

# On the Bailies of Bennachie turning 50



Dear Member

The reaching of any Golden Anniversary is a cause for celebration but especially so for a charity. On reaching 50 years of the Bailies of Bennachie, it is a sign that the motives and ethos are sound, have stood the test of time and that the foundations have endured. This is particularly true where the purpose that binds and perpetuates the charity are carried out by volunteers, who are inspired by the cause.

## Bailies Past

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, 1973 in Inverurie Town Hall, the inaugural meeting of the Bailies of Bennachie took place. It was attended by many people with an interest in Bennachie. A few weeks later, our first constitution was agreed. The name 'Bailies' was chosen. 1973 seems a long time ago.

Those founding the Bailies (Danny Gordon, James MacKay and Algy Watson to name the prime movers) displayed exceptional energy and vision in establishing the charity, enrolling influential dignitaries and landowners. They undertook a variety of activities and projects such as holding annual picnics, publishing books, producing maps and guides, installing hilltop indicators, establishing the Esson Car Park, etc. The list is too long for here but the reader is directed to the two main publications, *The Book of Bennachie* and *Bennachie Again*. What comes through is the way the Bailies formed a lightning-rod to attract diverse groups with specific interests in the hill under one umbrella.

## Bailies Present and ongoing

An important project in the mid-1990s was leading the establishment of the Bennachie Visitor Centre, which is now the focal point for Bennachie activities. Although never owning the building, the centre was adopted as our base. Our impressive library was assembled about this time, now residing in Garioch Heritage Centre.



Into the new century and the Bailies continued to adapt to changing times. The early 2010s saw the establishment of our Bennachie Landscapes Project Group in cooperation with the University of Aberdeen. They have become a vibrant subgroup and now host annual archaeological digs on the hill, to name but one activity. The Wildlife Group started mid-decade which includes Walks and Talks, learning more on the flora and fauna of the hill. The monthly Work Parties continue to be a major contributor to the health of the hill, almost since our inception.

Not least, a major effort is led on education to inspire perhaps the Bailies & Trustees of our future! Guided by Jock O'Bennachie, lots of resources are available on the website [www.juniorbailies.org.uk](http://www.juniorbailies.org.uk)

The Bailies held a successful charity walk in 2019 when 400+ people gave Bennachie a bosie by forming a ring around Mither Tap. A carbon trail was installed on the hill to coincide with COP 2021 in Glasgow.



The recent past saw the shutting of the hill due to Covid. Like many operations, we moved online and kept some momentum. However, as we were emerging from Covid, Storm Arwen and others in late 2021 shut many paths, some only reopened quite recently. Trying to keep the public informed during these periods became our prime activity.

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## Bailies 2023

2023 saw the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of the Bailies of Bennachie. We have adopted a new definition of our aims - 'A Voice for the Hill'. If the hill could speak, what would it say? That question now underpins all our activities.

Our Open Day in Inverurie Town Hall on Saturday May 20<sup>th</sup> 2023, was a huge success. Piano music was specially commissioned and performed; traditional tunes composed by local musicians such as Ian Thow were performed by the Garioch Fiddlers and an excerpt of the play that was commissioned from Alan Bisset, *The Hill that was a Home*, was performed. All of these, including a montage of the day, can be viewed on the website. However, the real thrill was meeting so many members, some of whom had made a huge effort to attend; many whose memberships dated back to our inception, and proudly showing off their 1973 brass pin.



The second 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary success is the play, as mentioned above, which enjoyed a sold-out run of six nights in July at the Garioch Heritage Centre. This has attracted many fitting accolades to Rhona Mitchell's troupe from the School of Drama and to the Bailies directly.

These events all raised our profile in the latter part of the year. On BBC Radio Scotland, the Bailies of Bennachie featured on *Our Story*. It is an excellent programme and showed us at our best. It was hosted by Mark Stephen, aired in October, and you can find the download here if you missed it on air. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000srxw/episodes/downloads>.

In November, we received the *Community Initiative Award* in the *Nature of Scotland Award* programme run by the RSPB. This has involved the RSPB sending a filmmaker to one of our work parties and interview various of our members. This award is especially gratifying as it is the result of a public vote.

Coming to the end of the year, we have recently been nominated and shortlisted for the Kings Award for Voluntary Service, which will be awarded in November 2024 (fingers crossed!)

The Bailies' star has never shone so bright in recent years.

Though appropriate in its own right, a hopeful spin-off of our activities this year was to remind members and the public that we exist, what we do and hopefully encourage their participation in the Bails as members, volunteers or trustees. We rely on people committed to the health and well-being of Bennachie to continue our work.



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## Bailies Future

We are in the process of planning environmental projects, working closely with existing and new landowners for the benefit of the hill. We will continue to explore the history of the hill and maintaining existing colony sites for future generations and provide information. We will keep you informed of progress.

We have a number of projects in the pipeline including:

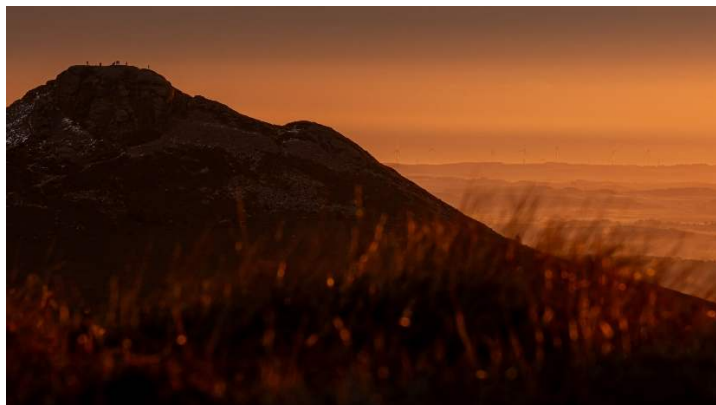
- repeating and expanding the public walks, ensuring members get first offer of tickets
- a number of significant environmental projects including bird-friendly planting
- an intensified Work Party programme starting in March
- our annual archaeological dig behind Pittodrie and beginning of the implementation of our Colony Management Plan

We are on a journey which, for the foreseeable future, is never ending and which will need to be continually adapted and adjusted to the pressures around us. The speed and direction of travel will be determined by the trustees at that time, using our history as guidance but dealing with the risks and opportunities that their world presents them.

It has been recognised that the current board is the first in the history of the Bailies to not have a member with a direct working relation to the founders. Would it not be a joy for our founders to look in on our activities now and hopefully smile that we still understand what they were trying to achieve?

If you feel that now is the opportunity to offer more time, knowledge and enthusiasm for Bennachie, please do contact the current Trustees via [info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk](mailto:info@bailiesofbennachie.co.uk) to find out what is involved with becoming a Trustee and give your contribution to the future.

In summary, the Bailies of Bennachie continues to thrive. We have had more good luck than bad. However, there is no hint that this is 'job done'. An analogy which is apt is that each trustee, volunteer and member *carries a stone to the cairn*; our collective efforts over time of giving a *Voice to the Hill* rewards none of us and all of us at the same time but, more importantly, rewards Bennachie, our iconic hill.



We thank you for your membership and your ongoing support and assure you that we will continue to steer the efforts of the Bailies of Bennachie in caring for the hill, being a voice for the hill, through this great organisation.

General Trustees - Bailies of Bennachie