



One House.
Two Stories.

Annual Report

Year ending September 2025

Belfast Charitable Society, Clifton House Centre
and the Mary Ann McCracken Foundation



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, the '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 is registered as a charity with HMRC (Charity Registration no XN45101).
The charity registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland on 25 April 2016 (NIC 104998).
Its principal office and registered office is Clifton House, 2 North Queen Street, Belfast BT15 1ES.



Belfast Charitable Society Board Members

Belfast Charitable Society

(Established 1752, Incorporated 1774)

President

Sir Ronald Weatherup

Board Members

Professor Alastair Adair (Chair)

Mr Aidan Bennett

Mr Glenn Bradley

Mrs Siobhan Brown

Ms Christine Donnelly

Mr Mark Glover

Mr Colin Graham (Hon Sec)

Mr Matthew Higgins

Mrs Eileen Mooney (Finance)

Mrs Norma Sinte

Clifton House Centre Ltd

(Incorporated 2012)

Directors

Mr Colin Graham (Chair)

Mrs Siobhan Brown

Mr Paul Carlin

Mr Philip Hall

Mr Matthew Higgins

Mr Erskine Holmes

Mary Ann McCracken Foundation

(Incorporated 2019)

Directors

Mrs Norma Sinte (Chair)

Prof Alastair Adair

Mr Les Allamby

Ms Angila Chada

Mr Colin Graham

Ms Diane Graham

Dr Margaret Ward

Ms Paula Reynolds

(Company Secretary)

Management

Ms Paula Reynolds - Chief Executive

CHAIR'S REPORT

As I come to the end of my first full operational year as Chair, I am delighted to reflect on the volume and quality of work and activity that has been produced by the Society and its subsidiaries, Clifton House Centre and the Mary Ann McCracken Foundation. I have set out some highlights from this busy year below.

Our first quarter (October to December 2024) saw the final months of the calendar of activity that marked the 250th anniversary of the opening of Clifton House. Significant legacy work continued into 2025 including the evaluation of this anniversary activity, and crucially, the development of our KS2 Education Resource – One House, Two Stories (featured on the cover of this report). This fabulous primary school resource tells the interconnected stories of Belfast Charitable Society, Clifton House and Mary Ann McCracken and reminds us that, from its opening in 1774, Clifton House was a place where people found shelter, food, care and dignity. Clifton House continues to be the home for almost 80 older people today and the Society remains steadfast in addressing disadvantage.

Our education resource encourages children to think about poverty and philanthropy, through Mary Ann's story and that of her work fighting for the rights of young people to learn. Our Mary Ann McCracken Foundation, together with other partners, delivered the fifth year of its bursary scheme aimed at reducing the financial barriers to higher education and employment faced by some young people. Sixty-one young people from North Belfast directly benefited, with partner donors supporting similar schemes in the Magherafelt, Ballymoney and Coleraine areas. The Society also facilitated the delivery of the Julie Maxwell Lewis Arts bursary in North Belfast.

In addressing disadvantage, the Society committed a total grant award of £565,800, from its own funds and those of partner donors, during the year. These grants were allocated to organisations who work on the ground with new communities; take a community development approach to eradicating poverty; create opportunities for education; address homelessness; and help older people make connections to services. This total award included sizeable grants to the Belfast Cathedral Black Santa Appeal and The People's Kitchen emergency fund.



Alastair Adair
Chair

The Society led the way by becoming the first Real Living Wage funder in Northern Ireland and continues to utilise Clifton House to reach the wider public through a programme of tours and talks. Over 3,000 people attended these and, continuing to strive for greater accessibility and diversity – it developed specialised talks and tours for those within the deaf community. Hundreds more visited for their own meetings and conferences.

I was privileged to host my first strategic planning session in May 2025. Informed by a range of keynote speakers, the Board and staff joined together to help chart our direction for the next three years. Good governance is held in high regard by the Society and is delivered through a robust timetable of governance meetings for each of our entities. We carried out a major due diligence exercise before assigning the lease of our nursing home to another provider, thus ensuring this valuable asset, and more importantly the residents who call it home, continued to be well looked after.

