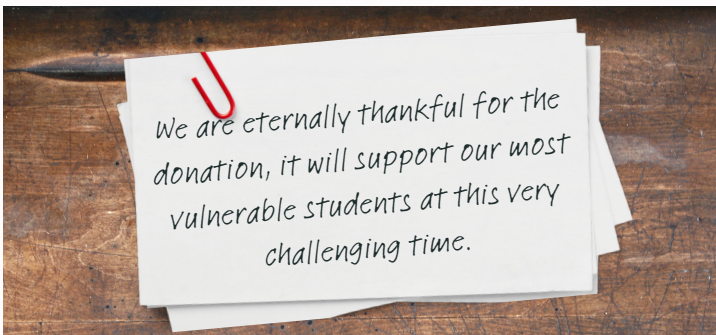
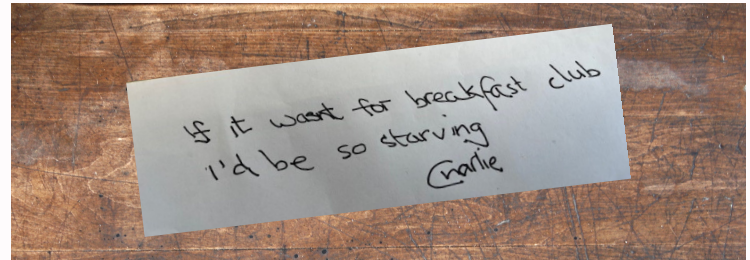


# Annual Report

Year ending September 2023



## 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.



North Belfast Creative Digital Hub



NI Hospice



Dundonald Women’s Institute  
on a tour of Clifton House

# Belfast Charitable Society

(Established 1752, Incorporated 1774)

## President

Sir Ronald Weatherup

## Board Members

Mr David Watters (Chair)

Mr Ian Elliott (Hon Treasurer- deceased Dec 2023)

Mr Alan Moneypenny (Hon Secretary)

Prof Alastair Adair

Mrs Siobhan Brown

Mr Colin Graham

Mr Nicholas Harkness (resigned May 2023)

Mr Matthew Higgins

Mr William Osborne (resigned January 2023)

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 (resigned January 2023)

## 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

Ms Paula Reynolds - Chief Executive

## Chair's Report



David Watters  
Chair

Although reporting on the year to end September 2023, I must note with sadness that shortly after this reporting period ended, the Society lost its dear friend, colleague, and Treasurer, Mr Ian Elliott. Ian passed away in December 2023 having served on the board for three years, during which time he brought much acumen and experience to the Society, in his friendly, generous, and good-mannered way. Ian is missed by us all.

This report is presented to the Society's 252nd AGM and marks the end of my tenure. I would like to look back briefly over some of the highlights of that long, eventful, and enjoyable time. The remainder of the report will detail achievements during this year.

Since joining the Board at the November 2011 AGM, I have been humbled and impressed by the extraordinary levels of skill and competence of my fellow Board members. Having taken on the role of Treasurer, then Chair in November 2012 and 2013 respectively, I, with the Board, have worked hard to inform decisions and change needed to make the monumental shift from providing care for older people in a nursing home setting – a function the charity had been providing since the 1880s. We recognised the real risk and financial loss that the charity was exposed to was not sustainable, and to safeguard this wonderful organisation, we knew we had to step back from that direct provision.

Leasing Clifton Nursing Home to a specialist provider gave us a new income stream and opened up time and opportunities to refocus – so we looked to our past and explored what philanthropy and addressing disadvantage needed to look like in the present day. We did continue to manage the 27-bed residential dementia unit at Clifton House until 2018. The level of care remained excellent and consistent as did the overall management of the unit but again the Board, recognising the risk associated with care for older people, voted to have another expert third party provider step in.

Inspired by the charity's long history of innovation and influence we choose to do more than just give out grants. We wanted to provide financial assistance to make real change and impact directly on the lives of those in need; starting with a substantial

grant to the NI Hospice to help build its education centre and most significantly, a three-year fund to support transformational change of its service provision. From 2015 we have provided grants that respond to immediate need, that reflect how we have listened to our awardees, and that are helping to support much needed risk-taking and innovative work that directly addresses grassroots need.

