

DORNOCH HERITAGE SOCIETY – HISTORYLINKS MUSEUM

Annual Report 2024-25

1. Introduction

Dornoch Heritage Society became a SCIO (SC008747) in November 2011 and our purposes are as set out in our Constitution. www.historylinks.org.uk (About us).

These are:

- The advancement of education, arts, heritage and culture relating to the history of Dornoch and surrounding district.
- The advancement of heritage and culture relating to Dornoch (and adjoining areas of the Highlands if relevant);
- The maintenance of a museum in Dornoch to make the above heritage accessible for all to enjoy.
- To promote community engagement and to encourage heritage research within the community.

These purposes are to benefit the community of Dornoch and all postcodes within the IV25 postcode sector. The collection area is some 100 sq miles; from Dornoch, north to The Mound, west to Rogart, Lairg, Bonar Bridge and back eastwards to Dornoch. Our main work is the running of a community-led independent museum, Historylinks. We employ a Curator and Museum Assistant alongside grant aided staff.

2. Achievements in 2024 – 5

Historylinks Heritage Hub

After six years of planning and fund raising our ambition to extend the original Historylinks Museum with a Heritage Hub was realised in the summer of 2024. We approached more than 15 funders large and small, including a community level Appeal, and finally brought together the funding package. Construction began in November 2023, the The Heritage Hub opened in September 2024 and has been transformational in its effect. The official opening was performed by Lord Thurso in April 2025.

The new space

The Hub has extended the gallery space and allowed us to have many new exhibits from our Collection, an additional office and toilets and dedicated entrance have resulted in a bright, modern extension to the much loved original museum. Crucially, the Hub given us a much needed community room to hold workshops, events and host visiting groups.

The community engagement programme

Once the fit out and new exhibits in the Hub were complete, our staff team launched a 12 month Activity Programme. Our approach is to reach out to include local people, groups of elderly, young, those with learning challenges and those unfamiliar with heritage experiences. The programme is proving an outstanding success and will be independently evaluated so that we can learn from the experience and generate continued funding.

Winter weekends

Using the new Hub during winter 2024/5 we piloted a number of weekend openings with special attractions, notably a series of wonderful tapestries on loan from the Inverness Castle project. The Dornoch Stitchers were key players in this venture and they are now embarking on a new tapestry triptych to be completed later in 2025.. Opening the Heritage Hub in March for Fibrefest weekend, now an established event for all things wool and attracting many visitors to Dornoch, also gave us the opportunity to fully utilise the Heritage Hub. We held a craft workshop, showcased the wonderful 18th century Katherine Gray silk dress from our Collection and put on an exhibit of early 20th century costume, curated by our young volunteers.

Extension of the Archive Storage

Since the museum opened in 1998 local interest and support for the museum has been shown by the significant increase in acquisitions from the local area, and consequently storage had become a problem. Therefore the Heritage Hub project included improving archive storage capacity and with assistance from the Dornoch Common Good Fund and member's fundraising, we were able to purchase and install a suite of 6 mobile shelving units capable of lateral movement, using triple-arm rotary controls. The archive storeroom is now future proofed for at least another 20 years at current rates

3. Impact of Historylinks

Collection

Exhibits from the permanent Collection comprehensively present the geological, historical and social evolution of Dornoch and the surrounding area in East Sutherland. Every year our Curator and the team research and present an innovative special exhibition. With the extended gallery space and new high quality display cabinets in the Heritage Hub, we were able to exceed this goal and in 2024/5 five new exhibits were created

(Lynne to insert)

Historylinks Archive

The Historylinks online archive www.historylinksarchive contains over 15,000 entries and is accessible to the public. It is well used and regularly receives very positive feedback from users with a range of interests, from academics, historians, writers and students.

Visitor Feedback

Feedback from the visitor survey carried out for season 24/5 confirms high levels of visitor satisfaction and enjoyment. The percentage of local visitors has risen since 23/4 no doubt as a result of the Heritage Hub programmes and new exhibits. The age range of visitors is also showing positive trends becoming more inclusive of families and a younger demographic. 42% of our visitors were under 45 years of age and 15% under-16 years. 35% of our visitors came from more than 25 miles away in Scotland, 28% from the rest of the UK and 27% from overseas, which reflects Dornoch's status as a major tourist destination. 40% of the overseas visitors came from the United States and the charity is planning to develop connections with US visitors in particular.

