ANNUAL REPORT 2024

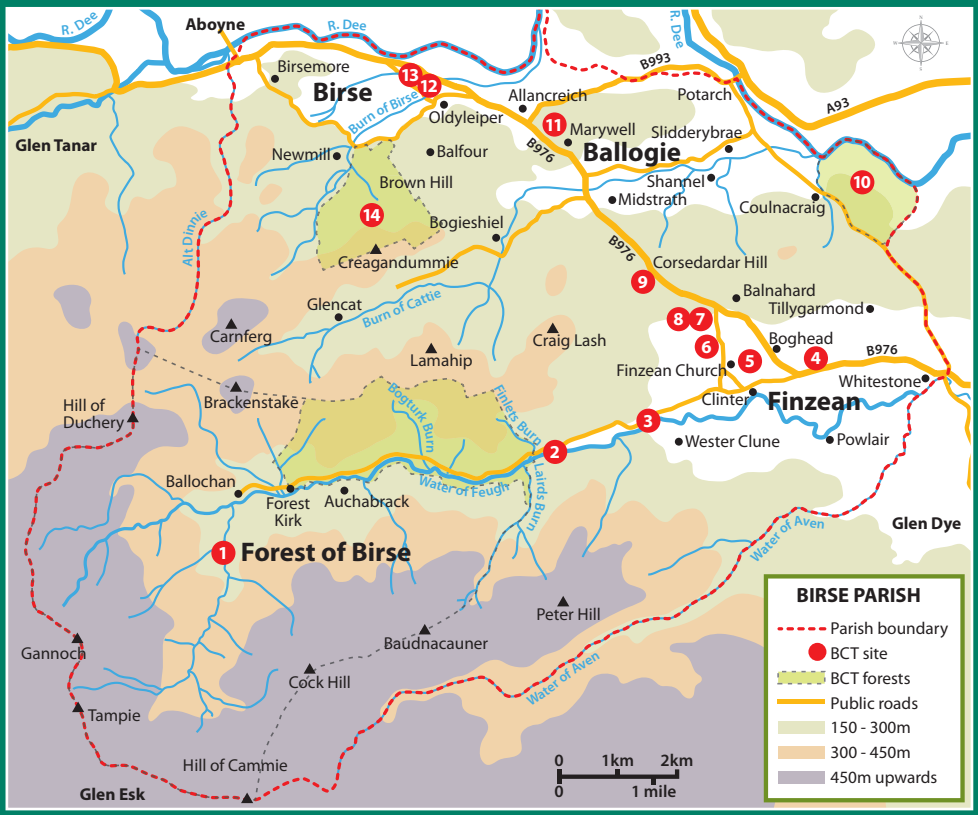


BIRSE COMMUNITY TRUST

Birse Parish

Birse Parish covers over 125 sq.kms. (50 sq.mls.) of Mid Deeside. The four main parts of the parish are the three local communities of Ballogie, Birse and Finzean and the largely uninhabited Forest of Birse. There are more than 600 voters on the Electoral Register covering the parish, which has a total population of over 800 living in around 300 households.

BCT was directly involved in managing fourteen sites in Birse parish on behalf of the community. The sites are marked on the map and the legal basis of BCT's involvement in each is listed below.



1. **Forest of Birse Commonty.** Ancient rights (>3,750 ha.)
2. **The Bucket Mill.** Ownership (c.1 ha.)
3. **Finzean Sawmill.** Ownership (c.1 ha.)
4. **Finzean Community Woods.** Long term leases (17 ha.)
5. **Finzean Community Path.** Long term lease (<1 ha.)
6. **Finzean School Wood.** Long term lease (<1 ha.)
7. **Finzean Old School.** Ownership (<1 ha.)
8. **Birse Parish Archive.** Ownership (<1 ha.)
9. **Corsedardar.** Long term lease (<1 ha.)
10. **Slewdrum Forest.** Ownership (173 ha.)
11. **Ballogie Soutar's Shop.** Ownership (building only)
12. **Birse Kirk.** Ownership (<1 ha.)
13. **Birse Community Hall.** Ownership (<1 ha.)
14. **Balfour Forest.** Ownership (241 ha.)

Letter from the chair

2024 was a significant year for the BCT in several ways. The Trust continues to maintain three A-listed buildings i.e. the Finzean Water Mills and the Souter's Workshop, Ballogie.