I am proud of all the grants the Society has made, with a few funded projects standing out, such as the instant response to the Covid crisis when schools, families and the students were faced with the immediate prospect of having to learn from home. The Society brought together a group of funders within a matter of days and purchased, and delivered, 225 recycled laptops to those less well-off school children in North Belfast who did not have digital provision. Similarly, we moved with speed to respond to messages we heard from schools about the levels of hunger they were dealing with because of the cost-of living crisis. Over two winter periods the Society granted almost £240,000 to alleviate this most basic of needs and worked to leverage a further £370,000 funding from others to support this school meals project.

We have supported projects that create futures of our young people. Working with the Creative Digital Hub we funded and encouraged others to support this state-of-the art, industry facing, skills development project that has the potential to shape the delivery of the post primary curriculum.

Our increasing profile drew interest from other philanthropic families who wish to redistribute their wealth. We received a series of donations (with more in the pipeline) to bolster our work in addressing disadvantage.



NI Hospice



Delivery of laptops to North Belfast Schools



Launch of North Belfast Creative Digital Hub



Barbour Fund Presentation



Hunter Smyth Fund at the  
Old Library Trust

The Barbour family, previous owners of Hilden Mills, wound up a series of smaller charitable trusts they had created throughout the generations and donated all residual assets to us. Given our shared missions and histories we designed a programme to help older people and the under skilled in the Lisburn and North Belfast areas, details of the outputs are noted further in the report. The Hunter Smyth family donated funds which we used to design a 15-year programme of grant making.

In working to help others help themselves, we supported the creation of a social supermarket in North Belfast, a project that helps families access food and support services, while learning about nutrition and budget management. At an organisational level we shaped 70 community and voluntary sector groups to understand budget management through the delivery of a five-year small loans programme. Together with two significant community sector stakeholders we built a loan fund of £1.2 million and thereby provided access to a different form of low-risk finance.

During my time we have worked to tell the story of this powerful charity. This work is delivered through our social enterprise, Clifton House Centre Ltd. It has grown from supporting one part time member of staff to four full time equivalent staff members and a group of 20 active volunteers, all of whom share the history of the Society, its people and its home through talks, tours, events and last year published a book to mark our 270th anniversary.

We have supported the North Belfast Heritage Cluster, building relationships in the local area and enabling others to tell their story too, while creating a vehicle for change and regeneration in this much divided part of the city.

I worked with colleagues on the Board to establish the Mary Ann McCracken Foundation. A registered charity that celebrates the life and works of this remarkable woman who was instrumental to the work of the Society for almost 80 years. The Foundation also enables the Society to keep her legacy alive and challenge the same issues she would if alive today.

I wish the Society and its future Chairs every success in the future. I know that the organisation will continue to build on the many trusted partnerships created in the last twelve years and that it will continue to focus on its mission as set out by our Founding Fathers in 1752. I am indebted to the two Presidents I served under (Lady Moyra Quigley and Sir Ronnie Weatherup), the various Boards, Committees, staff, in particular Paula Reynolds and Lucy Fraser 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.



Mary Ann McCracken Foundation  
& Kabosh Theatre Company



Benn Dinner, December 2022



Bill Osborne and David Watters

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

### *Encouraging and Influencing Philanthropy*

The Society continues to encourage and influence philanthropy to address disadvantage - in this, its 271st year, it allocated more than £271,000 of its funds as direct grants, leveraging a further £1,146,000 through collaborations.

Alongside the ongoing provision of support for much needed grassroots work (listed below) the Society provided financial assistance, and attracted further support, for two extremely important grants in the year.

- Cost-of-living school meals – in immediate response to evidence that schools are struggling with the reality that many pupils were coming to school hungry, and without provision of lunch. The Society stepped in and provided over £80,000 to post primary schools from across NI with the highest indicators of deprivation. It worked directly with the James Kane Foundation, Ulster Garden Villages and ARN Foundation to secure a further £152,500 for this cause.
- Working with the NI Hospice, the Society pledged £60,000 towards salary costs for two Specialist Community Palliative Care nurses, who alongside their palliative care training received pancreatic cancer awareness training, symptom management, and appropriate care for families and carers. Our grant enabled access to a further £500,000 from other funders.