I thank all of our staff for their hard work and commitment to all that we do, and I was delighted that, following a benchmarking exercise, staff were offered greater benefits and new posts were agreed to further support the team. I offer my sincere thanks to the body of volunteers who give considerable time and skills, helping us tell our story to many. Our strategic partners are vital to our success too.

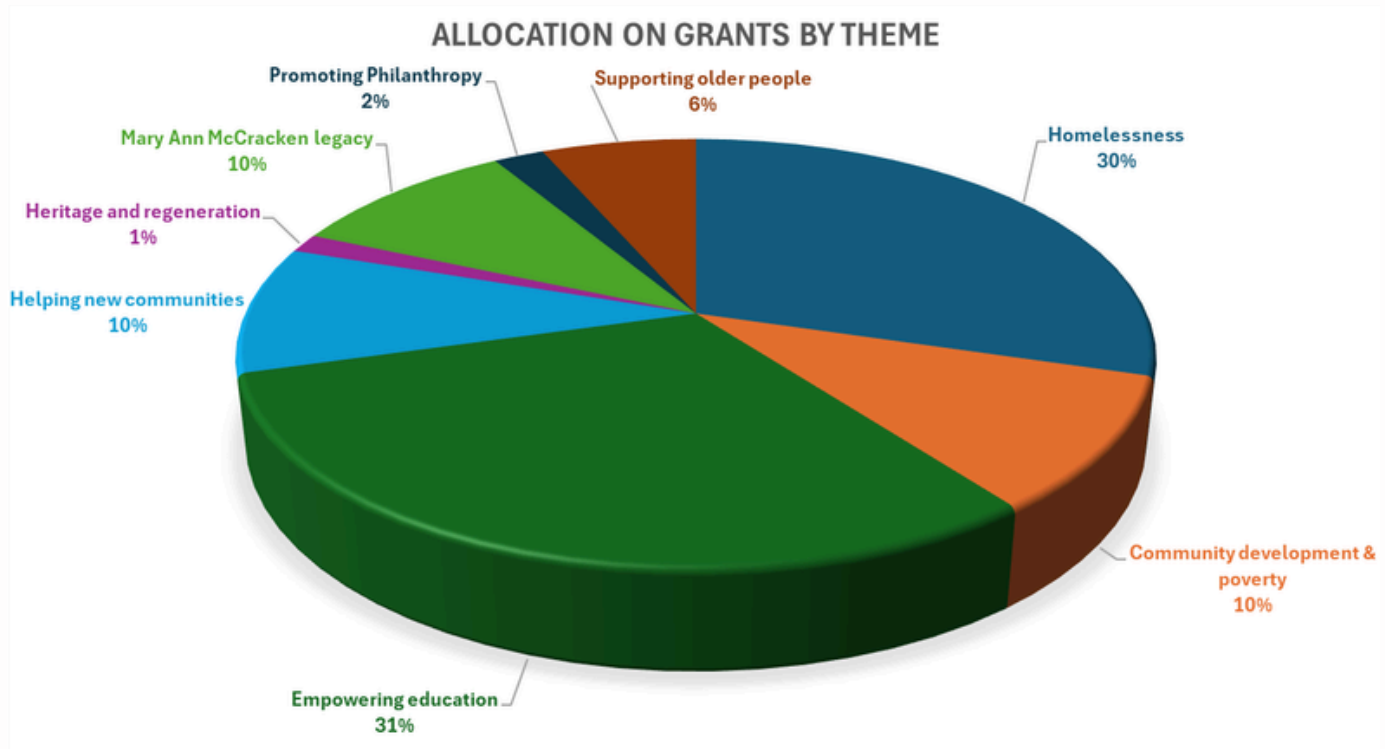
Finally, I want to thank all my colleagues on all three Boards for their unwavering support and commitment to this organisation and our mission to address disadvantage.

I encourage you to read through this report to learn much more about what we delivered in the year, a snapshot of our achievements!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alastair Adair". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

FINANCES

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North Belfast Youth Choir

GRANTS

The following pages provide some detail on the grants the Society and its donors supported in the year.