We continue to collect feedback from visitors which is reviewed at the end of the summer season and will continue to find ways to make our museum more appealing and accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds.

Contributing to the local economy

We employ staff from the area, local tradespersons, we purchase supplies locally whenever we can and we source stock for our retail area from local artists, craft workers and Brora Social Enterprise. As part of a destination attraction we contribute to bringing visitors to Dornoch who generate income for self-catering providers, cafes, shops etc.

Historylinks Young Curators

We are committed to offering local children the chance to know and appreciate their own heritage and so we continue to offer a children's Heritage club, the Young Curators, now in its fifth year. These heritage-themed fun and educational sessions continue to be very popular for the 8 – 12 age group and we are delighted that some of the young people have now 'graduated' as Club and Museum volunteers.

Community Curation Programme

With funding from Museums Galleries Scotland we have organised a 12 month programme, inviting local people to co-curate a wide range of work all of which will lead to exhibits. Engaging local residents to become involved in Historylinks and take part in researching and curating has been very popular. The pieces of work have included surveying the Cathedral Burial Ground, supporting the establishment of a Community Re-enactment group (CATU), and piloting oral history work, beginning with memories of Schooldays in Dornoch.

4. Membership of Dornoch Heritage Society

DH SCIO is a membership organisation, now comprising over 200 members. We continue to organise monthly heritage talks for our members during the winter/spring season which are very popular and also open to the public. Talks in 2024/25 have been wide ranging and fascinating from the History of Tartan to the Battle of Littleferry. The membership sub-committee also raises much-needed funds through holding twice yearly coffee mornings and sales, a heritage film night and a sell-out 'Taste of Burns' evening in January.

Following the initiative in 2023 to create a fraternal relationship between the town of Dornoch and the Village of Pinehurst in North Carolina, we embarked on a process to create a new category of international member. The purpose is to strengthen the bond between the two communities which are united by the common factor of Donald Ross the legendary golf architect who hailed from Dornoch and went on to have a stellar career in the US. www.historylinks.org.uk/intmem. International membership is open to individuals from outside the UK from summer 2025.

5. Income Generation

The charity is working on a Business Plan setting out our goals and funding strategy for the years 2025 – 2028. In common with many other independent museums Historylinks receives minimal public sector funding and depends for its existence on

consistent visitor footfall for our core costs and ongoing fundraising from a wide range of trusts and foundations to take forward community engagement.

The advent of cruise ship passenger tours to Dornoch is being planned for summer 2025. These tours will be in two parts, Historylinks and Dornoch Cathedral, and solid bookings may take time to become an established income stream for Historylinks.

Guided walks and visiting heritage groups are also a generator of income for the charity, using the facilities we now have in the Heritage Hub, and we plan to increase this aspect in 2025/6.

6. Workforce

Staff

We are fortunate to have a very experienced Curator, Museum Assistant and excellent community programme staff who give their time unstintingly to care for the museum's collection, mount excellent displays and take forward challenging new developments. Historylinks attracts very favourable reviews from visitors and is well regarded by other museums and organisations. Our staff are key to maintaining our reputation through the quality of their work and maintaining a high standard of communications.

Volunteers

With a small staff team volunteer support is of paramount importance to cover the range of our work from front of house, archiving, practical skills to refurbish and carry out repairs, fund raising, talks and tours and to support the Curator in the exercise of her role. The Museum sub-committee has the key role in the latter.

The value we place on volunteers cannot be overstated and without them we could not offer the range and quality of work to which we aspire. We have a strong body of volunteers as can be seen from the organisational chart in Appendix 1 to this report. It is vital to support and train the volunteer workforce. Front of house training is carried out annually as well as offering specific training in areas such as conservation skills.

The work of the Trustees though 'back office' is vital to our success. Every organisation large and small needs leadership, strategic planning and continuity and we have benefitted over the years from very committed people willing to put their shoulder to the wheel.

