

Trustees' Annual Report for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

Charity name: Discovering Old Welsh Houses Group

Charity registration number: 1131782

Objectives and Activities

Summary of the purposes of the charity as set out in its governing document	The Charity's objectives are: to advance the education of the public in general (and particularly amongst professional and amateur historians, architects and archaeologists and local communities) on the subject of pre-1700 buildings in north Wales, where possible using dendrochronology (tree-ring dating) & architectural recording; to promote research into the history of such buildings by volunteers and specialists for the public benefit in all aspects of that subject; and to publish the useful results. Our vision is "celebrating Welsh Heritage through the study of traditional houses and the lives of the people who lived in them".
Summary of the main activities in relation to those purposes for the public benefit, in particular, the activities, projects or services identified in the accounts.	Main activities: i) Newsletter : this bilingual quarterly publication informs members of activities and projects planned and undertaken and grants received .and Branch members also share their recent research. This is an important tool by which the charity shows what has been achieved in relation to our mission. ii) Website : this site has been updated and is very well used by members and interested people all over the world. iii) Study Tour : these have not been revived following the Covid-19 pandemic. iv) Monthly lectures on Zoom have become a regular and well attended part of our annual programme. v) Branches : Following the pandemic members of the Anglesey, Denbighshire and Flintshire branches have recommenced meeting face to face, intermittently visiting houses or studying topics of local interest. See 'Other optional information' for details. vi) Outreach & publicity : this normally takes place through a monthly lecture series from October to May, the media, the website, and occasional branch outreach events. The annual lecture was given using Zoom. vii) Seeking additional old buildings to study : members normally visit and research such buildings across north Wales, inviting the householders to become involved and give written permission for their house to be assessed, sampled, recorded or researched. This year fewer visits were undertaken compared to pre-2020, as we continue to recover from the long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, numbers of interested householders are now increasing again, whilst considerable online research also continues to be undertaken. viii) Raising funds : usually through seeking grants and fundraising events in order to undertake additional dendrochronology, building recording, research and publications. One fundraising event was held this year. One grant was successfully obtained last year, with another grant for the same project also obtained this year.
Statement confirming whether the trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit	It is confirmed that this is the case.

Additional information

Policy on grant making	Grants are not made to others.
Policy on social investment including program related investment	N/A
Contribution made by volunteers	Volunteers / members undertake and freely contribute a considerable amount of time and expertise to the activities of the charity, especially in leadership roles, house visits and house history research. The charity and its individual branches are run entirely by volunteers.

Achievements and Performance

Summary of the main achievements of the charity, identifying the difference the charity's work has made to the circumstances of its beneficiaries and any wider benefits to society as a whole.	<p>i) Membership: at the end of the financial year there were 229 paid up members.</p> <p>ii) Publications: “Discovering the Historic Houses of Snowdonia”, a bilingual book illustrating the important outcomes of the charity's earlier work was prepared jointly with the RCAHMW and was launched in December 2014. Copies have been sold subsequently and the income added to the Charity's funds.</p> <p>iii) Projects: the Denbighshire branch was awarded a £1,000 Tesco “Bags of Help” Community Fund grant towards a local history project. The Conwy Branch has been awarded a £1,166 Tesco “Bags of Help” Community Fund grant towards a local history project.</p> <p>iv) Grants: A Marc Fitch Fund grant for £2,250 was received to help fund a Houses Management Database Project that will enable the digital collation of information on all houses visited as part of the charity's research activities. This grant continued into 2023. The Edeirion Project was funded by two grants: Woodtiger Fund granted £5,224.70 and the Vernacular Architecture Group (VAG) £3,300. This project has now been completed and is awaiting reports.</p> <p>v) Completed work is published digitally on our website (discoveringgoldwelshhouses.co.uk) and is also made available online on <i>Coflein</i> – the RCAHMW website, <i>Archwilio</i>, and the Welsh Heritage Environment Records (HER). It is also deposited at local archives / record offices.</p> <p>vi) Consolidation of previous research: having been started in previous years, this consolidation is continuing and remains a major focusing, particularly whilst some of our more traditional activities were affected by the long-term impacts of the Covid-19 and are now being re-established.</p> <p>vii) House visits: due to the aftermath of the impact of Covid-19, few house owners were contacted and visited in 2021-22. Relationships are, however, now being re-opened, whilst new expressions of interest are also being received</p> <p>viii) Dendrochronology: dendrochronology was undertaken as part of a project that was grant funded.</p> <p>ix) Architectural Recording: pre-pandemic activity has been resumed and is producing exciting results.</p> <p>x) House History and other Research: this continues at a number of houses as part of the above projects and wider branch activity.</p> <p>xi) Accountability: the charity continues to share its achievements widely and to give opportunities for others to participate in our charitable</p>
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	<p>purposes through the website, whilst house visits have also started again (having been paused during Covid-19 and its aftermath). The charity continues to manage its resources responsibly, showing good stewardship through the roles of trustees and branches and through externally examined accounts adopted by the trustees.</p>
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Financial Review