Cost-of-Living school meal grants



Mary Ann McCracken Bursaries



ANAKA TEFL course participants



Mary Ann McCracken Bursaries

The Society, continued to support *education and skills projects* through its multi-year grants to:

- Creative Digital Hub – funding staff and equipment for this innovative facility that delivers digital and collaborative skills to students in North Belfast, ensuring they are prepared for future work while also creating model classrooms that deliver the curriculum in new ways. Almost 850 students, from years 8 to 14, benefitted in the year, alongside 27 teachers from across the area.
- ANAKA Women’s Project, a collective of women with real life experience of the asylum system;. Our funding supported two education workers, who delivered English conversational and IT classes and recruited support from a raft of volunteers who delivered homework clubs, children’s activities, and taught English and Maths to the migrant families. They also delivered 39 employment focused training courses through a private provider. Additionally, one member of the collective was given support to enable her to complete her undergraduate course.
- Early Intervention Family Services - working across North Belfast to help with all aspects of family life including school advocacy, benefit advice, parenting skills and access to other services. Over 300 individuals from 92 families were supported in the year, each family received one-to-one support, building skills and solutions to ensure children are educated. More than 40% of the children supported experience neurodiversity, showing the complexity of need has risen dramatically in the period.
- Mary Ann McCracken bursaries - 64 students across the area availed of support to continue with education or enable employment, for example, 12 received safety cards for construction industry training.

The bursary programme was supported by three other funders including the Hunter Smyth Fund, the James Kane Foundation, and the Mary Ann McCracken Foundation.

- North Belfast Youth Choir – 150 young people from across the area availed of professional instruction and access to the highest standard of choral and music tuition; the choir encourages members to form friendships whilst learning, performing, and travelling together. It performed at the Mansion House and Irish Embassy in London in the year.
- Mary Ann McCracken Foundation and the Anaka Poetry Project – noted further in this report.



North Belfast Youth Choir

The Society, continued to support activities for **older people** through:

- The People’s Kitchen - work providing older people with help and support leading into winter. The group received the funds from the Thomas Howard bequest.



Funders Forum NI Conference

The Society continued to support strategic work to **influence and encourage philanthropy** through:

- Funders Forum NI - a membership forum of independent and semi-independent funders who make grants in NI.
- Chartered Institute of Fundraising’s NI Awards, Fundraising Partnership of the Year – won by Aware NI and Danske Bank for a partnership that creates organisational impact, financial return, staff participation, volunteer engagement, awareness and shared learning.
- Work with high-net-worth families and organisations to develop plans for giving.



People’s Kitchen

In the year, the Society also received financial support from the:

- National Lottery Heritage Fund in the form of a six-month Development grant to support its work with the North Belfast Heritage Cluster.
- Residual assets remaining from the closure of the Victoria Homes Trust to support future work on social housing.



### *Barbour Fund Grants - Almost £200,000 committed to helping others*

In this year the Society completed the delivery of its Barbour Fund, set up to support work to improve employability and to help reduce isolation felt by older people. Since inception the Fund has supported activities as set out below.



Outdoors at Lisadian Care Home



Youth and skills development

## The Barbour Fund 2014 - 2023

### Addressing Isolation

**Older people living independently:**  
Over 1,000 older people benefitted from activities, outings and talks.

**Older People in Care Settings:**  
240 older people benefitted from improvements in their environment and socially from activities, music, gardening and art.

**Older People Helping Others:** 265 older people volunteered in tidy ups, preservation works and befriending schemes.

**Food Poverty:** 2,000 healthy meals made for over 55's & 400 "shops" for older women in a deprived area.

### Addressing Disadvantage

**Training Courses:** 4 new courses developed; 110 participants gained skills in tourism, hospitality, security and warehousing.

40 young people in TOPS (Time out for Positive Steps) developed new skills in online coding, horticulture, cookery, craft and music.

**Employment & Bursaries:** 28 people secured jobs from training.

14 bursaries awarded to students on health & social care at Belfast MET and 5 undergraduate courses in QUB.

**Youth & Skills Development:** At least 130 students aged 16 - 24 who are outside of mainstream education were provided with resources, opportunities to gain qualifications and to focus on personal and professional development.