7. Governance of the charity

We have implemented key recommendations from an independent review of our governance. The main changes have been a new name for the charity, removing the acronym SCIO (but retaining this charitable form) and replacing it with our former title of 'Society'. This will take effect from summer 2025. We are continuing to plan succession for our sub committees and trustees, aiming for a younger, more diverse age and background profile. Role descriptions for Trustees and terms of reference for the sub committees have also been clarified.

The administration of our financial affairs is of the utmost importance and we benefit from the services of excellent voluntary Treasurer services. This has been particularly important during the Heritage Hub project. In the coming 12 months due to retirement we will require a new SCIO Treasurer from October 2025. We will continue

our policy of retaining a reserve of 4 months operational funding which would be called upon for emergency purposes.

Succession planning is a constant theme on our agenda and we have welcomed a new Board member during 2024/5 who is Professor David Bell. Board members continuing in office are Alison Davies and Andrew Senior, Co-Chairs, Jerry Bishop, Treasurer, Fiona MacKinlay Museum Treasurer, Fiona Hampton and Richard Hickson.

8. Future priorities

In 2024/5 the Board and Museum sub-committee have been preparing for the Museums Galleries Scotland re-Accreditation process. This involves meeting the high standards set for accredited museums, in terms of Collection Care, Conservation, Access, and related policies and plans. It is vitally important that we retain this status and Historylinks submission is scheduled for summer 2025.

Now that we have realised our goal in creating the Heritage Hub, the next chapter for the charity is to keep driving towards our aim of becoming more self-reliant from a financial perspective. To achieve this the Business plan will highlight that our forward strategy will focus on:

- innovation in what we offer
- increasing earned income
- further building our positive reputation
- working collaboratively with partners

We will place emphasis on these targets over the next 3 years and no doubt beyond.

We thank our staff and volunteers, members and supporters and all our funders, large and small for the support they have given us in the past year. All are helping to make a reality of our mission 'To Keep the Dornoch Story Alive'.

Alison Davies – Co-Chair

Signed *Alison Davies*

Dated. *23/9/2025*

Andrew Senior – Co-Chair

Signed *Andrew Senior*

Dated *23/9/2025*

Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of Dornoch Heritage SCIO.

I report on the accounts of the charity for the year ended 31st March 2025.

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the terms of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Charities

Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (as amended). The charity trustees consider that the audit requirement of Regulation 10(1) (d) of the 2006 Accounts Regulations does not apply. It is my responsibility to examine the accounts as required under section 44(1) (c) of the Act and to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's statement

My examination is carried out in accordance with Regulation 11 of the 2006 Accounts Regulations. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeks explanations from the trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently I do not express an audit opinion on the view given by the accounts.

Independent examiner's statement

In the course of my examination, no matter has come to my attention which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements:

to keep accounting records in accordance with Section 44(1) (a) of the 2005 Act and Regulation 4 of the 2006 Accounts Regulations

to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with Regulation 9 of the 2006 Accounts Regulations