Review of the charity's financial position at the end of the period	The charity remains in a healthy financial position with £3,409.55 available for the running of the organisation centrally. In addition, the charity holds £6879.11 in its Project Fund and £2,158.61 in grant funds (these can only be used for the purpose for which they were granted). £36.51 is held in a non-monetary asset (equipment). Branches have £2,798.86 available, held both centrally and locally.
Statement explaining the policy for holding reserves stating why they are held	The reserves are held to cover any sudden drop in subscriptions or other income so that all invoices in a financial year can be covered.
Amount of reserves held	£1,300
Details of fund materially in deficit	None
Explanation of any uncertainties about the charity continuing as a going concern	None

Additional information

The charity's principal sources of funds (including any fundraising)	Sources of funding for projects will vary according to the focus, geographical location and size of each proposed project. One focus for funding research has received considerable funding and has now been completed.
Investment policy and objectives including any social investment policy adopted	N/A
A description of the principal risks facing the charity	The charity faced particular risks during the Covid-19 pandemic and in its enduring aftermath, particularly as local and national resurgences of the disease were experienced. This external context resulted in the slow restoration of opportunities for meeting together, the continued full or

	<p>partial closure of some archives and libraries, and challenges in arranging house visits. However, these pressures decreased substantially in 2023-24 and opportunities for all of these activities have markedly increased over the course of the year.</p> <p>In line with other charities and societies, the charity has experienced a slight decline in membership numbers compared to 2019-20, the loss of several long-standing members due to the passing of time, and growing challenges in recruiting officials / volunteers as long-standing volunteers retire. Whilst our membership numbers remain fairly healthy several branches are currently without secretaries and our webmaster is preparing for his retirement from the role.</p> <p>Externally, many archives and libraries are experiencing or are at risk of reduced funding, lowered capacity and even closure, which has the potential to impact heavily on our research activities. An announced reduction to the Welsh Government's funding of the RCAHMW has the potential to substantially reduce its provision of information and the support that it is able to provide to the research community, to the heavy detriment of our own activities.</p>
Other	<p>Social gathering such as branch meetings and house visits has resumed, although this has been affected at a local level by some branch secretary vacancies.</p> <p>In addition, the charity is also undertaking i) a major grant-aided collation of all previous visits, research and results and ii) major desktop / online research into pre-1700 houses across all parishes. This has allowed us to adapt to new ways of working in a post-Covid world (and to take advantage of new technologies) and to continue to involve and benefit from the work of members / volunteers whose capacity for travel or face-to-face contact has been reduced. It has also enabled members / volunteers to continue active involvement despite resurgences of Covid-19 at local or national levels.</p>

Structure, Governance and Management

Description of charity's trusts:	None
Type of governing document	Constitution
How is the charity constituted?	Unincorporated charity
Trustee selection methods including details of any constitutional provisions e.g. election to post or name of any person or body entitled to appoint one or more trustees	Trustees are elected at the June AGM and may stand for re-election. The trustees may appoint any members who are willing to act as trustees if vacancies arise between AGMs. The trustees may allow members to observe their meetings but those members are not permitted to vote.