### COVID-19 Response

**Family Support:** 13 families were provided with school uniforms 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.

**Adults with Learning Disabilities & Older people:** PPE equipment was provided for adults with learning disability to train in 2 social enterprise cafes; also free vouchers were given to older people to visit the cafes to reduce isolation.

**Sports Support:** Kids in a deprived area provided with equipment to enable a return to boxing.



President's Talk Series on  
*The First Great Charity of This Town*



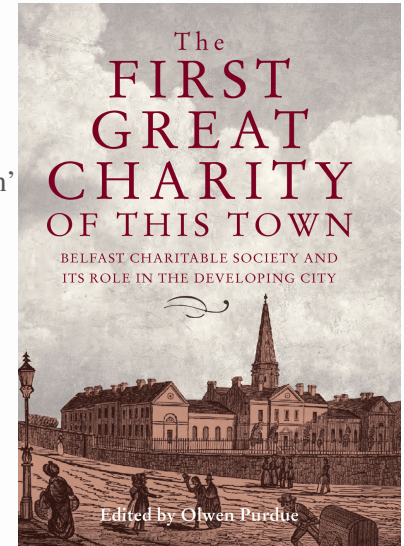
Book signing with Prof Mary McAleese,  
Sir Ronnie Weatherup and  
Prof Olwen Purdue

## *Telling Our Story*

The Society continues to tell the story of its past, its people and their contributions to the development of Belfast and beyond, particularly in shaping history and championing the causes of the disadvantaged. Much of this work is delivered through its subsidiaries, as below.

*Clifton House Centre Limited* – a social enterprise, which informs and educates others while sharing and preserving our archive and historic resources, achieved much in the year. Activity was delivered by staff and volunteers, and included:

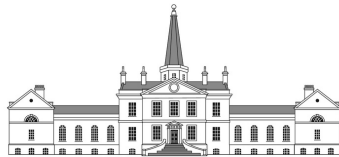
- Public and private tours - almost 1,100 attendees
- President's talks series focused on 'The First Great Charity Of This Town' - over 500 participants
- Talks delivered to historical and community-based groups.
- The delivery of an integrated communications plan to provide wider access to our history and current events that saw:



- Facebook followers increase to 5,713, with 10,600 visits, to a reach of 364,900 people; almost 200,000 saw the item about our past deputy manager in the residential home retiring after 31 years.
- Twitter followers increase by 10% to 2,234; in total reached 498,840 people; a popular item was the unveiling of the statue of Frederick Douglass.
- Instagram followers increase by 26% to 827 with most interest in the advertisement about our talks and tours.
- Articles and press releases that featured in local, regional, UK and Ireland-wide papers, radio and TV.
- Features for international and local platforms, ezines, blogs etc appearing on Google, Visit Belfast, Discover NI and many more.

Also in the year, staff and volunteers worked on the

- Protection and preservation of the archival records, materials and artefacts and Clifton House itself through the ongoing maintenance plan.
- Management of events for others through room hire (up over 50% on previous year) and the provision of office accommodation for the Society and other independent funders.



EST 1774  
**CLIFTON HOUSE**  
 HOME OF THE BELFAST CHARITABLE SOCIETY



Retirement of Mrs Sadie McKeown from Clifton Residential Home



St Patrick's Primary School Tour

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

- A pilot project with ANAKA Women's Collective, a local grassroots organisation led by, and for, women with experience of the asylum system. Through a series of four workshops, funded by the Society, and using poetry as a medium, participants were introduced to Mary Ann McCracken. They were invited to consider how her story might relate to their own lives. Participants then worked with local poets and artists to create individual and group poems and artwork to express Mary Ann's legacy, and the issues she would champion today.
- Historical information for Belfast City Council to inform its commission of Mary Ann statue.
- 27 walking tours in the period with 206 attendees to raise awareness about Mary Ann and her work.
- 6 talks with local historical groups.
- In partnership with the Wollstonecraft Foundation, developed and delivered the 'Two Marys in Conversation' event c.80 attendees room and zoom.
- Delivered tours within other festivals including Look North, Feile, Belfast Festival of Learning and CQAF.
- Ran a series of social media campaigns including 'Forgotten Women Fridays' and 'Untold Stories of WJ Brown'.
- Launched the paperback version of the Mary McNeill biography and a pamphlet on the author.
- Developed future potential legacy programmes around leadership.



