

Newsletter Winter 2024

As the sun sets on 2024 we can reflect in the lingering glow of the year spent in Benholm. A full set of seasons has passed and so much progress has been made in re-establishing the Mill of Benholm to the functioning heartbeat of the Community.

It has been a busy year with the volunteer days and the Mill being open to visitors at the weekends through the summer. The Harvest festival was quickly followed by Halloween; an authentic family atmosphere, an event greatly enjoyed by all! More than 100 children enjoyed an afternoon of spooky fun and games at the Mill.



We did not take many pictures of the event due to so many children being around, but we did get the permission of the mum of the winner of our Fancy Dress competition to publish her picture.

November saw us host local artist John Wilkinson who spent several weekends painting on site and exhibited some of his work in the upper Mill building. Well done John! We hope you come back and paint some more. We were also able to open the Café at the Mill - albeit in a basic form - and were able to offer refreshment to visitors as well as some very fine baking courtesy of Julieth Patisserie Art. The café has wound down for a time over winter for refurbishment, but we'll be back in February when the days are a wee bit longer and folk have enough daylight to get a wee walk before they have their cake! When re-opening the Café at the Mill there will be a wider choice of cakes and savoury item. Also, the coffee menu will be extended, and cappuccinos, lattes and other tasty treats will be on offer. What stays the same will be the fabulous cakes and artisan patisserie made by Julieth Patisserie Art exclusively for the Café at the Mill. When opening there will be wall space available for artists to sell their paintings.



Paintings by John Wilkinson (Acrylic, painted with palette knife)



The Christmas Market at the Mill End of November was the biggest event of the year and most possible the biggest event at the Mill of Benholm ever with estimated 600 to 700 visitors and over 25 stalls with art, crafts, food and other desirable items. Volunteers decorated the Mill buildings beautifully. A plethora of local producers with their wares and a bustling cafe made for a great start

to Christmas and a successful one for both us and the stallholders. Thank you go to both stallholders and to the many who turned out to support the event!



To wind up the year's events we held, in conjunction with Historic Churches Scotland, our third Christmas in Benholm Concert and Carol singing in Benholm Kirk. The best one yet! We were treated to the most impressive performances from both Lathallan's choirs and Johnshaven Primary School. The energy and enthusiasm of both pupils and staff was a joy to see and hear! And thank you to all the volunteers who showed up the day before to decorate the church most beautiful and helped on the day to make the event such a success.



It has been a very enjoyable year and although we know there are challenges ahead, we now know that there is a future for this Mill and that there is an appetite for what it can offer in the way of a visitor attraction and as a community hub.

Beside all those events, our volunteers did not stop working to improve the Mill of Benholm this autumn and winter. Too many things have been achieved to be able to mention them all, but here are a few.

With a grant funding we received from NESFLAG Coastal Communities Challenge Fund we were able to design, print and erect a sign at the Mill of Benholm car park showing walks and attractions of the whole area, this is the first step to transform the Mill of Benholm into a hub for visitors. A bike shed, an e-bike hiring facilities and another more detailed interpretation board for the Mill of Benholm will follow in the new year



The door at the lower Mill with original heritage graffiti was restored to an absolute outstanding standard by Bernie McCaffrey, thank you so much

From...



... to



Many stunning benches appeared made by our member Les Anderson, thank you so much



We had a very emotional ceremony unveiling the new plaque at our Alyson Reid Memorial Garden, with her mum, relatives and friends attending.



A hedge was planted as the border to the community garden courtesy of the Woodland Trust, more fruit trees and bushes were planted in collaboration with Greenspace Aberdeenshire. The Mill of Benholm Gardening Group has become part of the Kincardine Development Partnership (KDP) initiative K&M Growing Network. This aims to bring groups together across the area to support each other, share knowledge and encourage resilience in communities by providing the opportunity to access and grow good quality food on your doorstep. Groups from across Kincardine and Mearns will meet in January to discuss ways in which we can collaborate. KDP will hold in collaboration with Scottish Fruit Trees a seminar about orchard maintenance and fruit tree pruning in our Heritage Orchard in February 2025.