EMPOWERING EDUCATION

Ashton Community Trust: Family Early Intervention Programme - Two part-time home visitors continue to make a huge impact on families in North Belfast. This team provides 1-1 support to parents and their children (0-18 years) in their own homes. Over the year:

- 76 families received 1-1 support, including support for 85 parents and 107 children
- 45 families were further supported through onward referral to other essential support services.

Education Bursaries through Hunter Smyth & SMILE INC – These funds, managed and supported by the Society, support education bursary programmes in the Ballymoney and Coleraine Area Learning Communities (Hunter Smyth) and in the Magherafelt area (SMILE INC) that mirror the Mary Ann McCracken Bursary scheme. SMILE INC funds were supplemented with funding from the Raj Darshna Foundation and the Society to support a total of 141 pupils across the 9 post-primary schools in the area.

North Belfast Area Learning Community – Mary Ann McCracken Bursary programme. Now in its fourth year, four funders joined the Society namely the Mary Ann McCracken Foundation, The James Kane Foundation, Hunter Smyth Fund, and the LFT Charitable Trust. Together their funding enabled each of the 12 North Belfast post-primary schools to receive £2,500 and in turn to award 61 bursaries to young people aged 16 to 18 facing financial barriers to education or employment. Bursaries were used to fund resources, travel and accommodation costs for university; preparation costs to attend interviews; training and employment related costs; purchase of clothes, food and accommodation; and/or purchase of IT equipment.



North Belfast Digital Hub



Shankill Area Learning Community



EMPOWERING EDUCATION

North Belfast Digital Hub - This year marked the third and last year of the demonstration project for this state-of-the-art facility. The Society's grant contributed to the costs of employing a Creative Technology Leader and a Creative Technologist in the year. The hub ran a structured timetable of programmes enabling it to host 451 students from seven North Belfast schools to develop digital skills and reduce barriers to learning with Belfast Boys' Model School developing its own innovation hub based on that success. The entire programme saw over 28 teachers and 3,184 student visits in the year.

North Belfast Youth Choir (NBYC) – The Society, through the Chair and CEO fund, contributed towards the costs of the choir, removing financial barriers for participation and increasing access for post-primary young people across North Belfast. Now, with over 70 members, the NBYC continues to provide professional instruction and access to the highest standards of choral and music tuition, building on the exceptional experiences and performances to date. The choir was awarded 2nd place in the Youth Choir category of the City of Derry International Choir Festival and performed at the 150th Anniversary Performance with Belfast Philharmonic Society of Carmina Burana, to name but a few.

Shankill Primary Schools Area Learning Community (ALC) – A Co-Ordinator post for the Shankill Area Learning Community was part funded. The role manages shared learning, resources and expertise among the Shankill primary schools, and covers lessons for teachers to pursue continuous professional development. Excellent progress was made in the year, in particular the delivery of a conference to showcase the outstanding work of the schools. Attendees included Queens University Belfast, representatives from the Education Authority and Department of Education and funding partners. The project led to a number of school subgroups focusing on SENCO, Vice Principals; P1 Clusters and Numeracy and Literacy Co-ordinators.

HELPING NEW COMMUNITIES

Anaka Women's Collective – The Society funds two part-time Education Project staff who address education and skills gaps for school age children, young adults (aged 16-25) and women in the migrant community. Within the year the group:

- provided one-to-one advice on navigating official processes which led to securing 20 places for young people at secondary schools and 45 families accessing education and receiving financial support for transport, free school meals and uniforms
- provided support for school age children through the provision of weekly homework clubs for 40 P4-P7s and established an 8-week course to support 30 young people doing GCSEs in Maths, English and Science
- developed an evidence-based report on the current provision of education and a proposal for improvement called Stranded Dreams. The report was launched at City Hall to community and voluntary sector representatives, statutory agencies, politicians, and those with lived experience, receiving press attention, 67 calls to action and led to questions being raised in the Assembly
- organised a session hosted by the Lord Mayor to talk about educational challenges
- produced a short film, that screened as part of DOCS Ireland film festival
- organised a day-long celebration with other related community and voluntary groups to mark World Refugee Day.



