



## Friends of Greyfriars Kirkyard

### Updates



### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)

This year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) will take place on 24 November at 19:00, both simultaneously online (via Zoom) and in person (in Edinburgh). We are pleased to share that we will be joined by a guest speaker, **Dr Susan Buckham**. Susan will speak about the Conservation Management Plan that was developed for Greyfriars and its implications for the future of the Kirkyard.

The AGM is a key opportunity to hear about our progress over the last year and

including:

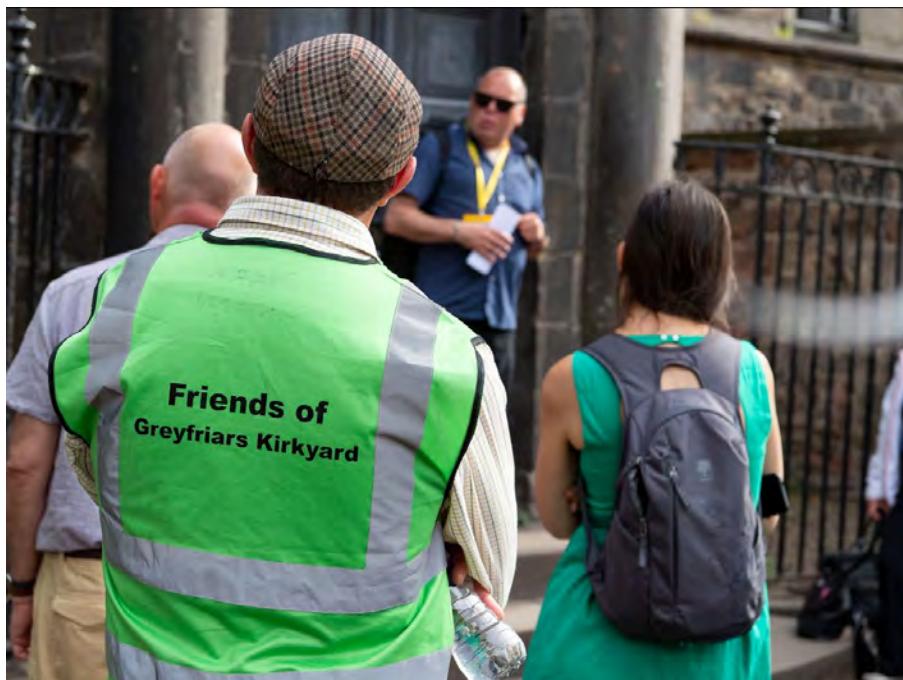
- Chair
- Deputy Chair
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Membership Secretary
- Programming Coordinator
- Conservation Officer
- Marketing Officer
- Digital Officer
- Education Officer
- Website Developer
- Ordinary Member

We would strongly encourage members to attend to ensure the meeting is quorate so we can vote on official business. The agenda is as follows:

1. Apologies and minutes of the 2024 AGM
2. Chair's report
3. Treasurer's report
4. Election of Management Committee members
5. AOB
6. Presentation by Dr Susan Buckham

To confirm your attendance (whether online or in person) and/or to declare your intention to stand for one of the Management Committee roles, please email FoGK Membership Secretary, Daria Tuhtar, at [membership.fogk@gmail.com](mailto:membership.fogk@gmail.com).

The Zoom link for the AGM will be sent to everyone a few days before 24 November. For those wishing to attend in person, the AGM location address is 5 Lauriston Gardens, Edinburgh, EH3 9HH. Telephone FoGK Chair, Mark Hatton, on 07774 499589 if you would like directions.



## CHAIR'S REPORT

following priorities.

**Priority 1:** To work towards a better understanding and appreciation of both the value of the Kirkyard and its vulnerabilities.

**Priority 2:** To help protect, preserve, and sympathetically restore the historic fabric of the Kirkyard.

The way we have set about delivering on these priorities over this past year has been as follows:

**Research** - We have individually and collectively dug deeper into the history of the Kirkyard, finding out more of its stories, meaning, and importance. Despite Greyfriars Kirkyard being the best known and most visited burial ground in Scotland, there is still a great deal to find out about the place.

**Communication** - We have been sharing our enthusiasm and knowledge in many ways. We have delivered dozens of guided tours, answered countless questions, given talks and published many articles (in our guidebook, *The Dead Centre of Edinburgh: Stories about Greyfriars Kirkyard*, through our website, and on social media), and participated in the annual Doors Open Days festival, introducing over 1,000 visitors to the Covenanters Prison.