Throughout 2024 and this year, fund raising for repairs and conservation at the Souter's Workshop has continued. The local heritage group of volunteers has spent many hours cataloguing the contents and a contents survey has been carried out by professional conservators. Once full funding is secured, the collection will be transferred while essential restoration work is carried out on the building.

Davie Hector continues to monitor the condition of the mills for BCT, and at the Bucket Mill plans are underway to establish a new miller, on the retirement of Stan Moyes. We feel this holds great promise for the security of the mill into the future.

The Commonty Pinewoods continue to regenerate as a habitat, and to provide a rich and peaceful place to be in and to walk through. The Pinewoods remain in the management of the BCT in partnership with the Estates of Birse and Ballogie.

The Old School has hosted many activities during this year. These include a painting class, a self-directed art group, leather work and training in lime mortar work. The Trust intends to continue use of the Old School as a community resource. Ideas for this would be welcomed from members.

Recent years have presented financial challenges for BCT in ways it has not had to face before. This year saw the first substantial tree felling since before Covid. Felling took place in Slewdrum and thinning in Balfour but for the future it is clear that BCT must examine the possibility of other income streams and may have to make some tough decisions in the coming years.

Elizabeth Bracegirdle for the Trustees
July 2025

Inspiring Aberdeenshire Cultural Award Winners

In September 2024 BCT were privileged to win the Cultural Award at the Inspiring Aberdeenshire Awards evening, held at Oldmeldrum House Hotel. The award was collected on behalf of the trust by trustee Simon Lindsey.

The competition was very strong and included a project to champion Doric at Monymusk Primary School and an oral history project in New Deer that has recorded the memories, local traditions and myths of the village, before they are lost forever – perhaps another project for the Parish of Birse!

The trustees were pleased and surprise to win, as Simon observed "all the nominees would have been deserving winners so to have come out on top was amazing"

The award means a lot to us and is a reflection of the hard work and success of the BCT over many years and recognition for so many people in the Parish who have helped and supported the Trust.

Thank you to everyone for your support and for nominating BCT in the first place, we couldn't have done it without all the support we have received from everyone, volunteers, the local community, people coming on our workshops and our tutors, to everyone who has helped us on our way – thank you!



Simon Lindsey (right) receiving the Inspiring Aberdeenshire Cultural Award, alongside Cllr Ron McKail, Deputy Provost of Aberdeenshire, on behalf of Birse Community Trust.



Wooden shoe lasts in the Souter's Workshop.

Souter's Workshop

In 2024, time was spent applying for funding to repair the workshop and preserve the collection. We have successfully secured Lottery Funding dependent on securing the outstanding balance of funds needed.

A bat survey was undertaken and the bats using the Souter's Workshop have been excluded to allow for building repairs. The chimney has been wrapped to preserve it against further storm damage, and a project plan for repair and preservation of the collection has been developed.

Our Heritage Group made up of local and interested volunteers has met regularly and researched information about the Merchant family, souters in rural Aberdeenshire and local history. A Conservator visited the site and helped guide us through the process of collecting data about the collection which began in January 2025.



Shoeboxes in the Souter's Workshop.

Aboyne Games

Robert Dinnie was instrumental in securing a stand for BCT at the 2024 Aboyne Highland Games and the Trustees were delighted to have the opportunity to share information about the work of the Trust with those who attended. We had information about our slavery project, our portfolio of natural and built heritage, and the proposed work on the Souter's Workshop. The day was busy and was visited by locals and visitors alike who were very interested in learning about our community.

Bucket Mill

The A-listed Bucket Mill was established in 1853 and was run by three generations of the Brown family, but by the 1970's it had fallen into disuse and was in a poor state of repair. Miller Stan Moyes took on the challenge, restored this historic building in the 1980's and ran it as a bucket-making business for three decades.



Finzean Bucket Mill

Thanks to Stan, the endangered craft of wooden bucket-making has survived, but as he prepares to retire, the Trust was deeply concerned about both the future of the building, and how Stan's skills could be passed on to the next generation.

The good news is that Owen Bushell, a graduate of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Building's Craft Fellowship Programme, specialising in Millwrighting, and a recipient of a Churchill Fellowship for which he researched best practice in rural craft businesses throughout Europe, is negotiating a lease with the Trust. Owen was already familiar with the watermills on the Feugh before a discussion on a way forward for the Bucket Mill began. For two summers he worked as a tutor with SPAB's working party which carried out repair and maintenance work at the mills. The Bucket Mill will remain in community ownership, and Owen is establishing a Community Interest Company which will repair, maintain and operate it.

