support them into employment and help them realise their full potential.



HAPANI



Mary Ann McCracken Post  
Primary Bursaries



Springboard Training



Our Volunteers



Augmented Reality Tour



Dr Eamon Phoenix

## *Telling Our Story*

Throughout its 270-year lifespan the Society has played a significant role in the development of Belfast and beyond, shaping history and championing the causes of the disadvantaged. This was undertaken by the organisation and by the many influential individuals who made up its ranks.

Today the onus is on the Society to **tell the story** of this history, these people and their contributions and to share our heritage, while maintaining and preserving the past and ensuring important legacy work is carried on. Most of this work is delivered through the activities of its subsidiaries, as summarised below.

**Clifton House Centre Limited** – our social enterprise informs and educates, raising awareness about our history and the importance of philanthropy. The Centre is also responsible for the preservation of the Society’s archive and historic resources and generates income that ensures the ongoing operation of the social enterprise with any surplus donated back to the Society.

Achievements in the year were supported by our skilled staff and volunteers, and include:

- Twice weekly tours with seasonal versions at Christmas, Halloween and Easter - almost 1,000 attendees.
- A programme of talks including those hosted by our President and curated by Dr Éamon Phoenix - over 1,100 participants.

- The delivery of a comprehensive marketing and communications plan to make available an array of information about our history and current events that:
  - Attracted 5,200 Facebook followers (5% increase in the year) with 4,105 page visits to a reach of 161,618 people.
  - Attracted 2033 Twitter followers (an increase of 10%). During July 2022 – September 2022 alone, tweets reached 74,000 people, creating 10,566 profile visits.
  - Attracted 656 Instagram followers.
  - Produced articles and press releases that featured in local, regional, UK and Ireland-wide papers, radio and TV.
  - Produced social media campaigns, features across international and local platforms, ezines, blogs etc about our work appearing on Google, Visit Belfast, Discover NI and many more.
- The creation of a series of video/interviews about the Society, the cemetery and Mary Ann McCracken.
- Making archival materials accessible e.g transcription of the first admissions books, poorhouse burials pre-1831 registers, Poores Board donations, second Ladies Committee book – all informing and developing genealogy services.
- Protection and preservation of the archival records, materials and artefacts.
- The management of events for others through room hire (approx. 90 days) and the provision of serviced office accommodation for the Society and other independent funders.



Cemetery Tour



Archive Research



Logistics NI Freight Conference

The **Mary Ann McCracken Foundation** - established to celebrate the life and works of this remarkable woman and to continue her legacy today. Achievements in the year include:

- An event focused on the experience of women fleeing Afghanistan with input from Afghan refugees in the Republic of Ireland, London and Australia attracting c.130 attendees, raising £3,500 which was donated to the Qamar Foundation working in Afghanistan. ‘Calls to action’ were completed including supporting donations to Store House, gathering information from relevant organisations to establish needs of refugees and asylum seekers in NI.
- Work to promote existing English language provision..
- Developed projects and funding opportunity for an education project for a Migrants Women’s Collective group.
- Worked with Belfast City Council to inform its commission of Mary Ann statue from a historical perspective.
- Foundation Co-Ordinator post appointed in June 2022 funded by the Department for Communities CRESI fund.
- New website developed and socials established.
- 30 walking tours in period, raising awareness about Mary Ann and her work.
- In partnership with the Irish Association delivered an ‘Exploring the lives and legacies of Mary Ann McCracken and her biographer Molly McNeill’ event for International Women’s Day c.90 attendees room and zoom.
- Delivered a Look North Festival event ‘Mary Ann McCracken: A Life Through Poetry’, poets Ruth Carr and Raquel McKee c 50 attendees room and zoom.
- Prepared and delivered a lecture marking Mary Ann’s death, ‘The Writing of Mary Ann McCracken’s Story’.
- Successful registration of the Foundation with the Charity Commission for NI.