**Hands-on action** - We have worked tirelessly in the Kirkyard on simple but important tasks such as litter picking, debris clearing, pruning, and weeding. Our monthly 'First Sunday' sessions in the Kirkyard have continued throughout the year with increasing levels of member participation.

**Teamwork** - We have carefully sought to build stronger, more respectful, and mutually beneficial relationships with many other stakeholders in the Kirkyard, including Edinburgh Bereavement Services, Edinburgh World Heritage, City of Edinburgh Council, Greyfriars Kirk, George Heriots School, The Grassmarket Community Project, and local tour guides.

**Advocacy** - We have spoken up for the Kirkyard at every opportunity.

Some particular highlights of 2025 have been:

1. Strengthening our Committee through adding new enthusiastic and knowledgeable members.
2. Further developing our website, fogk.org.
3. Introducing City Councillors and our MSP to the Kirkyard and helping them better understand its value and vulnerability.
4. Reaching many Edinburgh residents, local history societies, and stakeholders through tailor-made tours of the Kirkyard, thereby enhancing their appreciation of the Kirkyard.
5. Growing our membership base.
6. Progressing projects designed to better maintain and conserve the fabric of the Kirkyard. The recent award by the National Lottery to fund the Legacies in Stone: Connecting Communities with Historic Graveyards project will further this objective.
7. Raising funds through guidebook sales, donations, and membership income, which allow us to fund our projects and support others in work to improve the fabric of the Kirkyard.



## LEGACIES IN STONE

We were delighted to learn that Edinburgh World Heritage (EWH) was successful in securing funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund in support of Legacies in Stone: Connecting Communities with Historic Graveyards.

FoGK will be taking a full part in this project, including the investigation of the 17th century tomb of John Bayne of Pitcairlie (see picture) within the Kirkyard to see whether it contains a burial vault and to try to determine its origin.

As you may know, FoGK's origins can be traced back to a previous EWH-led and National Lottery-funded project, Making Lasting Impressions: Greyfriars Kirkyard Community Learning and Interpretation Project, and we are incredibly excited to build on this relationship by contributing to this new project. We look forward to expanding our knowledge of the Kirkyard and its history and raising our profile in the local community and beyond, which will hopefully translate into increased public interest and new members to further our impact.

Using money raised by National Lottery players, The National Lottery Heritage Fund supports projects that connect people and communities with the UK's heritage. Legacies in Stone will be made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thank you to National Lottery players across the UK.



[Learn more](#)



## MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE UPDATES

The FoGK Management Committee has recently welcomed some new faces: **Lesley Niezynski** and **Stuart Robins**. Lesley will serve as our Education Officer and help to develop new ways of engaging the public. Stuart will be acting as Website Coordinator and has already made good progress on our website.

Lesley is a lecturer and researcher based at Heriot-Watt University with a specialism in 16th-19th century accounting, including a recent interest in the link between accounting and death.

Stuart is Managing Director of his own Edinburgh-based design company, Zero, and an explorer and documenter of historic gravestones on his Instagram, @childrenofthestones.

If you spot Lesley or Stuart in the Kirkyard, please give them a warm hello.

In other news, our Deputy Chair and Conservation Officer, **Lexie Hunt**, has chosen to step down from her post due to a recent move to California; the Friends wish her all the best and thank her for all of her contributions during her time on the Management Committee.

As mentioned, we will be electing new Management Committee members at our AGM. If you're interested in any of the roles, we would love to hear from you.



## MEET THE POLITICIANS

Recently, the Friends have been having meetings in the Kirkyard with local politicians in order to raise awareness of the Kirkyard's historic value and present vulnerability. The Kirkyard needs the full understanding and support of local and national politicians who can influence decisions on funding, tourism,

To date we have met with three City of Edinburgh councillors as well as the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Angus Robertson MSP (Edinburgh Central).

All of these meetings have culminated in a tailored tour of the Kirkyard, as we feel it is vital for these figures to experience and admire the Kirkyard first-hand in order to understand why it is both so special and so at risk of deterioration.

Topics discussed included the role that Edinburgh's tourist levy, which will take effect in July 2026, may play in funding future conservation efforts in the Kirkyard.



## MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES

The Friends meet up the first Sunday of every month to carry out light maintenance activities and to pick up litter (particularly in the aftermath of the festival season). This can include picking up storm debris (such as that left behind by Storm Amy), waging war against the buddleia that threatens to overtake some of the monuments (a task that is admittedly made more therapeutic through the use of telescopic shears!), and helping visitors find out more about the Kirkyard.