There was no winding down in the garden and around the site as work has continued apace. Our volunteers continue to astound us with their drive and commitment and their fantastic efforts are clear to be seen around the whole site. Paths and drains, paintwork and repairs controlling the overgrowth; all done by volunteers as well as preparing and decorating ahead of events. We can't thank them enough, so we thought we'd let them loose on the reeds in the Mill Dam (pond) this winter! We have a small window of time to tackle this job, i.e., between now and February/March. To be specific we must stop pulling reeds when the first toads appear. They have important work to get on with and we will have to get out of their way until next winter. If you are keen to assist in this fun winter activity, volunteer days will be continuing on alternate Saturdays throughout the season. The first one will be on the 4th of January 2025. Bear in mind this will be a muddy job, wellies, waterproofs possibly waders for the truly intrepid! To minimise environmental impact, we will be forming a human chain and manually removing the reeds.



In the garden little more than a few brussels sprouts keep a few raised beds from their much earned sleep now. May they make the most of it, for next year's plans are in the making... and it won't be long before we're planting seeds again.

But not all is work, in November volunteers came together in the café to enjoy an afternoon with tea, coffee and cake.



Furthermore, we are continuing to work for the X7 bus service to stop at the Mill of Benholm and are in ongoing talks with Aberdeenshire Council, as they have to provide the safe infrastructure (bus stop) for the X7 to stop. Next meeting is in January. This is supported by our local politicians. Councillors Carr and Smith have recently been together with Tess White MSP on site to discuss the best way forward, Mairi Gougeon MSP visited the site in November and is strongly advocating for the X7 to stop at the Mill and Andrew Bowie MP visited the Mill of Benholm in October in support of the better connection of the Mill to the public transport network. Councillor Alison Evison and the Benholm and Johnshaven Community Council are also working hard to achieve this.

The Mill is becoming a place to come together to celebrate local produce, arts, crafts, food and people, as well as a place to learn the story of this place, the environment and to learn how best to preserve them for future generations. There is an opportunity for everyone to be involved and for everyone to benefit.

Looking forward to 2025:

Having whirled through the year's events in 2024 we will aim to build on those achievements and a packed itinerary of opportunities for you to come and spend some time at the Mill either as a volunteer or as a visitor. Information on all of the details can be found at the Mill of Benholm Enterprise website (<https://millofbenholm.scot/events/>). During the year, there will be many more workshops, talks, courses and other activities. So, follow us on Facebook for constant updates or check our website. But this is a two way street, if you would like to use our facilities to hold an event, workshop, exhibition, talk, etc, please get in contact with Mary at secretary@millofbenholm.scot. The more diverse our program is, the better it is for the Mill. We are working to develop and improve on the experience that we offer as we go forward and that we continue to be so well supported by the local community.

As you all know, the Mill buildings are closed during the winter, but tours can be pre-booked. Our volunteers are currently tackling the Mill Dam, but as soon as our toads are coming back, they will start to bring back the first path in the Mill Brae Woods connecting the Mill with the outdoor learning and meeting space at the confluence of the Castle Burn with the Burn of Benholm. The Scottish Community Tourism will visit the Mill as part of their conference in Montrose in February.

In March we shall have our very first Spring Fair at the Mill, in case you want to book a stall, please contact Mary.

If funding comes through, we shall start as soon as possible to enhance the area beside the Mill Dam to make it suitable for events, including weddings and also extend the footpath to the car park, to make disabled access slightly better.

A lot going on in the first few months of 2025.

If you are able to help in any way, please get in contact or use the QR code to help the Mill



An enormous thanks to all those, in whatever capacity, who have so generously given their support and encouragement throughout the year.

A Very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all

