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Friends of Greyfriars Kirkyard

Looking back on 2024-25

HELLO, FRIENDS!

As we are now a few weeks into the new financial year, we thought we would take this opportunity to reflect on our progress over 2024-25, thank you for your participation, and signal our priorities over the coming months.

Through the work of our dedicated volunteers, our efforts to preserve and celebrate Greyfriars Kirkyard have gained traction and led to demonstrable change, from increased public appreciation to physical improvements to new partnerships with key stakeholders. We remain determined to do our part to keep this special place thriving as one of several key stewards of the Kirkyard. However, none of this would be possible without your support.

Our membership works on a 'donate what you wish' basis, so it is your choice as to what you feel comfortable donating each year. If you want to remain a member but can't afford or choose not to make a donation at this time, that is fine with us; your membership will remain valid unless you tell us otherwise. **We hope this newsletter will illustrate our impact and encourage you to consider making another annual donation for 2025-26.**

reminders in April of each year. We are sincerely grateful for any support you choose to give.

Thank you again for being part of our mission to protect and enhance public enjoyment of the iconic Greyfriars Kirkyard. Read on for some of our highlights of the past twelve months.

Make a donation for 2025-26

WHY BECOME A FRIEND?

By joining Friends of Greyfriars Kirkyard, you can serve on our Management Committee, help to plan and deliver programming, network with like-minded individuals, receive a copy of our guidebook at a reduced rate, and make a tangible difference to the future of the Kirkyard. Growing our membership enhances the credibility of our organisation and improves our reach, amplifying what we can achieve.

If you haven't signed up, join us today!

[Become a Friend](#)



NEWS OF MEMBERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Over the past year, we were delighted to grow our membership by over 30%. We continue to prioritise recruitment, including transitioning newsletter recipients and Facebook group members to fully fledged members.

Our AGM was held on 6 November in a hybrid format. We were pleased to have a healthy turnout in order to be quorate and ensure valid proceedings. We also welcomed Louise Yeoman from BBC Radio Scotland who gave a fascinating talk on the history of the Covenanters.

One of our main agenda items was confirming the make-up of our Management Committee. We thanked Sue Proudlove for four years of service as she stepped down as FoGK Secretary.

In the months before that, we expanded our communications capacity by recruiting Susie Conaghan as our Digital Media Administrator and Marc Conaghan as our Marketing Officer. We also welcomed Fraser Paterson as a new member of the Management Committee.

Mark Hatton (Chair), Lexie Hunt (Conservation Officer), Liz Lockhart (Programming Coordinator), Chris Cooper (Treasurer), and Daria Tuhtar (Membership Secretary) will carry on for another term. **If you believe your skills would be well-suited to a particular role, please get in touch.**

inspired it? - we have invested in business cards, badges, and extra branded green hi-vis jackets to identify us while working in the Kirkyard. We hope to expand our merchandise offerings in the future. Let us know what you would like to see!



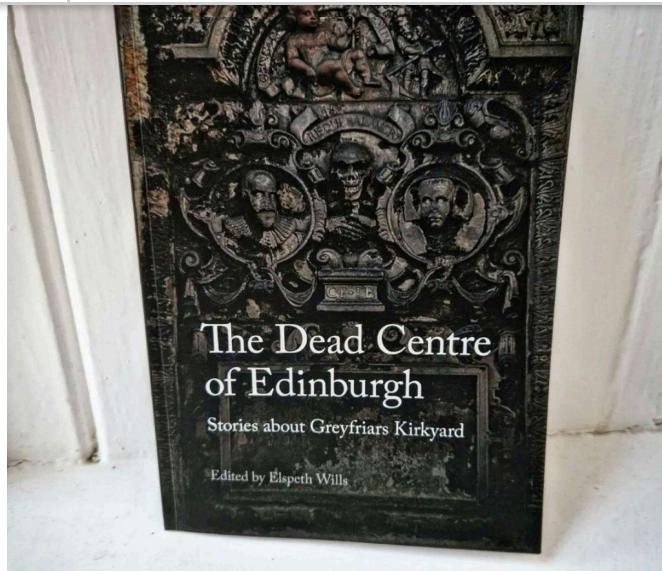
GUIDEBOOK

Due to phenomenal demand, we ordered a second print run of our debut guidebook, *The Dead Centre of Edinburgh: Stories about Greyfriars Kirkyard*. The book continues to be both a point of pride and important source of revenue for the group. For now, the majority of our sales are done in person, with Liz Lockhart overseeing website orders. The book is also available for purchase at the Greyfriars Kirk bookstore and the National Library shop. Please get in touch if you would like a copy.

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We believe one of the best ways to spark a lasting fondness for the Kirkyard is through guided tours. It is only by pausing to take in the singular beauty of the monuments - and ponder what they signified to the people who commissioned them - that you can really appreciate the Kirkyard's true magnificence and lasting importance. No two tours are alike as we strive to personalise them according to the group's interests, ensuring no one leaves disappointed. We target our tours at Edinburgh residents and anyone with an interest in the true depth of history to be found in the Kirkyard.

Below are just some of the groups with whom we've shared our love for the Kirkyard:

- George Heriot's School staff
- Greyfriars Kirk staff
- Edinburgh Festival Tour Guides Association
- The Kirk Michael Trust
- Edinburgh Tour Guides Association
- City of Edinburgh Council staff
- Newhaven SWI
- Edinburgh U3A
- Members of the general public who approach us in the Kirkyard!