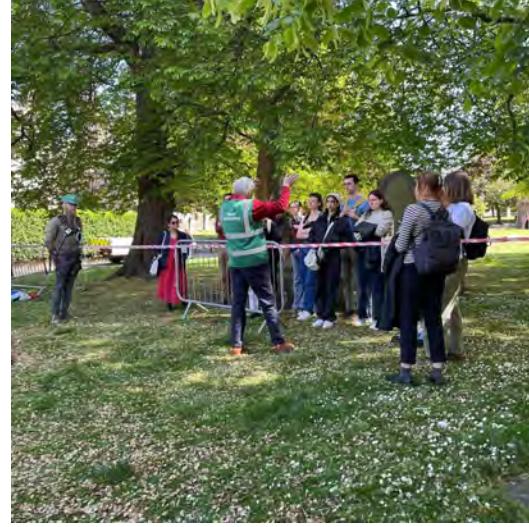
We cap off our afternoons by leaning into our nerdier tendencies through our 'Graveyard Geek' sessions in which we cover all kinds of topics about the Kirkyard, from examples of 17th century graffiti to famous Kirkyard 'residents' to the hidden symbolism of the monuments.

The First Sundays have been a great way of fostering new friendships and sharing knowledge and passion for the Kirkyard. As always, we would love to see you there - **please meet at the main entrance at 13:00 the first Sunday of every month unless otherwise communicated on Facebook.**

Pitcairlie mausoleum canopy. The canopy had sustained significant damage from buddleia intrusion and water ingress, threatening the stability of the stonework and indeed the entire structure. In order to combat this decline, Edinburgh World Heritage, Edinburgh Bereavement Services, stone conservationist Nic Boyes, and the Friends joined forces to plan and deliver repairs to the canopy and seal up the joints with lime mortar, as well as inserting copper nails to slow further buddleia growth.

While this work was underway, our Treasurer and resident Bayne expert, Chris Cooper, brought classroom theory to life by delivering educational talks to MSc Architectural Conservation students from the University of Edinburgh.

The Bayne monument serves as a fantastic case study of what can be accomplished through effective collaboration and shared enthusiasm. We hope to be able to repeat this success across additional monuments as resources and capacity allow.



## TOURS

The Friends continue to show off the Kirkyard to a range of audiences, including both organised tours and ad hoc encounters with curious visitors. Recent tours have featured local historical societies, local authority departments, Kirk volunteers, George Heriots School staff, and politicians. Although anyone is welcome on our tours, we do strive to engage with Edinburgh residents in particular, highlighting the unique historic treasure that is right on their doorstep. It is very rewarding to see

and, in some cases, newly minted Friends.

We also delivered three tours as part of the Edinburgh 900 celebrations, providing an introduction to the history of the Kirkyard and changing trends in monument design. Not only did these tours see an excellent turnout, we raised over £300 from combined ticket and guidebook sales. It was fantastic to contribute to such a dynamic programme of events and we thank the City of Edinburgh Council for inviting us to take part.

