BEITH CULTURAL & HERITAGE SOCIETY
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR AGM WEDNESDAY 24TH JUNE 2026

I'd like to welcome everybody to our AGM this evening.

I think I say every AGM that we've had a busy year; that is the case again and inevitable when trying to achieve as much as possible with a small team.

This year we have held the following events:

July Opened the Auld Kirk the first weekend in July to coincide with American Independence Day.
Welcome a group of Presbyterian clergy from New Jersey, showing them the Auld Kirk and providing refreshments in the Townhouse.

August Held a public meeting in the Community Centre to discuss our options as a Society.

Sept Took part in Ayrshire Doors Open Day, opening the Townhouse and Auld Kirk.
Talk on Matchstick Model making.

Oct Quiz Night
Talk on how chainsaw carving came to the Garnock Valley.

Nov Held a service of remembrance at the Auld Kirk on 11th November.
Talk on William Ferguson's war.
Held a St Andrew's coffee morning.

Dec Took part in Lights and Laughter event.

We closed for the winter but were actually in the Townhouse several days a week sorting, cataloguing, and cleaning.

March Quiz night.
Evening talk was unfortunately cancelled by the speaker, but we held an afternoon with DVDs of old Beith photographs.

April Spring coffee morning
Talk on the Sma Shot cottages

May Talk on the lost tracks of Ayrshire

June Plant Sale

As well as all of the above the archiving team have met most weeks to carry on the work of recording all our collection, and we have produced 3 newsletters during the year.

However, our main emphasis this year has been on trying to safeguard the future of the Society by changing the legal set up to a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation or SCIO and deciding on our future at the Townhouse.

Our SCIO application was granted on the 31st October. Following on from that we applied to dissolve the original Beith Cultural & Heritage Society charity which happened on the 30th April this year. We are currently still working on getting the required paperwork to prove to OSCR that all our assets and liabilities have been transferred to the new charity – this last step is proving to be very frustrating, and I've lost count of the number of phone calls our Treasurer has made to our bank. When we are finally able to submit the completed form the original charity will be removed from the public register of Scottish charities.

After hearing the opinions of those who attended last year's AGM or the public meeting, we approached North Ayrshire Council about moving into part of Beith Library. After several meetings with both the Library and Heritage Service managers we signed a Partnership Agreement on the 19th May. Under the agreement the Society will have the use of the top floor in Beith Library, plus the area by the stairs on the ground floor and some storage space in the basement. Our intention is to move our museum collection there and be open by 12th September ready for this years Doors Open weekend. As you have seen by the pile of boxes, we have started packing some things ready to move, but won't actually move anything until the upstairs has been painted. We still have our lease of this building and intend to continue using the Townhouse for events and the rooms will be available to hire.

We haven't had the time to do much about the building over the past year, although money has been spent on urgent repairs to the roof and guttering and on replacing the rotten floorboards in the reception area. Once we are settled in the library, we will be able to focus our attention on the Townhouse building again. The problem at the moment is we are still attached on 2 sides to a derelict building and even if we sort out the problems with our stonework the building will still have a damp problem.

I would like to thank all our members for their ongoing support over the year, as well as those who attended our events. Also thank you to our volunteers and my fellow Trustees for all their hard work, enthusiasm, and support. A couple of people deserve a special mention – Gail Mackenzie for taking on the role of newsletter editor and Andy Cooper who does such a good job as our quiz master.

We will be electing a new committee soon but before I finish, I want to pay tribute to committee members who aren't standing for election. Mair Christie joined the committee in the early days of the Society and for many years covered more shifts in the Townhouse than anyone else, and also was our newsletter editor. Health issues have meant Mair hasn't been able to be active and she decided to resign when we became a SCIO. Marina Simpson has also made the decision to step down from the committee. Marina's main role has been with our fundraising events especially with those involving baking and we hope that she will continue to help as able. Thank you to both of them.

Finally, Rae Hutchinson has indicated she is willing to stay on the committee but as she forewarned us at last year's AGM wishes to step down from her role as Secretary. Rae has been Secretary for many years. She always says that she actually only agreed to become minute secretary but ended up doing a lot more. I want to publicly thank her for all her hard work for this Society despite all her other commitments and I am pleased we will continue to benefit from her wide knowledge of the area.

Julie Crook
24th June 2026