'Two Mary's in Conversation' event



ANAKA Women's Collective



Great Place Planning



Rescued tiles now housed in  
St Patrick's Church

### *Utilising Our Assets*

As noted in previous reports the Society, since inception, has **utilised and developed its built assets** to address disadvantage. Clifton House provides an income stream for the charity and its work, while playing an important role with the Society's strategic work aimed at catalysing the regeneration of the local area.

In the year, the Society continued to chair the *North Belfast Heritage Cluster* and delivered a six-month development phase of a new five year 'Re-creating a Great Place: North Belfast' project. It secured the funding for this work, until March 2028, from the National Lottery Heritage Fund on the Cluster's behalf. Achievements within the development phase included:

- Securing the initial development phase funding of £67,766.
- Work with the Heritage Cluster, and its 14 members (groups responsible for heritage assets stretching across north Belfast) to improve governance and operational capacity.
- Enhancement and strengthening of relationships within the Cluster and beyond.
- The incremental development of a series of strategic projects that includes urban design and environmental sustainability work.
- Work with other organisations to deliver the second Look North festival - a weekend-long programme of talks, tours and events using our heritage buildings.

- Promotion and development of a heritage trail
- Ongoing delivery of a comprehensive archive project helping to safeguard historic documents and artefacts.
- Research and ‘telling the stories’ of the various sites, and the streets in between, enabling Cluster members to rediscover aspects of their own history that have been forgotten over time.
- Marketing and communications work to attract 1,200 Facebook followers, an increase of 13%; 1,291, Twitter followers, an increase of 3%; 186 Instagram followers an increase of over 100%; TikTok 104 followers with 406 likes; continued website content development.
- Evaluation and review work informed another successful application securing the longer-term delivery phase funding of £682,939 in August 2023.



North Belfast Heritage Cluster meeting



Look North! Festival Heritage walking tour



North Belfast Heritage Cluster members

## Thank You

Anaka Women's Collective	Dr Philip Hammond	Niamh Goggin
ARN Foundation	Duncairn Arts Centre	North Belfast Area Learning Community
Ashton Community Trust	Eric Barfoot	Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities
Barbour and Coburn Family	Estate of Mr Norman Caters	Northern Ireland Water
BBC Children In Need	Fredrick Street Meeting Place	North Belfast Workings Men's Club
Belfast Cathedral – Cathedral Church of St Anne	Funders Forum NI	Prof Mary McAleese
Belfast City Council	Gerry Simpson KC	Public Records Office NI
Belfast Harbour Commission	Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland	Queens University Belfast
Belfast Hospital School	Hunter Smyth Fund	Radius Housing
Belfast Junior Chamber of Trade	Indian Community Centre	Redeemers Central
Belfast Metropolitan College	Irish Academic Press	Raj Darshna Foundation
Belfast Orange Hall	James Kane Foundation	St Malachy's College
Carnegie Oldpark Library	Lady Moyra Quigley	St Patrick's Boys School, Jesuit Order
Cathie McKimm	LFT Charitable Trust	St Patricks Church, Donegall Street
Consarc Design Group	Linen Hall Library	Synagogue at Annesley Street
David Moffett	Lord Mayor of Belfast	Synopsisys
Denis Maloney	Martin and Hamilton	Tom Brown
Department for Communities	Milibern Trust	Triangle Housing Association
DfC Covid Recovery Employment and Skills Initiative Programme	Mr and Mrs R Herron	Ulster Garden Villages
Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin	National Lottery Community Fund	Ulster University
DLD Trust (O'Neill Family)	National Lottery Heritage Fund	Victoria Homes Trust
	National Museums Northern Ireland	Wollstonecraft Foundation

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

A photograph of Clifton House at night, viewed through an ornate wrought-iron archway. The house is illuminated from within, showing a large central tower with a spire. The sky is a deep blue, and the scene is framed by trees and a path leading to the building.

CLIFTON HOUSE

*Preparing for its 250th Year*



**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 any of our services please visit our websites or follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram**



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