If you know of any group that would like a bespoke tour, please let us know.

Upcoming public tours with the Royal Society of Edinburgh as part of their *Curious* public engagement festival are also in discussion. We also hope to offer virtual talks to engage those members who are further afield.

We are currently offering guided tours as part of the City of Edinburgh's Edinburgh 900 programme of celebrations, marking Edinburgh's 900th anniversary with events, talks, tours, and tales. Multiple dates are available across 4 May, 6 July, and 7 September. Register today.

[Register for Edinburgh 900 tours](#)



Scott Family

In contrast to the dramatic Gothic tower on Princes Street dedicated to Sir Walter Scott, the **Scott Family monument** in Greyfriars is humble and easy to miss: a small red granite block lying on the ground beside the entrance to the western yard. In recent times, the stone has become dislodged and we have been working with various stakeholders to explore its reinstatement.

Lord Warriston

Following an inquiry all the way from New Jersey, USA, we have been working on potential options to commemorate **Archibald Johnston** (Lord Warriston) in the Kirkyard, requisite approvals permitting. Warriston was a key figure in the Covenanters movement and while he was buried in Greyfriars following his execution by the newly restored monarchy in 1663, we are unsure of the exact location.

John Bayne of Pitcairlie

Gaze into the **John Bayne of Pitcairlie** monument and you will see his stony likeness peering back at you, making it among the most recognisable and distinctive in the Kirkyard. Unfortunately, water intrusion and buddleia growth have threatened its stability. The Friends have been working with stakeholders to devise and fund a program of emergency repairs until a more permanent solution to its restoration can be delivered.



FIRST SUNDAYS

We continue to meet the first Sunday of every month (except for August) to undertake light maintenance duties to assist the Council's hard-working team in keeping the Kirkyard looking its best. This has included trimming buddleia growth, picking up litter, cleaning the Grassmarket stairs, planting daffodils, removing debris after Storm Eowyn, and even picking up confetti by hand (a thankless task, as Delia will tell you!). Once the physical work is over, we share stories about the Kirkyard and discuss monuments of note. In recent months, this has involved studying the Carstairs, Henderson, and Little monuments, comparing their present appearance to historical accounts, contemplating their artistry, and linking their namesakes to the complex tapestry of Scottish history.

All are welcome - please meet at the main entrance at 13:00 the first Sunday of every month.



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Conservation Management Plan

We encouraged members to take part in Dr Susan Buckham's consultation to inform a new Conservation Management Plan. The Plan "...identifi[es] the variety of interests, associations, and values different people place on Greyfriars Kirkyard, the risks and issues facing the graveyard today, and outline[s] a plan to best care for this site." We will continue to engage with Susan and the Council as they consider how to implement the Plan's recommendations.

City of Edinburgh Council

We work closely with the City of Edinburgh Council, who own and manage the Kirkyard. Recently, we have welcomed a wide range of Council staff to the Kirkyard to help them understand its full significance as a historic site which tells the story of the city.

George Heriot's School

Mark Hatton and Liz Lockhart have been liaising with George Heriot's School, in particular examining the extensive carved stonework dating to the mid-1600s both inside and outside the school buildings. It is clear this stonework has a great deal in common with what we find on the monuments in the Kirkyard (see example below), but in much better condition. We are hoping to facilitate a comparative study of these carved stones and the symbolism and craft used.



WEBSITE

Thanks to the brilliant efforts of our communications specialists, Susie and Marc, we launched our permanent 'home' on the Internet: fogk.org. Although it remains a work in progress, we have added blogs, upcoming events, a reading list, membership information, and other resources onto it. We will continue to populate it with regular content over the coming months. **If you love to research and write, we'd be delighted to have your help!**



Friends of Greyfriars Kirkyard

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About Us

The Friends of Greyfriars Kirkyard is a group of people who feel passionate about the Kirkyard and wish to learn about, share knowledge about & protect the place.

There is so much to learn about the Kirkyard on so many different levels. It is full of history, meaning and mystery, all of which we are keen to find out more about. We want to share what we learn so that more people can better appreciate the value and vulnerability of this special place. We want to help protect the Kirkyard by working with the people and authorities who are responsible for maintaining and caring for this place. Ultimately we want to help ensure that Greyfriars Kirkyard is preserved for future generations to learn from and enjoy.

About Greyfriars

Greyfriars Kirkyard has been an important part of Edinburgh since the Greyfriars used the land as a farm to grow food and medicines for the poor and sick of Edinburgh. When the Reformers banished the Greyfriars, the land was granted to Edinburgh Council by Mary Queen of Scots in 1562. Over

Our Facebook group continues to cover a wide range of topics about, and insights on, the Kirkyard. Please do take a look and contribute if you wish.

JOIN OUR FACEBOOK GROUP

DOORS OPEN DAYS

In September, we once again took part in **Doors Open Days**, an annual event which grants rare and free access to hundreds of historic buildings and locations across Scotland. In our case, this meant opening the gates of Covenanter's Prison to curious explorers and guided tours alike. In total, we attracted over 1,000 visitors both local and international and raised over £600 in donations. Hoping to repeat - if not surpass - this success, we have already confirmed our participation in Doors Open Days 2025, taking place at the end of September. The programme will go live in August 2025. **Volunteers to help out are very welcome.**





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