Launch of Stranded Dreams Report



Anaka at Clifton House



Ardoyne Bone Community Health & Leisure Trust

ADDRESSING POVERTY THROUGH A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Ardoyne Bone Community Health and Leisure Trust – funding towards a Development Manager who plays a pivotal role in the development of the much needed health and wellbeing centre. By September 2025:

- the first phase had been fully let to businesses and leisure ventures
- the level of secured income exceeded expectations
- 60 construction training jobs and 3 apprenticeships were created, and 95 young people attended a construction school
- social prescribing infrastructure was set up with 50 annual prescribing slots offered.

Lower Oldpark Community Association (LOCA) – salary costs for a Housing and Regeneration Worker (HRW) were provided for two years. The post promotes and supports physical regeneration in the Lower Oldpark neighbourhood and helps residents in addressing housing and local environment problems. Over the year the worker:

- conducted a physical regeneration survey for the area, and produced a report
- responded to 195 advice enquiries, resulting in 421 actions, including emails, letters, phone calls, provision of information, and home visits
- produced two LOCA Housing Newsletters, delivering them to 440 households while also updating the local community via Facebook and the LOCA website.

Newington Credit Union – the Society supported a part-time Marketing Officer for three years to enable the organisation to increase adult and juvenile membership through the promotion of the services of the Credit Union and through work in local schools. The latter also helps to educate children/young people/students about the benefits of saving and borrowing safely to meet their financial and future needs.



Street Soccer NI -Homeless World Cup



Black Santa Appeal



Hosford Housing



SOS Bus NI



The People's Kitchen

ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

Black Santa Appeal - As part of the 250th anniversary of Clifton House, the Society provided match funding to the Black Santa Christmas Appeal for the first time. These funds subsequently supported 104 local charities in Belfast, with a particular focus on young people, homelessness and homelessness prevention.

Hosford Community Housing – is a new community led housing charity founded to fight homelessness, poverty and exclusion by creating and sharing innovative housing models. By leveraging £40K of funding from the Society, the project aims to secure 18 houses / 23 tenancies to provide a home for people who have been homeless.

Street Soccer NI – Sixteen homeless men and women were able to attend the Homeless World Cup Tournament to represent Northern Ireland, with financial support from the Society. This event brings together organisations from all over the world who use football to tackle homelessness and social isolation. It also supports these organisations by building international connections, facilitating skill sharing and helping members to develop.

SOS Bus NI – The Society contributed £2000 towards the Compassion in Action programme, to support SOS Bus NI's walkabout teams to reach those most vulnerable on the streets of Belfast.

The People's Kitchen (TPK) – a significant donation provided by the Society contributed towards the day-to-day running costs of this essential homeless crisis service over winter, their busiest period, allowing them to purchase 500 sleeping bags; support 67 individuals into temporary accommodation during the storm/adverse weather conditions; provide 800 meals per week during their busiest period; purchase sleeping mats for rough sleepers in Belfast; provide 38 individuals with mobile phones to help them connect with their support services; provide transport for those homeless who have been allocated temporary accommodation; provide emergency blankets during the storm for those sleeping rough in Belfast.

OLDER PEOPLE – CONNECTING TO SERVICES

Creative Local Action Responses and Engagement (CLARE) – Formed in 2013 by members of the North Belfast Community, CLARE uses a community development, social work approach to address isolation, loneliness and improve health and wellbeing for people over the age of 65. The Society contributed to the salary costs of two Community Wellbeing Support and Social Workers whose work resulted in 2538 contacts made with 118 people (aged 65+) in North Belfast to help them remain as healthy and independent as possible for as long as possible; and 1156 attendances at group activities ran by CLARE.

NI Water Fund – The Society receives an annuity from NI Water because of its role in developing the water infrastructure in Belfast before 1840. This year Clifton House residential home received a donation as a contribution towards a programme of social activity for residents and the sheltered accommodation received support for a gardening project.

COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

NI Hospice Specialist Community Care Palliative Nurses – the salaries of two Specialist Community Care Palliative Nurses. Working in both Belfast and South-Eastern Health & Social Care Trusts, to date the nurses have provided care for:

- 327 patients, providing invaluable support and comfort in the final months of their lives at home
- 13,443 specialist community nursing home visits.