have not been met, or

to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



Name: Calum Stewart

Relevant Professional qualification: Chartered Accountant

Address: 10 Knockbreck Street, Tain, IV19 1BJ

Date: 18th September 2025

DORNOCH HERITAGE SCIO

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025

	Unrestricted	Restricted	31/03/2025	31/03/2024
RECEIPTS				
Donations	£ 3,824.00	£ 20,186.72	£ 24,010.72	£ 11,869.43
Grants	£ 6,272.00	£ 183,138.45	£ 189,410.45	£ 378,936.64
Loans	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ 5,801.73
Receipts from fundraising activities	£ 3,149.75	£ 250.00	£ 3,399.75	£ 5,280.23
Admissions & Walks	£ 18,231.40	£ -		
Shop Sales	£ 6,917.40	£ -	£ 25,619.80	£ 26,080.71
Invoiced Sales	£ 471.00	£ -		
Income from investments	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ 32,292.41
Membership Fees	£ 3,530.00	£ -	£ 3,530.00	£ 4,539.75
Receipts from other charitable activities	£ 773.28	£ -	£ 773.28	
FIT payments	£ 1,295.46	£ -	£ 1,295.46	£ 1,141.98
Gift Aid	£ 4,680.65	£ -	£ 4,680.65	£ 2,935.10
Bank Interest	£ 595.73	£ -	£ 595.73	£ 973.43
Other income	£ 17,535.03	£ -	£ 17,535.03	£ 253.09
TOTAL RECEIPTS	£ 67,275.70	£ 203,575.17	£ 270,850.87	£ 470,104.50
PAYMENTS				
Expenses for fundraising activities	£ 923.00	£ -	£ 923.00	£ 1,023.27
Gross trading payments	£ 4,062.11	£ -	£ 4,062.11	£ 2,608.98
Payments relating to charitable activities	£ 66,382.28	£ 714.42	£ 67,096.70	£ 48,988.91
Grants and donations	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ 3,532.09
Governance costs	£ 240.00	£ -	£ 240.00	£ 70.00
Other payments	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ 32.80
SUB-TOTAL	£ 71,607.39	£ 714.42	£ 72,321.81	£ 56,256.05
PAYMENTS RELATING TO ASSET & INVESTMENT MOVEMENT				
Heritage Hub Project	£ -	£ 391,272.25	£ 391,272.25	£ 232,652.30
Purchase of investments	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -
TOTAL PAYMENTS	£ 71,607.39	£ 391,986.67	£ 463,594.06	£ 288,908.35
(-DEFICIT) SURPLUS FOR YEAR	-£ 4,331.69	-£ 188,411.50	-£ 192,743.19	£ 181,196.15

DORNOCH HERITAGE SCIO

STATEMENT OF BALANCES YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH 2025

	31/03/2025	31/03/2024
Cash		
Cash on hand	£ 842.42	£ -
Till Float	£ 50.00	£ 50.00
Staff Floats	£ 100.00	£ 100.00
Change Float	£ 193.00	£ 193.00
	£ 1,185.42	£ 343.00
Bank Accounts		
Bank of Scotland (<i>Museum</i>)	£ 1,992.38	£ 12,548.15
Clydesdale Bank (<i>DHS</i>)	£ 9,016.83	£ 11,642.67
Virgin Money (<i>Hub</i>)	£ 15,016.73	£ 195,743.70
	£ 26,025.94	£ 219,934.52
Investment Accounts		
Hampshire Trust Bank	£ 11,636.00	£ 10,766.40
	£ 11,636.00	£ 10,766.40
TOTAL	£ 38,847.36	£ 231,043.92

DORNOCH HERITAGE SCIO

THE FOLLOWING PAGES DO NOT FORM PART OF THE STATUTORY ACCOUNTS

HISTORYLINKS HERITAGE HUB ACCOUNTS 2024/25

Income	£ 207,013.40
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Grants	£ 183,138.45
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NLHF 3	£	45,101.00
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NLHF 4	£	29,041.36
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NLHF 5	£	53,299.08
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MGS	£	22,519.00
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Coastal Communities	£	5,000.00
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NLHF 6	£	18,941.86
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NLHF 7	£	9,236.15
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Donations	£ 20,186.72
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Gift Aid	£ 2,842.50
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Fund Raising	£ 250.00
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Interest	£ 595.73
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Expenditure	£ 387,740.37
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Extension Contract	£ 290,277.99
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GMR Henderson	£	108,354.58
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GMR Henderson	£	40,816.43
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GMR Henderson	£	111,348.36
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GMR Henderson	£	18,451.36
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GMR Henderson	£	11,307.26
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Professional Fees	£ 16,061.30
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Torrance (QS)	£	2,460.00
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Scotsafe (CDM)	£	1,200.00
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DACIC (Room Hire)	£	140.50
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HAS	£	836.40
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Blueprint	£	2,400.00
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SF Structures	£	840.00
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Torrance (QS)	£	2,460.00
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HAS	£	554.40
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CFJ Consultants	£	1,250.00
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Wendy West	£	1,250.00
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Blueprint	£	1,200.00
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Torrance (QS)	£	1,230.00
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Goldwells	£	240.00
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Refurbishment	£ 4,256.95
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Fit Out	£ 76,846.26
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Opening Event	£ 227.87
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Transfer (BoS Account)	£ 70.00
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Surplus (Deficit)	-£ 180,726.97
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Opening Balance	VM Account 01/04/2024	£ 195,743.70
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Closing Balance	VM Account 31/03/2025	£ 15,016.73
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