Additional information

Policies and procedures adopted for the induction	Agreed policies and procedures have been adopted for the induction and training of trustees. A trustee Welcome Pack is made available online.
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and training of trustees	
The charity's organisational structure and any wider network with which the charity works	<p>The charity is controlled by its governing document (a revised constitution adopted on 21 June 2023) and constitutes an unincorporated charity. All trustees gave their time voluntarily and received no remuneration apart from travelling @ 45p per mile and other out of pocket expenses (as agreed in advance and on submission of receipts).</p> <p>Trustees' meetings are held on Zoom three times a year. A small Management Group Meeting is held on Zoom three times a year (and at additional times as required) and focuses on Finance and Governance, Capacity Building and Forwards Planning (including volunteer recruitment) and internal and external Engagement (including IT / Website, PR, Publications and Newsletters). These meetings report back to the trustees' meetings. Minutes are kept for all meetings.</p> <p>The trustees regularly review all policies including safeguarding, governance and management arrangements.</p> <p>This year there is a new Secretary in post and work has been done via email and Zoom meetings; this has been found to save time and reduces travel expenses. The Secretary role now focuses almost entirely on the charity's administration/governance, and is not combined with additional roles / activities in research or branch leadership and 10 hours per month is typically given. This is likely to increase over coming months as the Secretary plays an active role in a new internal engagement drive.</p>
Relationship with any related parties	The charity has excellent working relationships with organisations active in related fields. This can include joint meetings, information exchange, collaboration in research and the sharing of speakers and events.

Reference and administrative details

Charity name	Discovering Old Welsh Houses Group
Other name the charity uses	Darganfod Hen Dai Cymreig
Registered charity number	1131782
Charity's contact address	44 Rhos Manor, Penrhyn Avenue, Rhos on Sea, Conwy, LL28 4PN

Names of the charity trustees who manage the charity

Trustee name	Office (if any)	Date of Appointment
Mr Richard Cuthbertson, MBE	Trustee Former Chairman (until June 2022)	December 2008
Mrs Margaret Dunn	Trustee Former Secretary (retired June 2023)	December 2008
Mr John Townsend	Trustee Former Treasurer (until April 2021)	Co-opted June 2011; Appointed June 2013
Dr Wally Barr	Trustee Joint Flintshire Branch Secretary Joint Newsletter Editor	Co-opted Sept 2012; Appointed June 2013
Ms Zoe Henderson	Trustee Former Group Membership Secretary (until December 2021)	Co-opted Sept 2012; Appointed June 2013
Mrs Janice Dale	Trustee	Co-opted Sept 2012; Appointed June

	Chairman	2013
Mr Peter Masters	Trustee Webmaster	March 2013
Dr Martin Cherry	Trustee Research Co-Ordinator	June 2014
Dr Shaun Evans	Trustee	June 2017
Ms Eleanor Carpenter	Trustee	June 2017
Ms Jane Parry-Evans	Trustee Houses Database Management	June 2019
Mrs Rosemary Brotherton	Trustee Treasurer	Co-opted April 2021; Appointed June 2021
Mrs Gillian Jones	Trustee Former Conwy Branch Secretary	June 2021
Dr Frances Richardson	Trustee <i>Retired Jan 2024</i>	June 2023
Dr Alison Montgomery	Trustee Secretary	June 2023

Additional information

Corporate trustees – none

Name of trustees holding title to property belonging to the charity – none

Funds held as custodian trustees on behalf of others – none

Exemptions from disclosure – none

Other optional information

Since 2021 the AGM & Public Lecture has been held on Zoom, most recently at the AGM & Public Lecture of 21st June 2023.

Our officers, branch secretaries and others maintain regular online and phone contact to ensure the good management of the charity. Central and branch newsletters and other communications also continue to be circulated to members.

The following DOWH Members' Zoom Meetings have been held:

2023 April: *The Early Modern Development of Image and Status at Gwydir*, Meinir Moncrieffe

2023 Oct: *Exploring North Wales with the Rev. John Parker, 1798-1860*, Edward Parry

2023 Nov: *Recording Ruthin – investigating the historic buildings of a town and its countryside*, Ross Cook

2023 Dec: *Sex, Power, Marriage: Katheryn of Berain and her Four Husbands*, Helen Williams-Ellis

2024 Jan: *One thousand years. Welsh Houses and the climate of the past*, Danny McCarrol

2024 Feb: *The Deep Mapping Estate Archives Project*, Scott Lloyd

2024 March: *From listing to local heritage: finding value in historic buildings*, Judith Alfrey

These monthly Zoom lectures proved very popular.

Declarations

The trustees declare that they approved this annual report on 15 May 2024.

It was endorsed by the AGM on 19 June 2024.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Janice Dale". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

Janice Dale, Chair

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Alison Montgomery". The signature is more abstract and less legible than the one to its left, featuring a prominent initial 'A' and a long, sweeping tail.

Alison Montgomery, Secretary