Borders Heritage Festival & Borders Heritage Forum

Galashiels Regional Meeting Minutes

5th October 2015, 15.00 – 17.00

Present:

Julie Nock - Borders Heritage Festival Coordinator
Andy Jepson - Borders Heritage Festival Assistant
Erica Hume Niven - SBC Access Ranger
Jared Squirrel - Borders Family History Society
Peter Munro - Borders Family History Society
Helen Currie - Bowhill House
Murray Dickson - Old Gala Club
Margaret Collin & husband John - Melrose Historical & Archaeological Association
Kay Adamson - Borders Archaeological Society
Jenny Lauder - SBC Library Service
Pippa Coles - Abbotsford
Chris Bowles - SBC Archaeologist

Absent:

Corina McQuat - Barony Castle / Polish Map
Alastair Redpath - Project Hawick
Donald Gordon - Trimontium Trust
Julie Nock welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked everyone for coming. This was followed by round-the-table introductions.

**Agenda item 1: Borders Heritage Festival 2015**

Julie provided initial statistics for the festival in 2015. A full list will be circulated once all data from sites has been received.

This was followed by round-the-table feedback:

1. **Peter Munro**
   - Stated that attendance was “phenomenal”
   - The Borders Family History Society were busier in September than the previous 3 months
   - They have broken down attendees to three categories; Scottish Borders, UK and Abroad
   - Visitor figures are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>September</th>
<th>Avg over previous 3 months (June-Aug)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Borders</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abroad</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This reflects a 60% increase.

- Peter also stated that the Peel exhibition received 600+ visitors and a decision was made to extend the exhibition into the Festival period
- On Doors Open Day (Saturday 19th September) they had 19 visitors to Overhaugh St
- The Historic Writing Workshop had 5 attendees which was lower than normal. This is usually in the region of 12
- Statistics on the Moffat talk were not known. Peter to supply these

2. **Helen Currie**
   - Bowhill House opened especially for house tours on two Thursdays during the Festival
   - Helen stated that Bowhill would do more next year as these “worked very well”
   - Bowhill will review the times they set for the walks in the future
     - It was believed that a walk at 1pm would be more popular than a walk at 2.30pm but it proved that the afternoon walk was busier than expected
     - Helen considered that 15 was a good size group but attendees were higher
   - It was noticeable that visitors also used the tearoom
- The Secret Stroll walk, however, only had 1 or 2 attendees
- Helen stated that Bowhill House does not have a Twitter account

3. **Pippa Coles**
- Abbotsford put on free additional tours of the house collections & gardens
- There were 2 each day at the weekends
- They ran 13 tours in total lasting between 30 and 45 minutes in duration
- There was the perception that attendees joined the tours because they were already at the house; it was not noticeable that they were there because of the Borders Heritage Festival
- There were between 8 and 15 at each session
- During a group discussion on directions & signage to Abbotsford, in respect of the new Borders Railway and the bus companies who drop visitors off at inappropriate roundabouts, Pippa told the group that the new “Border Weaver” bus now picks up train passengers and takes them to a number of sites including Abbotsford. Here is the link -> [http://www.scottsabbotsford.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Border-Weaver-Bus-timetable-2015-16.pdf](http://www.scottsabbotsford.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Border-Weaver-Bus-timetable-2015-16.pdf)

4. **Margaret Collin**
- Margaret stated that the Melrose Historical & Archaeological Association had hoped to be excavating this year and would have submitted this event for the Festival
- Unfortunately the dig did not go ahead
- They ran the Monk’s Walk and figures were healthy. It was stated, however, that figures have been healthy all year so it is difficult to assess whether September’s numbers were as a result of the Festival

5. **Erica Hume Niven**
- Erica provided some figures for the St Cuthbert’s Way walks from Melrose to Kirk Yetholm
  - Saturday – 12 people
  - Sunday – 11 people
  - Monday – 3 people
  - Tuesday - 2 people
  - Wednesday’s Old Melrose walk – 7 people
- They had to lay on buses to take people to the start of the walk because it was linear (it did not end where it started)
- Erica suggested that this can turn people off from attending – most people turn up on the day if the weather is okay. People may be reluctant to book ahead
- Peter Munro sympathised with this point
- Erica suggested that they would need to weigh up the benefits of a free/chargeable walk in future
- Murray Dickson commented that the series of walks from the Walking Festival could be affiliated to the Heritage Festival
  - In 2015 the Walking Festival was centred on Galashiels
  - In 2016 it will be at Coldstream and Peebles in 2017