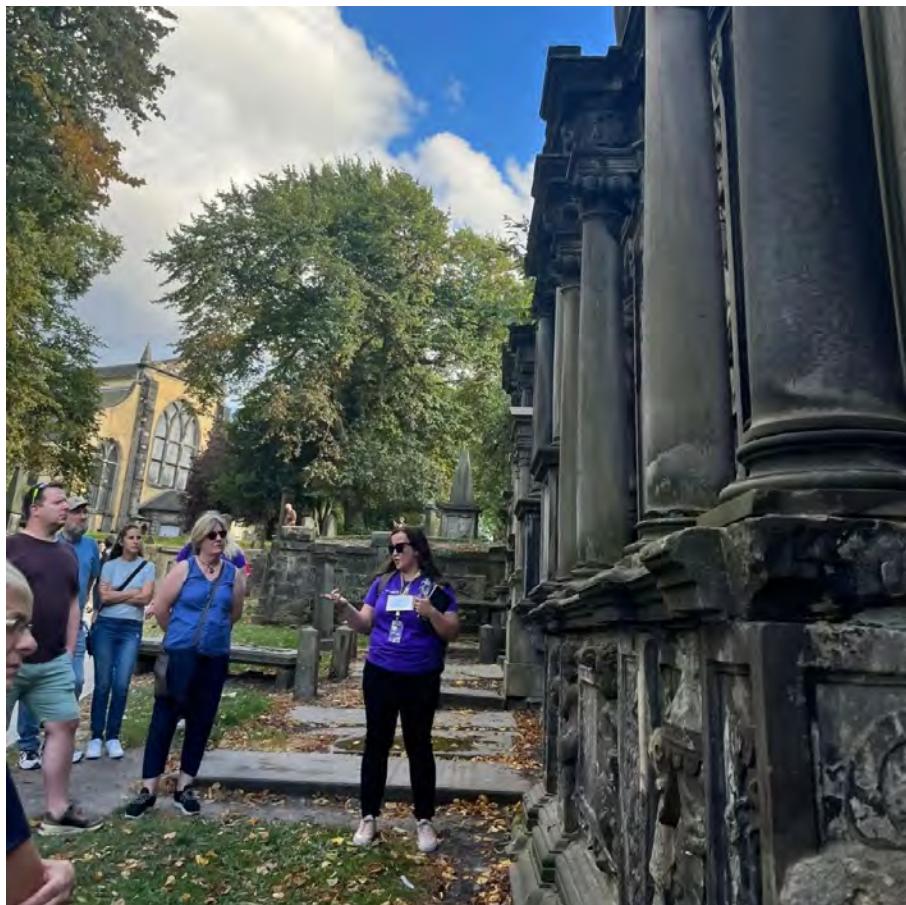
We have become more systematic in collecting feedback and are pleased to share that our tours have generated a very positive response from participants, as the below testimonies showcase:

*"Where to start! We had a wonderful visit to Greyfriars Kirk, made especially memorable by our guide. Their exceptional knowledge of both the city's history and that of the graveyard brought the tour to life, adding fascinating detail and depth that we didn't expect. They were professional, engaging, and approachable. We left feeling enriched and grateful having gained so much more from the experience than we could have imagined."*

*"The tour guide was excellent with a deep knowledge that he was able to translate into great stories about the burials. Thank you so much!"*

*"I think tours like this are really useful to help me understand Edinburgh history, enhancing my sense of belongingness to the city."*

If you know of any group that would like a bespoke Kirkyard tour, please let us know. These tours are free of charge, although donations are always welcome. If you would like to volunteer to lead tours in future, please let us know. Full training & support will be given.





## MONUMENTS

### *Sir Walter Scott*

We are progressing with a project to reinstate the memorial stone that marks the burial place of the father of Sir Walter Scott and several of his siblings (see photo). Few people realise that the Scott Family were closely involved in the Kirk during their lives and that some of its members lie here. This memorial stone is an important reminder of that fact.

### *Milne monument*

The Milne monument is in urgent need of repairs due to the supporting columns crumbling. We are supporting EWH and Edinburgh Bereavement Services on ways to fund and carry out such repairs.

We are keen to see two or three new seats installed around the Kirkyard and have an offer of a donation to cover the cost. The donor would like to see a plaque on the seats memorialising their ancestor, Lord Warriston, who was buried in the Kirkyard in an unmarked grave following his execution in 1663. We are working with EWH and Edinburgh Bereavement Services to complete this project.



## 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. A flock of both local and international visitors took pleasure in investigating the elusive Covenanters' Prison, which is ordinarily locked to the public. Inside, they found monuments to notable Scottish figures like James Hutton and Mary Erskine and heard a more measured account of the treatment of prisoners within its walls, helping to dispel some common misconceptions. As a bonus, the mild weather helped in attracting extra footfall.

In total, the day raised just under £400 from guidebook sales and donations. We were thrilled at how popular the event proved to be and hope that we left Edinburgh residents and tourists alike with a positive impression of Greyfriars and the Friends. We would like to thank everyone who helped to make the day possible, including Edinburgh World Heritage, Edinburgh Bereavement Services, and our volunteers, including our Deputy Chair and Programming Coordinator Liz Lockhart who led on preparations and logistics on the day.



## ABOUT THE NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND

Our vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future. That's why as the largest funder for the UK's heritage we are dedicated to supporting projects that connect people and communities to heritage, as set out in our strategic plan, [Heritage 2033](#). Heritage can be anything from the past that people value and want to pass on to future generations. We believe in the power of heritage to ignite the imagination, offer joy and inspiration, and to build pride in place and connection to the past.

Over the next 10 years, we aim to invest £3.6billion raised for good causes by

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