The Trust believes this is a significant step towards securing the future of the Bucket Mill and is deeply grateful to Stan Moyes for his willingness to pass on his skills. It is

also grateful to Davie Hector, who, as manager of maintenance and with his own group of experienced volunteers has kept the buildings in good health and has been an important part of the conversation.



Bucket Mill interior

Events

In March 2024 Perthshire based author Linda Cracknell led a writing workshop for us in the Forest of Birse. The workshop booked up immediately showing the local interest for working with a published author. We also held a leatherwork class with northeast traditional leatherworker Fin Scott and even more locally Helen Jackson ran a Cordage and Looping workshop at the Old School, Finzean, for the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association.



Minibeast on Finzean Community Path

Finzean Primary School pupils also came out to study minibeasts in School Wood.

This was followed in the autumn by a visit to plant wildflowers in the wood, grown on from seed the children had collected locally themselves about two years ago.

Volunteers

As usual TotalEnergies staff were very good to BCT in 2024 with groups of volunteers coming out twice to cut back the overgrown vegetation along the Coffin Road in Balfour Forest. The path was fast becoming lost under regenerating tree saplings.

Branching Out Plus, the mental health group also came out to help, cutting back vegetation around the Sawmill, scything the fledging wildflower meadow at the Old School and carrying out a moth survey at the Bucket Mill. We also had Andy Newcombe back to carry out another two-day lime mortar course at the Old School, which has the added benefit of repairing the stone walls for us.



TotalEnergies volunteers on the Coffin Road, Balfour Forest



Lime mortar repairs at the Old School Finzean

Christmas Card 2024

All profits from this card went to the Birse Community Trust. 100 cards were made and sold.

This has encouraged the production of further Christmas cards for this year, as well as greetings cards and a 2026 calendar. These are being planned at the moment.



BTCo Forest Operations

Felling operations were carried out to clear fell the Muckle Ord in Slewdrum during 2024. This included clearance of wind-blow left over from Storm Arwen. The timber was sold standing for this operation and road improvements were carried out to facilitate extraction by timber lorries. The felled timber was sent to Cordiners in Banchory and was split between different uses with a majority going to chip wood. BTCo worked with the forest managers to maximise prices where the market demand is higher.



Felled timber in Slewdrum Forest

Thinning operations have continued in Balfour with timber extraction continuing into 2025. Revenue from felling operations has allowed BTCo to pay rent arrears to BCT. Until final harvest payments are received and 5-year budgets updated, additional donations to BCT remain unknown.

BTCo continued to work closely with the local mountain bike community through the recognised Aberdeenshire Trails Association. Their partnership allows BCT to maintain the existing bike tracks in a safe and user-friendly manner for the benefit of all forest users. Working with BCT, BTCo keep use of the tracks under review to ensure they remain of net benefit to the community.



Thinning operations in Balfour Forest

BTCo continued to work with other community organisations to facilitate events in the forests for the benefit of the wider community, including orienteering, running races, cycle events, forest education and scientific research.

Obituary

David Duncan, Miller
Finzean Turning Mill and Saw Mill



David Duncan, known to his friends as Dyte and his acquaintances as Davie, passed away in August 2024 after a short illness. He was 95, and apart from his National Service had lived in Finzean his entire life. Born at Haughend, Finzean in 1928, one of a large family, Davie was the fourth generation of the Duncan family to operate the sawmill and turning mill. In his lifetime he saw many changes which affected the daily life of the mills. As a boy his first job was in the turning mill, making spiles and bungs for herring barrels. They made two or three million bungs per year, but that industry faded with the fluctuations in herring numbers.

He saw National Service between 1947 - 49 in Germany as an ambulance driver, and after that he returned home, where one of the staples for the turning mill was making brush heads of all sizes, with their main outlet being the workshops for the blind in Aberdeen where the bristles would be fitted. That market dried up almost overnight, destroyed by the arrival of plastics in every aspect of domestic life. "I thought, well, it'll be craft goods from here on," he said. "You just had to swallow and accept it."

After that, he focused on craft goods - porridge spurtles, tattie mashers, baseball bats – anything that could be turned. There would be the occasional made-to-order piece for the oil industry. He milled locally grown oak for the building of the Scottish Parliament. The timber was used for the flooring in the main Chamber around the Presiding Officer's Chair. And always, sawn timber for the estate or local businesses.