6. Peter Munro – additional
- Peter added that visitors from abroad thought it was “good that the Festival was on for a whole month” giving them an opportunity to attend some events
- Peter also added that although a month-long festival could be difficult to staff it helps with opportunities and promotion
- It would also be nice to have a “Scottish Borders Hour” akin to the Ancestry Hour

7. Murray Dickson
- Murray commented on the dates of the Festival: -
  - The schools and working generation are back to work during September
  - We will get the “grey brigade” coming to the Festival
- Chris Bowles suggested that the Festival could be moved earlier by two weeks; the last two weeks in August and the first two weeks in September
- Pippa suggested that the dates in September are good as it provides a boost for the downward turn as we head into Autumn and towards Winter

8. Jared Squirrell
- Jared commented that the Borders are not looking to children enough although Margaret disagreed

Final Comments
- Pippa
  - There is a sense of belonging in the Walking Festival that she did not experience with the Heritage Festival
- Erica
  - This is because the Walking Festival is a well-established event with dedicated attendees
- Peter
  - We should look into publicising available accommodation more
- Murray
  - He had not heard about the Heritage Festival until Andy invited him to this meeting
  - He wondered why we could not produce an equivalent of the “What’s On” programme
- Helen
  - Found it hard to set something up at short notice this year
**Agenda item 2: Borders Heritage Festival 2016**

There was general discussion on possibilities for 2016:

- **Julie**
  - Julie asked whether we should have a theme for the Festival
    - She stated that 2016 is the Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design and we might want to consider this as a theme for 2016. We have, unfortunately, missed the deadline for funding applications as this was June 2015.
    - 2017 is the Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology. Funding applications will probably have a deadline of June 2016

- **Erica**
  - Wondered whether a theme would be too restrictive
  - She also added that we could put on different town walks

- **Margaret**
  - Suggested that the Festival should not focus solely on a theme

- **Erica**
  - Said we should tap in to the success of the steam train next year if it returns
  - We could use the train for archaeological tours
  - We should also consider the heritage of trains & stations for “train spotters” (no offence intended)

- **Jared**
  - Wanted to consider textiles & mills in the Borders
  - This was supported by Erica who is looking at a heritage trail for Selkirk mills
  - Support for a focus on mills was given by Jennifer and Andy

- **Murray**
  - Thought that we could feature war memorials and organise a trip to view the many memorials that are in the Borders towns
  - Murray also thought there could be something we could do with the heritage of farming & ploughing

- **Margaret**
  - Suggested that traditional/rural/heritage crafts would be a good attraction
  - Helen supported this saying it had worked well previously at Bowhill

- **Helen**
  - Added that Bowhill House will be taking a stand at the Edinburgh Expo in April 2016. She would be happy to promote 2016’s Festival if there was something she could show/give to people

- **Murray**
  - Added that we should consider HLF money for additional signage to help promote the Festival

- **Chris**
Stated that currently the funding for the Festival comes mainly from the Council Archaeology budget and that it probably will not change for 2016.

This led us nicely into the discussion on the Borders Heritage Forum...

Agenda item 3: Borders Heritage Forum

Julie introduced the Borders Heritage Forum. Its aim is to bring historic houses, heritage sites, national & local societies, re-enactors, historians & local community groups together.

It will enable everyone to have a voice and will focus on both the built & natural heritage.

The Forum will be empowered to take decisions.

Comments on a Forum were made around the table:

- Helen
  - Said that a Forum is a difficult thing to run unless one person (a co-ordinator) leads it and is paid
  - It does not work if there are numerous volunteers trying to find time to run it
- Pippa
  - Identified an example (Discover Scotland’s Gardens) where groups/organisations/individuals come together and pay a subscription. This in turn pays for an administrator and/or steering committee
- Murray
  - Added that we should write to Galashiels Community Council to ask for funds
- Peter
  - Noted that Ancestral Tourism tried subscription and it did not work too well because some people felt it was not fair with individuals paying the same rate as larger organisations
- Julie
  - Reminded everyone that the Forum would need to be ‘constituted’ to enable it to request funds and have a bank account

In conclusion, those around the table were positive about a Forum:

- Peter was happy to be a trustee/be on the committee
- Erica was happy too but questioned how much time she could allocate to it
- Pippa was interested
- Kay was interested but would have to take the proposal back to her group
- Murray was also interested but would also need to raise it in Old Gala Club’s next group meeting
- Helen was interested