Inaugural Lecture



Mary Ann McCracken Tour



Launch of Look North! Festival



Archive Team

### *Utilising Our Assets*

As noted in the Chair's Report the Society, since inception, has **utilised and developed physical assets to address disadvantage**. This is no different today whether, as reported previously, using Clifton House to provide an income stream for the charity whilst meeting other social objectives or through its strategic work aimed at catalysing the regeneration of the local area.

In relation to the latter, the Society continued to chair the North Belfast Heritage Cluster, and managed a one-year project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund on the Cluster's behalf. Achievements include:

- Well attended monthly meetings and visioning sessions which informed a five year funding application.
- Regular meetings with the Departments for Communities and Infrastructure, Belfast City Council and other statutory agencies to inform the Cluster's proposal for improvements to urban design and road layout in the area and direct lobbying of Minister Mallon on this matter.
- Archive management work with all members; archive access work including social media campaigns: Understanding cultural identity through religious and cultural festivals, Great Women of North Belfast; Reconstructing Clifton Street; 6x6 - interviews and stories from within the Cluster.
- Partnered with other organisations to deliver the first Look North! North Belfast Festival - a weekend long programme of talks, tours and events focused on our heritage buildings and opportunities for regeneration.

- Promotion and development of a heritage trail.
- Allocation of £6,500 of seed funds which supported a ‘Peace Tree’ initiative, a horticulture project and digital capacity building.
- Ongoing members’ capacity building including the development of Outline Business Cases (OBC) to inform large scale capital building projects including one for the Society’s property on Clifton Street.
- Exploratory work with the Belfast City Council around the opportunities for the cemetery and the associated development of an OBC.
- Marketing and Communications work to attract 1,062 Facebook followers (12% new); 1253 Twitter followers (16% new); 91 Instagram followers; set up a TikTok page and in two months attained 106 followers and 391 likes; continued to develop the website content with items such as the 6x6 interviewers achieving 1,900 viewers.
- Evaluation and review work informed another successful Heritage Lottery application which hopes to see the commencement of the five-year project through to 2028.



St Malachys College at St Patrick's Church



Heritage and Regeneration Festival Event

## Thank You

Alan Parkinson  
Anaka Women's Collective  
Ashton Community Trust  
Association of Charitable Foundations  
Barbour and Coburn Family  
BBC Children In Need  
Belfast City Council  
Belfast Hospital School  
Belfast Junior Chamber of Trade  
Belfast Metropolitan College  
Belfast Orange Hall  
Carnegie Oldpark Library  
Common Purpose  
Consarc Design Group  
Department for Communities  
DfC Covid Recovery Employment and  
Skills Initiative Programme  
Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin  
DLD Trust (O'Neill Family)  
Dr Éamon Phoenix  
Dr Frank Costello

Dr Margaret Ward  
Dr Sinead McCoole  
Duncairn Arts Centre  
Eric Barfoot  
Estate of Mr Norman Caters  
Fredrick Street Meeting Place  
Funders Forum NI  
Halifax Foundation for  
Northern Ireland  
Horn of Africa People's Aid NI  
Hunter Smyth Fund  
Indian Community Centre  
Irish Academic Press  
Jim McDermott  
John Gray  
Keith Haines  
Linenhall Library  
Lord Mayor of Belfast  
Martin and Hamilton  
Milibern Trust  
Myrtle Hill  
National Lottery Community Fund

National Lottery Heritage Fund  
National Museums Northern Ireland  
North Belfast Area Learning Community  
Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund  
for Charities  
Northern Ireland Water  
North Belfast Workings Men's Club  
Olwen Purdue  
Professor Mary McAleese  
Public Records Office NI  
Queens University Belfast  
Radius Housing  
Reclaim the Enlightenment  
Redeemers Central  
Raj Darshna Foundation  
Springboard Opportunities  
St Malachy's College  
St Patrick's Boys School, Jesuit Order  
St Patrick's Church, Donegall Street  
Ulster University  
Victoria Homes Trust

..... And all of our members, dedicated volunteers, contributors to 'The First Great Charity of this Town' publication and those who visited Clifton House.



**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. 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,  
Twitter, Instagram or contact us  
on 028 9099 7022**



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