Davie Duncan was a sociable man but after his father retired in 1977, he worked alone, with occasional help when handling unusually large timber, except for six months when Stan Moyes came for an informal apprenticeship. He used his solitary time to learn by heart the poems, most of them in the Doric, that he was famous for

at public gatherings. He could recite the long narrative poem The Muckle Spate without a hitch – an extraordinary feat of memory. He was a sportsman, with an interest in shooting, football, bowls and he was a great dancer – even teaching ballroom dancing at Strachan. And golf – for many years he was an enthusiastic member of Tarland Golf Club. His son Roddy said of him "He was easily pleased in life, he didn't need fancy things. Simple things was what he liked."

Davie treated everyone equally. When Prince Charles, as he was then, visited the Finzean Mills, and later made a donation to help with maintenance, Davie treated the Prince as he treated all his visitors:; he was friendly, informative and a superb guide to his personal kingdom.

For the wider world, the small world of mill-wrights and water power experts, the world of heritage and preservation of the old ways, he was an immensely important figure. He maintained the buildings and equipment that had been in his family for nearly two hundred years. He was master of a process which had remained unchanged for centuries. He understood intimately, as few others could, how to read weather and water, trees standing or felled.

For him the mills were more than a livelihood, they were a way of life, and he enjoyed a job where little changed and small things – the daily state of the river, the birds nesting in the buildings, gave him pleasure. He never officially retired. He continued to work at the mills when he was past the age of 90, always planning the next job to be done and keeping an eye on the wheel and the water. He was the guardian of a completely sustainable process.

David is survived by his children Ruth and Roddy, and his grandchildren Mackenzie, Ellie and Ewan.

Trustee News

This year saw the resignations of two of our trustees and we thank them for all the hard work and loyal support they have given the trust during their time in office.



Siân Loftus resigned from the Board of Trustees in January 2024 after three and a half years. Her knowledge of the heritage sector and experience in the management of historic buildings was invaluable in helping the Trust prioritise and plan for the maintenance of our building portfolio. Sian will be remembered for her enthusiasm in leading the successful "Aye, It Wis Aabody" slavery project in conjunction with Finzean School.



Toby Rider resigned from the Board of Trustees after six and a half years He however remains a Director of BTCo. Toby's interest in the management of wildlife and the countryside and his role within BTCo provided a strong link between the two organisations.

Current Trustees

Alison Bell, Liz Bracegirdle, Nancy Davidson, Robert Dinnie, Simon Lindsey.

Join us

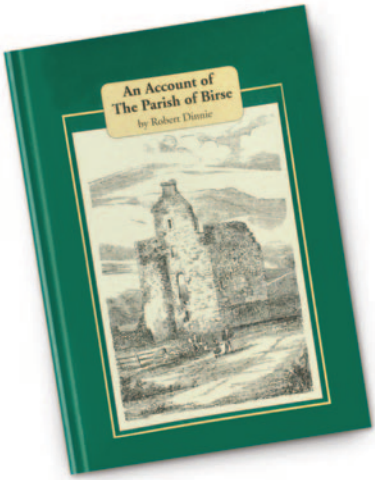
If you live in Ballogie, Birse or Finzean and you'd like to become a trustee, or to offer help with a specific area of interest or expertise, please contact us at: **bctoffice@birsecommunitytrust.org.uk**

BALANCE SHEET AT 31 DECEMBER 2024

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Endowment funds £	2024 Total funds £	2023 Total funds £
FIXED ASSETS					
Tangible assets	79,370	494,195	-	573,565	574,445
Investments	2	-	-	2	2
	79,372	494,195	-	573,567	574,447
CURRENT ASSETS					
Stocks	1,716	-	-	1,716	1,871
Debtors	11,519		-	11,519	6,223
Cash at bank and in hand	23,437	1,000	50,000	74,437	101,778
	36,672	1,000	50,000	87,672	109,872
CREDITORS					
Amounts falling due within one year	(4,406)	-	-	(4,406)	(3,083)
NET CURRENT ASSETS	32,266	1,000	50,000	83,266	106,789
NET ASSETS	111,638	495,195	50,000	656,833	681,236
FUNDS					
Unrestricted funds				111,638	109,154
Restricted funds				495,195	497,082
Endowment funds				50,000	75,000
TOTAL FUNDS				656,833	681,236