REGENERATION THROUGH HERITAGE

North Belfast Heritage Cluster – a network of local organisations that want to use their assets to catalyse regeneration in one of the most disadvantaged areas of NI, while ensuring the sustainability of members and building. The Society funds 5% of National Lottery Heritage Fund Great Place North Belfast, a heritage and regeneration project raising awareness of 15 historic buildings and sites. Over the year, the project has delivered:

- a leading role in the 2025 Look North! Festival
- a lighting project which marked a significant capital investment - seven members benefited from lighting improvements or new lighting installations on security, architectural features and stained-glass windows
- a community planning project for the upper Donegal Street area that aims to reimagine and revitalise public spaces in the district
- a series of archive development plans for its members
- an expanded walking tour programme of the area, transitioning from free festival-based tours (such as during Look North and EHOD) to scheduled paid tours operated through Clifton House
- a large number of behind-the-scenes initiatives including development of outline business cases; governance support; partnership and collaboration work and strategic representation and input.



#Great
Place
North
Belfast

MARY ANN MCCRACKEN FOUNDATION



Supported by funding from the Society, the **Mary Ann McCracken Foundation** celebrates the life and works of this remarkable woman, her legacy and relevance today. Over the course of the year, the following work was completed:

- sponsorship of a new award category as part of the annual Blackboard Awards in February 2025 – The Mary Ann McCracken Leadership Award. The first winners of this award were Principals Mary Montgomery from Belfast Boys' Model and Paul McBride, former Principal from St Malachy's College
- a themed open day (5 July) with over 50 attendees, many of whom had never visited Clifton House before, a panel talk by Dr Lauren Smyth, Dr Margaret Ward and Eva Kilmurray on three remarkable women – Mary Ann McCracken, Winifred Carney and Baroness May Blood in August. This event was attended by 60 in-person and 15 online
- 15 public walking tours including a new Mary Ann McCracken and Martha McTier walking tour, and a further four private tours for community groups including Barnardo's, Arts Ekta and Short Strand Community Group.
- Exploration on what role the Foundation could play in supporting the UK wide Community Cohesion Commission.



Mary Ann & Martha
McTier Walking Tour

Norma Sinte, Chair, at
Blackboard Awards

Mary Ann McCracken
Walking Tours

MARY ANN MCCRACKEN FOUNDATION

- the development of 'Mary Ann's Poor House Tales', a new self-guided audio and AR experience funded through Belfast City Council's Neighbourhood Tourism Grant, was researched and designed in the period
- public talks including International Women's Day (IWD) and anniversary of Mary Ann statue unveiling at City Hall with Dr Robyn Atcheson and Dr Lauren Smyth at Belfast City Hall which was attended by over 100 people; and private talks to community groups, including Antrim U3A
- participated in the Look North! Festival and Feile an Phobail to share Mary Ann's story with a wider audience
- social media, where reach continues to grow on Facebook and Instagram
- a new education resource for Key Stage two primary schools: the resource, entitled 'One House. Two Stories', was completed in September 2025 and focuses on the Poor House and the children who lived there, and on Mary Ann McCracken. This has since been shared with over 20 local primary schools in North Belfast
- a Mary Ann McCracken notebook became a beautiful addition to the Clifton House merchandise offering.



CLIFTON HOUSE CENTRE

Clifton House Centre had another busy year in delivering a wide range of activities aimed at educating and informing members of the public about the influence that the Society has had in the development of Belfast, and in addressing disadvantage since 1752. Activities included:



- the delivery of a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade funded programme: six cemetery tours and associated workshops delivered with 91 pupils from local north Belfast post primary schools; and six cemetery tours and associated workshops delivered with 85 participants from six local women's groups
- 10 house tours, 12 cemetery tours and 13 Mary Ann McCracken walking tours, to a combined audience of over 400, delivered by our volunteers
- themed tours including 1798 Plots & Plotters; Medical History tours, Women of Clifton Street Cemetery tours, BSL Tours, Christmas and Halloween themed tours, attracting a further 300 visitors
- dedicated talk delivered by President of BCS, Sir Ronnie Weatherup, to Ulster Reform Club members
- private tours to 38 community groups and societies, a further 600 visitors
- conference bookings continue to attract new audiences, with 87 bookings in the year



Cemetery Tours



Talk for Ulster Reform Club Members



House Tours

CLIFTON HOUSE CENTRE

- talks on Thomas McCabe, Bodysnatching, the United Irishmen, the Great Famine and hidden histories of the women of Clifton Street Cemetery, and for the first time a BSL and ISL signed talk on Belfast's Deaf Communit(ies): Language, Education, Poverty and Law, 1850-1920, by Dr Cormac Leonard, attracting a combined audience of 225 into Clifton House. Private talks were delivered to a further 300 attendees
- 'Clifton House, an avatar for social reform' focused on the evolution of social reform, emphasising the continuing need for legal frameworks and public involvement
- 'A Very Victorian Crafty Christmas' event, on 8th December with 120 attendees
- recruitment of new volunteer guides: to support Clifton House in delivering talks and tours, and to support new Self-Guided tour offering
- the development of our archives, ensuring archive and artefacts are preserved and protected. For example the restoration of Edward Benn and Edward Pimm paintings, which have now been rehung in the Boardroom of Clifton House
- themed social media campaigns to tell our story and attract new audiences online, resulted in over 600 new followers on Facebook and Instagram, and over 13K visits.



INFLUENCING AND ENCOURAGING PHILANTHROPY

Promoting Philanthropy – the Society facilitates conversations, work, and action to increase philanthropy in Northern Ireland, and to bring more resources to addressing disadvantage. This year, the Society:

- hosted two Families in Philanthropy meetings – to promote and support philanthropy. This group has grown over the last 12 months, with 7 families now attending
- supported work of other independent Foundations and Trusts including: The James Kane Foundation, SMILE INC, Hunter Smyth Fund and the Julie Maxwell Lewis Bursary
- continues to host and participate in the Funders Forum NI, a representation body of funders in Northern Ireland.



Thank You

Anaka Women's Collective	DLD Trust (O'Neill Family)	Northern Ireland Museum Council
Angila Chada	Dr Cormac Leonard	Northern Ireland Water
Anne McErlane	Dr Robyn Atcheson	Nuala McKeagney
Armstrong Storytelling Trust	Duncairn Arts Centre	Paul McCusker
Artsekta	Fredrick Street Meeting Place	Queens University Belfast
Ashleigh Galway, Curry Primary	Funders Forum NI	Radius Housing
Ashton Community Trust	Gordan Sanders Charitable Foundation	Rainey Endowed School
Avila Kilmurray	Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland	Raj Darshna Foundation
Barbour and Coburn Family	Hunter Smyth Fund	Real Living Wage Foundation
Belfast Cathedral – Church of St Anne	Indian Community Centre	Redeemers Central
Belfast City Council	Irish Academic Press	Ruth Carr
Belfast Harbour Commission	Kathleen's Attic	Saturday Hospital Fund
Belfast Junior Chamber of Trade	Ken Dawson	SMILE INC
Belfast Media Group	LFT Charitable Trust	St Malachy's College
Belfast Orange Hall	Lord Mayor of Belfast	St Patricks Church, Donegall Street
Blueprint Development Consultancy	MACS	The Belfast Jesuit Centre
Carnegie Oldpark Library	Myrtle Hill	The James Kane Foundation
Cathie McKimm	National Lottery Community Fund	Thomas Howard Fund
Community Foundation for NI	National Lottery Heritage Fund	Tom Brown
Community Places	National Museums Northern Ireland	Totten Electrical
Consarc Design Group	Newington Credit Union	Ulster Architectural Heritage Society
Crothers Chartered Surveyors	North Belfast Area Learning Community	Ulster Reform Club
David Watters	North Belfast Community Partnership	Ulster University
Decowells Restoration	North Belfast Workings Men's Club	Visit Belfast
Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin	N Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities	Volunteer Now

Special thanks to all of our dedicated volunteers

Clifton House is home to the Belfast Charitable Society and the Mary Ann McCracken Foundation.
It houses our archive, heritage and conference centre and is available for private hire.
History tours and talks are available to book at CliftonBelfast.com



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