BCT 2024 Financial Summary

Income	Area	Amount	Comment
Rent	Balfour & Slewdrum Forests	-	Birse Trading Company Ltd
	Slewdrum Forest	5,000	EE telephone mast
Grants and donations	Grants	20,517	AHF, Aberdeenshire Council
	Donations	3,290	Individuals
Other income	Sales and services	111	Book sales, wooden products, room hire etc
	Subscriptions	300	Associate members
	Total income	**29,217**	
Expenditure			
Land and buildings	Commonty Pinewoods	1,413	Deer control & maintenance
	Mills (General)	606	Bucket Mill survey, mills maintenance
	Community Woods & Path	100	Upkeep of the paths & tree work
	Finzean Old School	1,009	General maintenance
	Soutar's Shop	30,343	Condition survey & maintenance
	Archive	74	Cataloguing
	Total project expenditure	**33,545**	
Administration	Office admin/book keeping	11,507	
	Insurance	8,926	Buildings and Forests
	Accountant fees	335	
	Stationery, postage, phone	779	Includes mailing Annual Report
	Advertising	235	Games Day leaflet & Annual Report
	Legal & professional fees	612	
	Electricity	2,742	
	Total administrative costs	**25,136**	
	Total expenditure	**58,681**	
Net total		**-29,463**	



AN ACCOUNT OF THE PARISH OF BIRSE

by Robert Dinnie

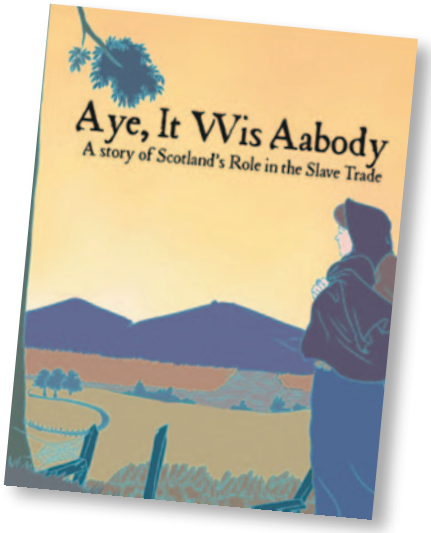
Published by BCT
Paperback, 170 pages; £8.50

BCT's edition of Robert Dinnie's classic 19th century history of Birse Parish. Originally published in 1865, Dinnie's book contains a wealth of information about the parish, including chapters on Birse, Ballogie and Finzean.

AYE, IT WIS AABODY

Published by BCT
Paperback £5.00

A fascinating, age-appropriate graphic novel entitled 'Aye, it wis Aabody' tells the story of Scotland's connection to the slave trade. It was produced by Magic Torch Comics, in collaboration with the children of Finzean Primary, and using research the children themselves worked on.



Copies post free in Birse Parish, £2.50 postage elsewhere in UK

BCT, The Old School, Finzean, Banchory AB31 6NY
email: BCToffice@birsecommunitytrust.org.uk



Donations and Legacies

This Report describes some of the work done by Birse Community Trust (BCT) to conserve historic sites in Birse parish and carry out a wide range of other projects to promote the common good of the local community and deliver wider public benefits.

BCT is a local charity (Scottish Charity Number SC028220) and donations make an essential contribution to helping BCT conserve the heritage of Birse parish and its three communities of Ballogie, Birse and Finzean.

Please help BCT conserve the heritage of Birse Parish by making a donation.

BCT is also very grateful to those who leave a legacy to BCT for the Birse Parish Endowment Fund, which was established by BCT to help provide long term support to maintain the historic sites that BCT looks after on behalf of the local community.

For more information, please contact:-

BCT, The Old School, Finzean, Banchory AB31 6NY
email: BCToffice@birsecommunitytrust.org.uk

Birse Community Trust exists to promote the common good of the inhabitants of Birse parish and deliver wider public benefits.

Everyone on the Electoral Register covering the parish is eligible to be a member of BCT and responsible for electing up to seven local Trustees who run BCT on behalf of the community.

BCT undertakes a wide range of local projects. BCT's core partners are Birse parish's three Community Associations and two Community Councils.

BCT is a company limited by guarantee (SC188799) and a Scottish charity (SC028220) with its registered office at J&H Mitchell, WS, 51 Atholl Road, Pitlochry PH16 5BU.

Birse Community Trust
BCT

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